

Recognizing and Healing Attachment Distress in Couples Therapy Using Emotionally Focused Therapy

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Emotionally Focused Therapy for couples was developed by Dr. Sue Johnson from her original dissertation research (1988).

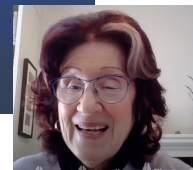
The content of this presentation is based on Dr. Johnson's conceptualization of couples' distress, training materials, development and research.

Dr. Johnson was a blessed teacher and inspiration to me, and to therapists throughout the world, for bringing this model to life and the change that happens in couples' relationships as EFT therapy touches their lives.

She was a beloved teacher and dear friend. You will learn more about her, her work and wisdom throughout this training, and I hope it will profoundly touch you also.



December 19, 1947 - April 23, 2024



Emotionally Focused Therapy

Looks within at how individuals, partners and family members construct their emotional experience of relatedness

- using Rogerian interventions

Looks between at how individuals, partners and family members engage each other

- using Systemic interventions and tasks

In order to:

- Reprocess / expand emotional responses
- Create new kinds of interactions / change the dance
- Foster secure bonding between partners

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Our focus today

Part 1 Empathic Holding

Being With:

Attachment Perspective, Strong Attachment Affect, Affect
Assembly

Part 2: Moving Together

Dancing the EFT Tango:

Present Process, Moving Within/Between, Progress Orientation

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We don't just heal the relationship; we create a relationship that heals.

- We need a safe haven, to be held and comforted.
- The partner doesn't fix the problem but they offer connection which makes the problem tolerable so they can learn to fix it together.

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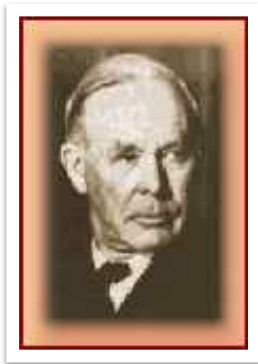
ATTACHMENT

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Attachment Theory

John Bowlby

A secure base (1988, p. 62)



“All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s).”

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Wired In

Imagine you are:

- The baby – what feelings do you have here?
- The mother – what feelings do you have here?
- The car driver – what feelings do you have here?

Being aware of and holding the feelings of all 3 is what it's like to be an EFT therapist.

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Essential Concepts

Attachment Disconnection and Insecurity is a Threat to Human Survival.

Emotion is the Music, listen for it, focus on it and make it explicit.

We are the tool – our Attunement and Empathic Responsiveness is Key.

The level of experiencing matters. We must go safely into the depth of it.

Assemble emotion and order It.

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ABCD'S of Attachment (Jorgensen, 2009)

A. Acceptance (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Beate Ditzen Biological Psychiatry
Volume 65, Issue 9, Pages 728-731, 1 May 2009)


B. Belonging (Maslow; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Sapolsky, R.M. 1998)

C. Comfort (Bowlby, 1969; Soothing – Gottman; Reassuring Refuge, CSWJ,
36:21-30, 2008)

D. Desire (Birnbaum & Reis, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007., Johnson and
Zuccarini, 2010.)

S. Safety (Bowlby, 1969; CSWJ, 36:21-30, 2008)

Understanding the Impact of Disconnection from an Attachment Perspective

- 
- Emotional Difficulties and Lack of Security
Reinforce and Amplify
 - Disturbances of Identity/Self Disturbances
Reinforce and Amplify
 - Difficulties with Relationship/Relatedness
Reinforce and Amplify

Necessary Protection

- Relational trauma, racial or minority trauma and oppression –
 - real and present
- “Earned” protection – coping strategies to survive
 - Necessary and adaptive
- Validate and honor these survival strategies and
 - the context in which they were developed

But...

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Block to Full Experience

- A consequence of this survival/coping strategy can be that a person can become shut-off from their experience
- Missing one’s own experience, disconnected or dissociated from self
- Protection from real threat is needed and it alters Working Model of Self, Working Model of Others and Working Model of the World

But...

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Rigid Reactivity

- Coping strategies are be fast and become rigid
- Body and brain react automatically to protect from threat
- Body and brain react as though the threat is real, even when it may not currently be happening
- This can create self-fulfilling prophecies and prevent corrective experiences

So...

