

Life Management Associates, LLC

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Intake for Couples



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WHAT IS EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED COUPLES THERAPY (EFT)?

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) is a short-term treatment approach whose goal is the reconnection between partners. EFT, developed by Susan Johnson and Les Greenberg, is based on John Bowlby's attachment research over 50 years ago. Bowlby found that humans and higher primate animals appeared to have an innate need to feel attached to and comforted by significant others.

Adult attachment relationships are believed to have the same survival function as the mother-child bond, since ideally these attachments can provide the same love, comfort, support, and protection throughout the lifespan. However, due to our relationship histories, and the negative interaction cycles we get into with our partners, many of us have difficulties with trust and expressing emotion to those who mean the most to us.

When couples argue about such issues as jealousy, sex or money, the origins of these arguments are usually some form of protest from one partner about not feeling connected, not trusting, or not feeling safe or secure with the other partner. When those we are attached to are not available, or are not responding to our needs to feel close or supported, we feel distressed. We may become anxious or fearful, numb or distant.

These behaviors can become habitual or rigid modes of reacting to our partners. Furthermore, these toxic behavior patterns seem to take on a life of their own as they cycle into repetitive couple's interactions that cause much pain, injury and despair. We focus on these patterns and work on changing these negative interaction cycles in a non-judgmental environment.

In a relatively short time, couples begin to recognize and eventually express their needs for love, support, protection and comfort that are often hidden or disguised by the harsh or angry words used in repetitive self-defeating patterns of conflict or arguments with each other. Partners begin to "listen with the heart," one of the cornerstones of EFT – which means listening not for the literal meaning of a partner's words, but for the feelings that lie beneath. In return, the other partner is better able to respond from their heart in kind. This is the emotional focus of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy.

We view the building of "a safe haven" in your relationship as our primary task, and we will try to focus on your primary needs -- to feel close, secure and responded to --- which probably underlie most of your couple's conflict.

Once this safe haven and feelings of connection are reestablished, you will be better able to manage conflict and the painful or difficult feelings that will inevitably arise from time to time in a close relationship. Furthermore, without so much defensiveness, each of you will be able to send clearer messages and will be better able to hear the other's perspective. You will be better able to collaborate, problem-solve, and compromise – in short – you'll be more of a team – which is the secret of a long-lived, successful marriage!

Research on the success of EFT: -- EFT appears to move couples from distress to recovery in 10-12 sessions for 70-75% of cases, and creates improvements in 90% of couples coming in for therapy. EFT has been used with many different types of couples in private practice, university training centers and hospital clinics. These distressed couples include partners suffering from disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress, and chronic illness.

To view further references, recent articles describing EFT therapy and books on EFT, please refer to the EFT website: www.eft.ca; Psychology Today, March/April 2003



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AN EFT ROADMAP FOR COUPLES

Stage 1 – Understand Your Strengths and the Patterns that Keep You Stuck

Step 1: Set goals for counselling; understand some of the ways your relationship history affects your relationship now.

Step 2: Discover and describe the negative patterns of interaction you get stuck in. You and your therapist will track your interactions with your partner and identify where and how your communication breaks down.

Step 3: Emotions are stirred up in your relationship, especially when you get stuck in these negative cycles of interaction. Emotions also drive the cycle. You may first be aware of anger, frustration, anxiety, numbness or even withdrawal. Notice inside what other feelings are beneath these initial feelings, such as hurt, sadness or fear.

Begin to share these “underneath” feelings with your partner. It is OK if it feels “bumpy” – it helps diffuse the cycle sometimes but not always.

Step 4: Describe your cycle and recognize what the triggers are. Understand how the things that you do to protect yourself and your relationship affect and may even threaten your partner. Notice how you co-create the cycle: “we’re doing that thing again...the more I go after you, the more you withdraw because you’re feeling hurt...” Slow down your conversations so that you can tap into the feelings that are beneath the surface. Catch your own thoughts (“She doesn’t care;” “I don’t matter”) before acting on them. You might notice that you can hold back your knee jerk reactions to avoid the cycle. You might not know yet how to pull each other close and you might be afraid the “old way” will come back. However, when you discover that this negative cycle is the source of unhappiness in your relationship, you realize that your partner is not the enemy. You can then work together to gain control over this negative cycle and that already feels infinitely better.

Stage 2 – Create a New, Intimate Relationship Bond; Change Your Communication Patterns

Step 5: Both of you are now able to talk about your feelings that get triggered by the negative cycle, including things you might not have been able to say before. With less friction and more compassion between you, there is safety to explore your experience more deeply. We all have doubts about ourselves at times and may also have fears about depending on others. You may struggle with personal fears or insecurities in this relationship. You may have had life experiences that make it difficult to trust others to be there for you. With the help of your therapist, you can take turns and begin to share these “raw spots” with your partner. As you take these risks, your partner begins to truly see and understand where you are coming from, which creates empathy.



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AN EFT ROADMAP FOR COUPLES

Step 6: This step involves staying engaged and listening to your partner's disclosures. Your partner may share feelings that take you by surprise. You may feel disoriented or even hurt that you have not heard your partner share so personally like this before. It is OK to experience a mixture of emotions. Start by trying to understand at an emotional level what your partner is saying, without needing to change his/her experience or take responsibility for it yourself. Stay open to the possibility of experiencing and understanding your partner in a new way. Allow yourself to be moved by your partner's new disclosures.

