

## What is emotionally focused couples therapy?

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) is usually a short term (8-20 sessions), structured approach to couples' therapy formulated in the early 1980s by Professors Susan Johnson and Leslie Greenberg. EFT is supported by John Bowlby's attachment research, wherein it appears that as humans we have an innate need to feel attached and comforted by a few irreplaceable others.

EFT is all about attachment. In the early stages of therapy, the focus is on repetitive, negative cycles of interaction that couples get caught in where they trigger each other's attachment panic and thus react in rigid, self-protective ways. One partner's best attempts to get emotional needs met unfortunately can trigger the other to react defensively, creating distance and pain, rather than closeness and emotional safety. We call this a dance because the steps are so well known and each partner affects the other intimately. Most couples know the steps of their "dance" very well and often feel helpless to change the steps.

EFT is a non-blaming, gentle approach to couple distress that validates each partner's perspective and helps couples to send and receive clear emotional signals regarding needs and fears. Instead of simply working on communication skills that can sometimes feel like a "band aid" to the situation, EFT aims to help couples to see their dance and exit their dance by sending more clear messages about emotional needs in ways that do not trigger the defences and fears of their partner. EFT goes to the heart of the matter by uncovering the deeper needs and fears that often go unheard and by helping partners express these deeper feelings to each other. This is how each couple can create a new dance of connection, safety and security.

The goal of EFT is to help couples create a secure attachment. This means not only having a close, safe and loving bond together, but also an increase in coping and overall stress management for each individual. Securely attached people navigate the trials of life with greater ease than those who are insecurely attached. There is nothing like knowing that a precious loved one has your back to help you to face what life throws at you.

EFT for couples has been extensively researched over the last 25 years, with a substantial body of research supporting its effectiveness. Studies find that 70-75% of couples move from distress to recovery and approximately 90% show significant improvements in marital satisfaction. EFT meets all the American Psychological Association's criteria for an evidence-based intervention. The major contraindications for EFT are ongoing violence in the relationship or an ongoing affair.

### The message of EFT is simple:

"Forget about learning how to argue better, analyzing your early childhood, making grand romantic gestures, or experimenting with new sexual positions. Instead, recognize and admit that you are emotionally attached to and dependent on your partner in much the same way that a child is on a parent for nurturing, soothing, and protection. EFT focuses on creating and strengthening this emotional bond by identifying and transforming the key moments that foster an adult loving relationship."

Dr. Sue Johnson