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Conscious Flexibility

- Body and brain are fully aware of vulnerability and the risk involved
- Awareness and discernment between real threat and biases and cues of safety and belonging.
- Aim is to develop flexible adaptiveness.
- Choosing when to lower shield in session and then between session
- Having New Corrective Experiences

Creating Earned Security

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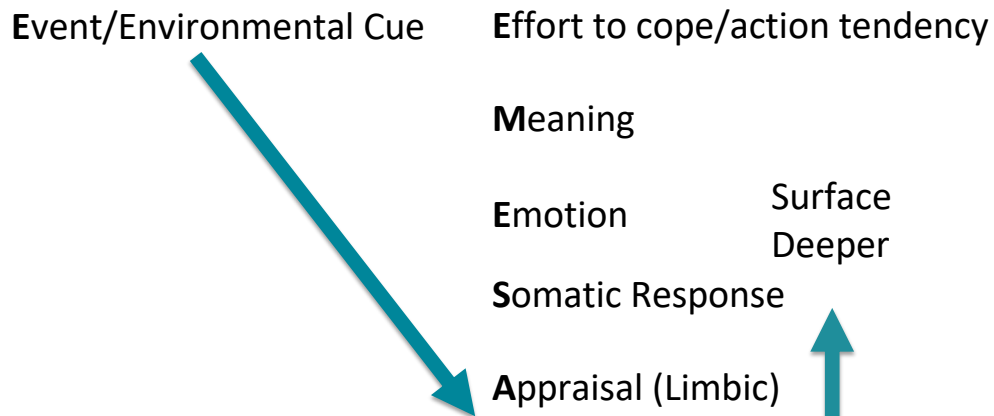
THE PROCESS OF EMOTION E.A.S.E. M.E.

Event (cue)
Appraisal (limbic)
Somatic Response
Emotion
Meaning (working model of self & oth
Effort (to cope)



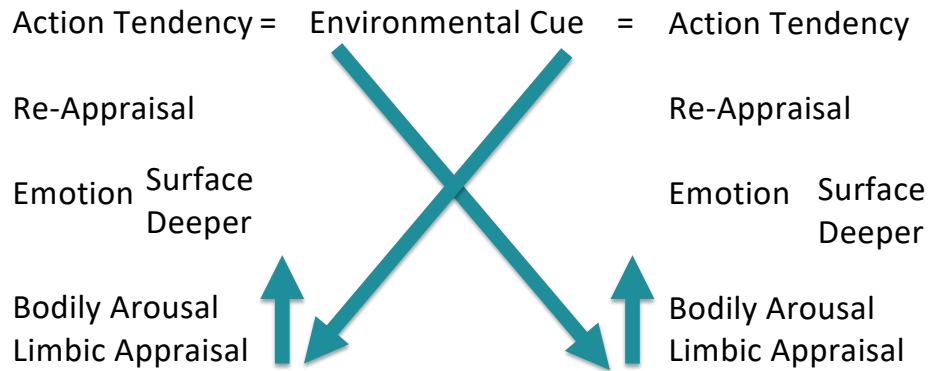
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The Process of Emotion E.A.S.E. M.E.



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The Process of Emotion Creates the Negative Cycle

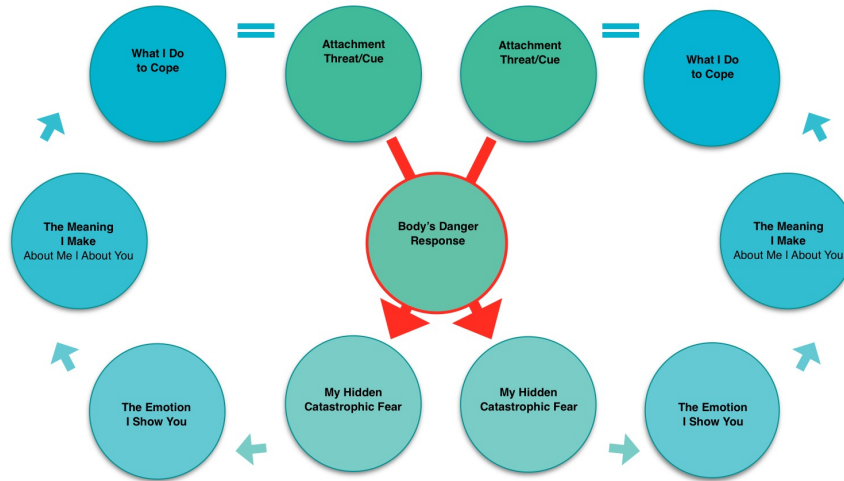


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Ways we cope with unmet attachment needs