Step 7: Explore what helps you feel deeply connected, what is most important for you in this relationship. In this stage of therapy your therapist helps you find ways to ask for your needs in the relationship in a way that is both caring and direct. You can lean into and reach for your partner and he/she is able to reach back in a loving way. You have found a new way to relate when one of you feels stressed, hurt or insecure. The bond between you shifts, becoming closer and more intimate. You can check out your perceptions and talk about feelings. You can listen with an open heart, be curious about one another and offer reassurance when needed. Both of you have a felt sense of "being there" for each other.

Stage 3 – Use New Communication Patterns to Solve Problems and Maintain Intimacy

Step 8: Revisit old problems or decisions that have been put on hold (e.g., parenting, finances, sex, family issues, health concerns, etc.) while staying emotionally connected. They don't seem as loaded now that you feel heard, valued, close and secure. Focus on staying accessible, responsive, and engaged while talking about practical issues. Together, you can face any of life's challenges more easily.

Step 9: Congratulations! You have reshaped your relationship. Or perhaps this is the first time in your relationship that you have felt a profound bond with one another.

You have worked hard to get here, so it's important to celebrate it and put safeguards in place to protect it. Create rituals together that privilege your relationship. Find ways of keeping this new way of relating strong.



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Couple Screening Form

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Check the items that apply

MOODS: (ex. irritability, depression etc.)

____ My moods are a problem to the relationship. how?:

____ My partner's moods are a problem to the relationship. how?:

ALCOHOL and SUBSTANCE USE

____ My use of alcohol is excessive

____ My use of prescription or illegal drugs is a problem

____ My partner's uses alcohol excessively

____ My partner's use of prescription or illegal drugs is a problem

AGGRESSION

____ My temper adversely affects our relationship

____ I have been verbally abusive to my partner

____ I have been physically abusive to my partner

____ My partner's temper adversely affects our relationship

____ My partner has been verbally abusive to me

____ My partner has been physically abusive to me

____ Our fights and arguments are very destructive to our relationship.

AFFAIRS

____ I have had an affair during our relationship (or an inappropriate outside relationship).

____ I am currently having an affair (or an inappropriate outside relationship).

____ My partner has had an affair during our relationship (or an inappropriate outside relationship).

____ My partner is currently having an affair (or an inappropriate outside relationship).



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Couple Screening Form

SATISFACTION AND COMMITMENT, IN PERCENTAGE TERMS, (0% — 100%)

_____ % I am committed to staying in our relationship.

_____ % Overall how satisfied are you now with your relationship?

Directions: In percentage terms, how strongly do you agree with the statements below.

Use this scale to answer the questions below.

0	25%	50%	75%	100%
Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely

_____ % I feel disorganized by all this negative emotion.

_____ % I can't think straight when my partner gets so negative.

_____ % Talking things over with my partner only seems to make them worse.

_____ % I have little confidence that we can discuss a significant problem without fighting.

_____ % I am basically unhappy with my relationship.

_____ % I have often felt like leaving my partner.

_____ % I often don't feel close to my partner.

_____ % I'm not satisfied with our sex life.

_____ % I feel lonely in our relationship.

_____ % I feel we are disconnected.

_____ % My partner and I live pretty separate lives.

_____ % I confide in a special person outside of our relationship. Who?

_____ % There are specific events in our relationship which I am having trouble getting over.

What are they?

_____ % In spite of all our problems, I believe that my partner really cares about me.



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EFT COUPLES QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____ Age _____

Relationship Status _____ Years together _____

Please answer each question as completely and accurately as possible. Your information will help me learn about your relationship and help me plan your treatment. If you are faxing it, my confidential fax is 406-782-1318. If you are emailing it, send it to: mary@lmalc.org or jeffrey@lmalc.org.

1. What are the things you like most about your relationship?

2. What do you like most about your partner?

3. What are the things you most want to change?



4. How often do you argue? What do you most often argue about?

6. When you argue, does someone end up leaving? Who? How long before they come back? How long do you stay angry at each other?

7. Who is the first to attempt to make things better?

8. Do your arguments get physical? Verbally abusive? Please detail.



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EFT COUPLES QUESTIONNAIRE

9. Who initiates sex most often?

10. If you are not having sex, when and how did it stop?

11. Do you use sex to repair the relationship? How?

12. Is sex a painful topic in your relationship? Why?

13. Do you feel safe and secure with your partner? Now? In the past? Please detail.



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14. In your present relationship, can you ask your partner when you need closeness and comfort? Please detail. Can you rate your level of difficulty (1 extremely easy --- 10 extremely difficult).

15. Can you think of bonding moments in your relationship when one of you reaches out and the other responds in a way that makes you both feel emotionally connected and secure with each other? Please detail.

16. What messages about love/marriage did you get from your parents? Your community?

17. Before your present relationship, did you experience a safe, loving relationship with someone you trusted, felt close to and could turn to if needed? Who? Please detail.

18. Are there significant times in your present relationship that you felt your partner was not there for you. Please detail.



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EFT COUPLES QUESTIONNAIRE

19. If it is hard for you to turn to and trust others, to let them close when you really need them, what do you do when life gets too big to handle or when you feel alone?

20. Name two specific things that would make you feel safer and more secure in your present relationship.

Anything else about your relationship you wish to share?

Client signature _____ Date _____

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