

## WHAT IS EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED COUPLES THERAPY (EFT)?

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) is a therapeutic 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 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 will be more of a team - which is the secret of a long-lived, successful marriage!

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) is based on Attachment Theory which is applicable to all humans. We all have attachment needs, fears, longings. What throws our partners into distress is one or both partners not getting their attachment needs met. What humans do then lead us to pain and fear, which tweaks our behaviors. We interact with each other that leaves us feeling really disconnected and really alone. And maybe even questioning our love for each other.

### **Why is it important to process emotions and feel?**

Emotions have central control over our nervous system, cognitions, behavior, etc. We are biologically hard wired where emotions drive our survival. We have emotions for a reason. They send important messages that something needs to be looked at. When you get the signals all mixed up it is hard to get the benefits of your love relationship. There is no way around paying attention to the emotional signals. Hurt needs to be healed, when you load share the hurt, it starts to shrink and become easier.

Emotions are the messenger of love. Because you love your partner, we need to help you know a bit about what you feel on the inside and share it in a way your partner can hold it. In distress we have a lot of secondary or reactive, fastmoving emotions that push our partner away. EFT goal is to move from secondary to primary emotions. By sharing those primary emotions with each other and helping your partner hold it, creates bonding moments. I have never met a relationship that could not benefit from more bonding moments. So, vulnerability to vulnerability, that is the Velcro that all couple's need to feel a secure, loving relationship. We all need more of it, life is hard, stressful, we work a lot, we do not see a lot of each other. EFT helps your bond move from unstable, to closeness. We did not really learn this growing up through life. I want you to feel the benefits of your love.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Withdrawer or Pursuer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Withdrawer or Pursuer

# Couple's Cycle

*Infinity diagram designed by Scott R. Woolley Ph.D.*

Overview of the couple's particular cycle (its history, mechanisms, triggers, etc.)...

**Behaviors - What I do**

**What I think to myself**

About me:

About you:

**Secondary/Reactive Emotions**

I react emotionally with

**Primary Emotions**

How I REALLY feel deep inside

**Unmet attachment needs**

What I need, what my intentions are

- \*Every behavior (what I do) triggers an attachment need in the other.
- \*Every trigger/behavior is assigned a meaning or assumption (Thoughts) based upon our lens (Meaning of Intent)
- \* →

**Behaviors - What I do**

**What I think to myself**

About me:

About you:

**Secondary/Reactive Emotions**

I react emotionally with

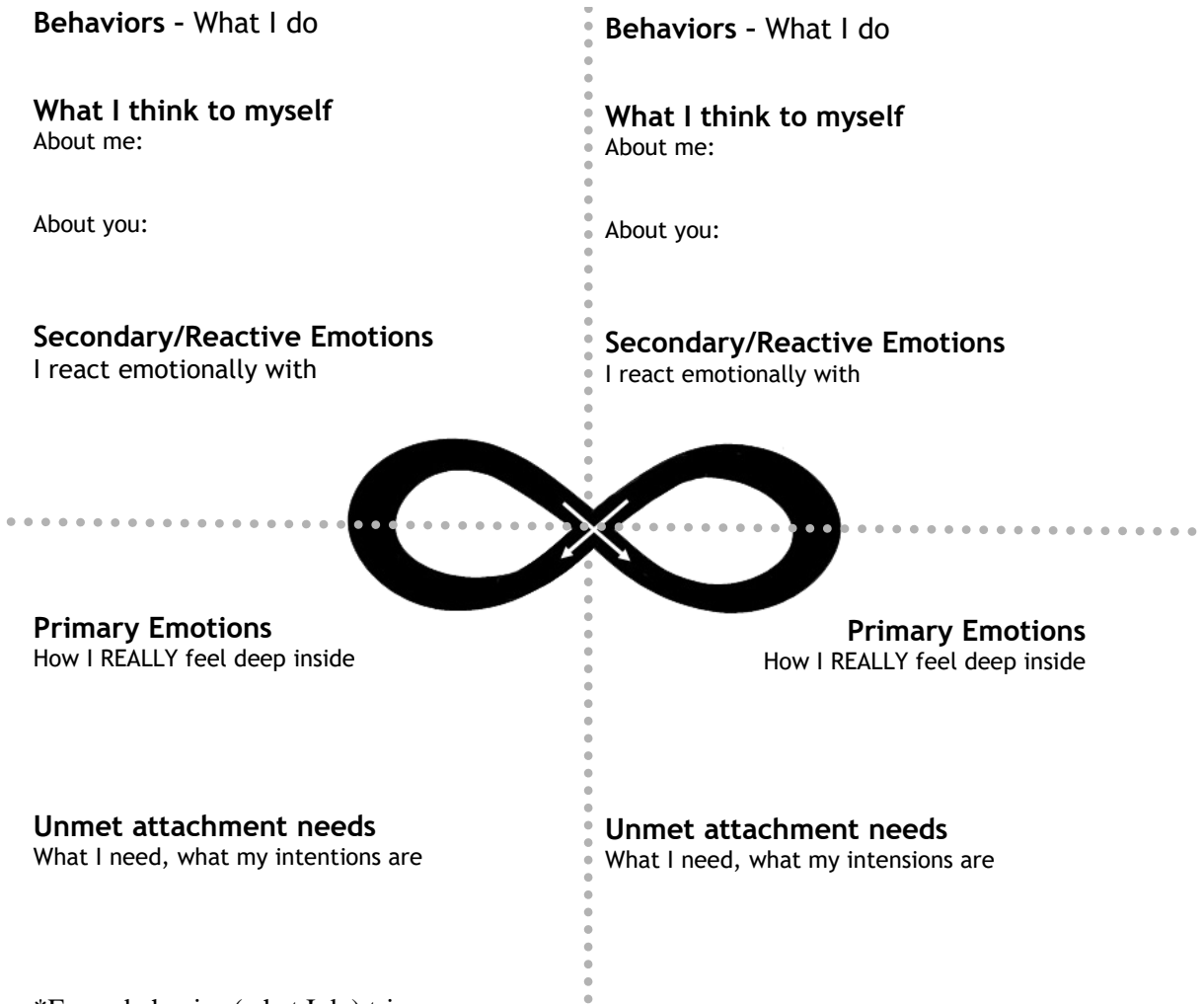
**Primary Emotions**

How I REALLY feel deep inside

**Unmet attachment needs**

What I need, what my intentions are

- \*Based upon our meaning/interpretation of behavior, primary emotion is experienced deep inside.
- \* Instead of showing/expressing our internal primary emotions, we tend to protect and display a reactive secondary emotion.



## Understanding Your Negative Cycle

Couples get caught in “negative cycles” of interaction. A “negative cycle” is a repeating pattern of negative behaviors, thoughts and feelings that causes distress. You react to your partner’s reactions and your partner reacts to your reactions and you go round and round in a never-ending negative cycle. Understanding and untangling your “negative cycles” is a first step in climbing out of distress. The exercise below will help you with this process.

### When my partner and I are not getting along:

I often react by (*describe behaviors*)...

My partner often reacts to me by (*describe behaviors*)...

When my partner reacts this way, I often *feel*...

When I feel this way I, see myself as....

When I feel this way I long for or need...

When I react the way I do, I guess that my partner feels...

Describe your repeating negative cycle (*include how you and your partner trigger each other’s feelings, thoughts and behaviors*)...

## When We Are Not Getting Along: My Feelings, Thoughts and Behaviors

✓ Check all the statements that reflect the way you feel or what you do when you and your partner are fighting or not along. Look back over the list and circle a few to indicate the most important items.

### What I Do.....

I criticize  
I attack  
I blame  
I defend  
I analyze  
I rationalize  
I get quiet  
I become cold or aloof  
I clam up  
I withdraw  
I avoid conflict  
I leave

### What I Feel .....

I feel scared.  
I feel afraid.  
I feel hurt  
I feel vulnerable  
I feel worried or nervous.  
I feel disappointed.  
I feel let down.  
I feel sad.  
I feel alone or lonely.  
I feel hopeless.  
I feel down or depressed.  
I feel empty.  
I feel disconnected.  
I feel isolated.  
I feel ignored.  
I feel shut out or pushed away.  
I feel rejected.  
I feel abandoned.  
I feel misunderstood.  
I feel my partner is never there for me.  
I feel frustrated.  
I feel angry.  
I feel like getting back.  
I feel like protecting myself.  
I feel guarded.  
I feel like clinging to my partner.  
I feel flooded with emotion.  
I feel unable to calm myself down  
I feel overwhelmed.  
I feel confused.  
I feel unable to focus my thoughts.  
I feel blank.  
I feel numb  
I feel smothered  
I have trouble putting thoughts into words

I feel it's always my fault.  
I feel judged.  
I feel blamed or criticized.  
I feel put down.  
I feel I don't know what I have done.  
I feel analyzed.  
I feel invalidated.  
I feel discounted.  
I feel attacked.  
I feel controlled.  
I feel intimidated.  
I feel dismissed or "blown off".  
I feel uncared for or unwanted.  
I feel unlovable.  
I feel unattractive.  
I feel unimportant.  
I feel inadequate.  
I feel small or insignificant.  
I feel I don't matter.  
I feel I've failed.  
I feel guilty.

### In My Body I Feel.....

I feel my heart speeding up.  
I feel tense somewhere in my body.  
I feel uneasy in my stomach.  
I feel tightness in my throat.  
I feel pressure in my chest.

### How We Interact During Conflict .....

\_\_\_\_\_ I often want to avoid talking about our relationship.  
\_\_\_\_\_ During an argument, I become become silent, withdraw and don't want to discuss things.  
\_\_\_\_\_ My partner often pushes an issue and won't let it drop.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I often want to push my partner to talk about our relationship.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I often get angry and critical to get my partner to talk.  
\_\_\_\_\_ My partner withdraws a lot and won't face an issue when I want to talk.

### Other Feelings: \_\_\_\_\_