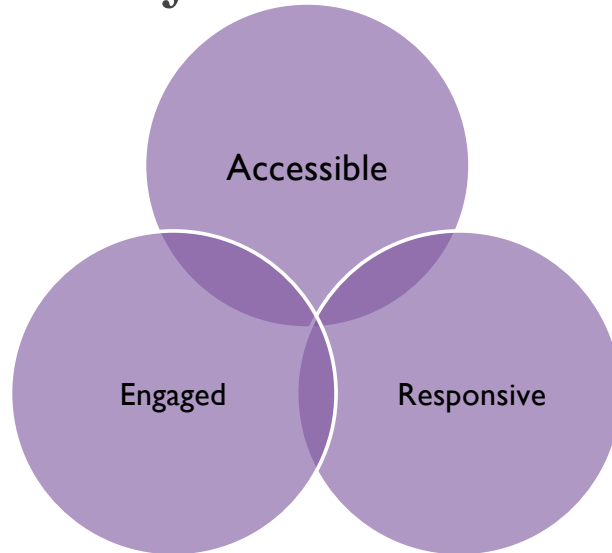
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The Process of Emotion

We use it for Tracking the Interpersonal Pattern/the Cycle and for Affect Assembly and Deepening

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ARE you there for me?



Emotional presence is the “solution”

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Empathic Attunement:

“Holding” the client in his/her experience, imagining and having some bodily sense of the client’s experience, being responsive to client’s experience



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So what do we do with HIGH INTENSITY?

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**How would you stop/slow
down that escalation?**

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EFT therapists welcome reactivity (not trigger it) to get to vulnerability. Remember: Reactivity is the best way partners know to deal with the threat to their relationship.

- “If we can become comfortable with the power of emotion, it becomes the therapist’s greatest ally, rather than a disruptive force to be contained.”

(Johnson, 2012)

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“When you order emotion it becomes tolerable, once it’s tolerable you can move into creating corrective experience.”

Sue Johnson

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Therapist Presence

- High conflict calls for a strong, accessible, responsive, and engaged therapist presence.
- ARE you there for me? The couple, the partner's will want to know, "Are you there for me therapist."
- Can you keep the focus when the conflict is alive?

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What Helps

- Reflection & Validation through attachment lens
- Try Matching energy
- Sending that message "I'm here for you"
- Expressing pain non-verbally
- Touch (sometimes)
- Get in Their Line of vision - (tunnel vision)
- Process transparency
 - (I'm moving in to help you)
 - (I want you to talk to me)
- Cue to calm

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When We Get Triggered

- Watch and monitor your own trigger, what triggered you (and what was your response).

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©Dr.Sue Johnson

**Stay with the
attachment
distress,
the partner & the
present**

As you watch:

- What do you experience listening to Sandra's messages about danger?
- If you were Sandra's therapist, which aspects of this session would you personally find most challenging?

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The EFT Tango

From EFT Step by Step with Dr. Rebecca Jorgensen

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Staying with the attachment distress message (partner, present / trauma)

How does the therapist **stay with** the *emotion* in Sandra's message?

What do you notice about **what the therapist does with the content** of Sandra's messages about danger

How does the therapist heighten **the attachment meaning**?

How and why does the therapist help Sandra to **disclose attachment significance to her partner**?

Focusing The Session

- Can I slow you down? I get confused...
- I know this is important to you so you want to jump in. Right now I want to finish this piece with ____, I know you see it differently. Can you hold on, and I'll come back.
- I need to interrupt you. I want you to have a different experience. That means I will stop you, slow you down. Is that okay?
- Okay, I'm going to interrupt you. Let's go back. Let's slow down and look at what just happened here.

