

What is Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT)?

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy was Developed by: Emotionally focused couples therapy (EFT) was developed in the late 1980s by Dr. Susan Johnson and Dr. Leslie Greenberg. EFT evolved out of the humanistic tradition with its focus on the role of emotional experience in human growth and its emphasis on a safe, non-judgmental relationship in which to explore and experiment. As EFT was developed specifically for couples, the model incorporated systems theory, which understands individual experience in terms of interactional cycles and interpersonal contexts. EFT found its theoretical grounding in John Bowlby's attachment theory and its application to adult relationships. By conceptualizing primary adult relationships as attachment bonds, EFT targets the issues of emotional engagement and security that are relevant for so many distressed couples.

Overview Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy: "EFT is an integrative model that incorporates humanistic, systemic, and attachment concepts and interventions. Committed primary relationships are conceptualized as attachment bonds, which ideally provide partners with both a "safe haven," which they can turn to for comfort, and a "secure base," which supports their autonomy. EFT understands couples' issues in terms of the distress that is a natural reaction to a lack of security in attachment relationships. This distress is reflected in a couple's interactional cycle, as each partner's efforts to get his or her attachment needs met are experienced as triggering by the other. One of the most common patterns is a blame-withdraw (pursue-distance) cycle.

EFT proceeds by exploring and identifying the cycle in terms of behaviors and then in terms of underlying feelings and needs. Clients are helped to access and process emotion using interventions such as reflecting, validating, heightening, and empathic exploration. Interactions are restructured as the problematic cycle is tracked, explored, and reframed to highlight the partners' importance to each other as well as their longing for a secure connection. As partners' de-escalate, EFT therapists support them in both expressing more vulnerable emotions and in responding to each other in an attuned and responsive way."

Source: Ann Margulies at www.annmargulies.com/