Stage 1 Example



Stage 2 Example



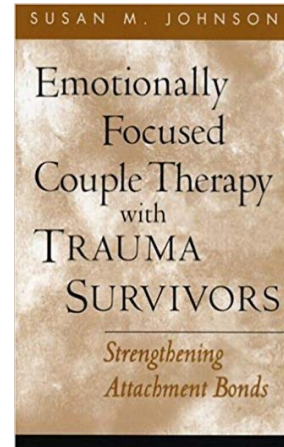
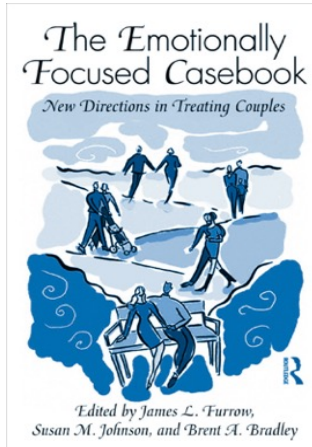
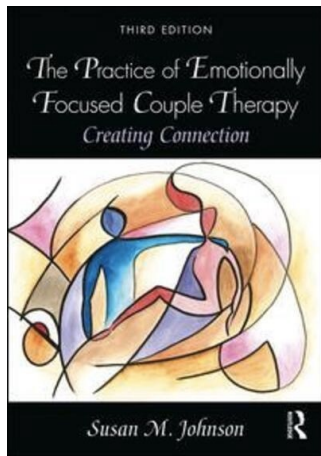
With Earned Secure Attachment Couples:

- Able to be aware of emotion and regulate affect
- Can communicate emotions to partner
- Can empathize with other's position as well as self-disclose
- Can ask for needs to be met
- Appropriately assertive
- Can solve problems together
- Can tolerate ambiguity and differences
- Can metacommunicate

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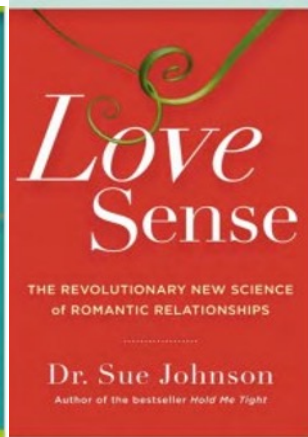
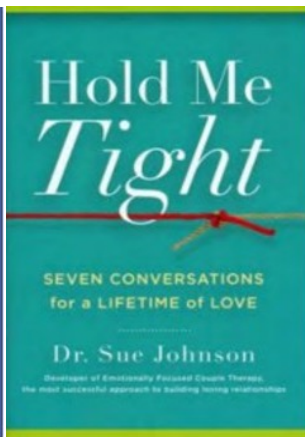
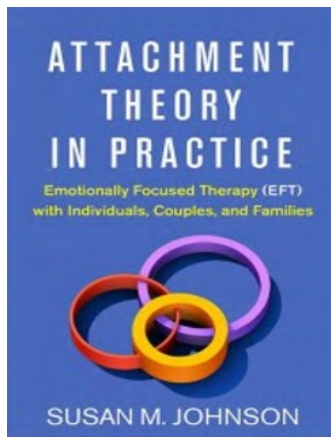
Take-aways | Questions

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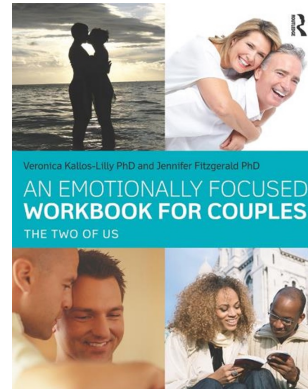
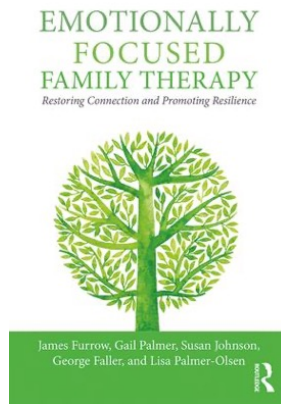
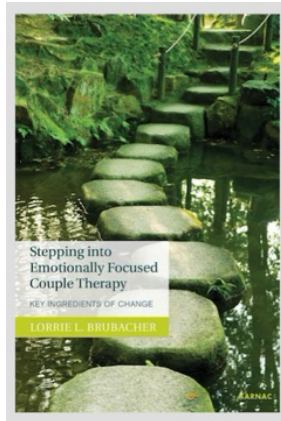
Recommended EFT Texts

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Recommended EFT Texts

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Empirical Support for the Effectiveness of EFT



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Contact Rebecca



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- Emotionally Focused Therapy FB Group
- Building A Lasting Connection
www.buildingalastingconnection.com for learning the process of emotion “Love Mats” (connection system®)

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