

June 30, 2020

EFT

CONNECTION + COMMUNICATION + SAFETY

3

PRO TIPS FOR
COMMUNICATION

Emotionally Focused Therapy

Learn about this amazing therapy that's all about how we connect with others

MINOTA-JEAN KENNEL, RSW, BSW



PLUS

*Relationship
Quiz -*

How do you
handle conflict?

What's EFT?

Okay! So you have heard about Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), but what is it really? Can it help me resolve conflict?



Would it surprise you to hear that 50-65% of couples seeking therapy experience toxic or physical conflict in their relationship (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020)? More often than not, both partners react to each other in hurtful ways (Rouleau et al., 2019). EFT recognizes the patterns of toxic conflict are complex. EFT works with the belief that the toxic behaviours we may engage in do not have to define who we are or how we manage conflict in the future (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020).

EFT is a therapy that understands that the people around us, our environment, and our past experiences shape how we deal with stress (Johnson, 2019). An important aspect of EFT is that the process of the therapy and the theory behind it are guided by science and have been rigorously tested in studies (Johnson, 2019). The results of these studies have been extraordinary with multiple positive outcomes such as less relationship conflict, increased marital stratification and even increase people's physical and emotional health (Hassan et al., 2017)! EFT works at a deeper level of connection with our partners so that we change, or re-organize, how we relate to them (Johnson, 2019). How does this change take place? By addressing our attachment style as well as increasing our communication and awareness of emotions. This allows us to feel like our partner is a safe and secure home base for us (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020).

MINOTA-JEAN KENNELL
Registered Social Worker

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This magazine is meant to be an introduction to Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) in the context of conflict in intimate relationships. This a series of short articles. It is by no means an exhaustive tool that explains all aspects of EFT and conflict in relationships. You will find several places throughout the magazine where you can find alternatives, extra resources or tips for dealing with conflict.

Should you be interested in more information or exploration to see if EFT is a fit for you, please speak to your therapist.

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How Does EFT Work?

EFT sounds great, but what does it actually do and how does it play out in relationships?

AN OVERVIEW

The purpose of EFT is to change the style of attachment we have to our intimate partner in order to create a secure bond (Burgess-Moser et al., 2015). When we have had negative interaction cycles with our partner, we have to learn new ways of relating to them so that we can have new ways of responding to them (Johnson, 2019). Creating a secure attachment with our partner allows for new patterns of relating and interacting with them (Johnson, 2019). In order to do this, we need to get in touch with our primary emotions - sometimes emotions we have not been aware of (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2019).

Often these primary emotions are the result of unrealized fear or insecurity about our place or role in the relationship (Bowlby, 1984).

Indeed, conflict may be caused by unmet attachment needs (Rouleau et al., 2019). If we can express these fears and understand how the fears cause us to act out with protective behaviours that harm others, we can start to create a sense of safety with our partner (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). When we get stuck in toxic ways of relating and reacting to each other we are in a negative interaction cycle (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2019). EFT explores the triggers, primary and secondary emotions of the



negative interaction cycle all the while helping to create a safe and secure bond with your partner (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2019).

As such, a large portion of EFT is working with recognizing and communicating emotions (Rouleau et al., 2019). Being more aware of what we need in a relationship allows us to consider new solutions and explore new patterns of relating to each other (Rouleau et al., 2019). There is now room to practice new, healthier ways of relating to our partner (Johnson, 2019). In fact, this process will actually change the wiring of your brain (Johnson & Milton H. Erickson Foundation, 2013).

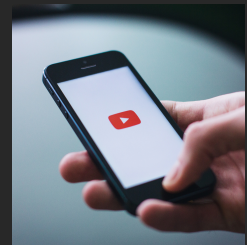
ATTACHMENT AND CONFLICT

You might hear a lot about attachment or attachment style in EFT. What is it and how might it affect conflict in relationships?

Attachment theory used to be thought of as how parents and children interact. These patterns of interaction build the foundation of our nervous systems, our sense of self, and influence how we deal with stress (Johnson, 2019).

Now we know attachment is not just related to our parents, but also our intimate partners (Johnson & Milton H. Erickson Foundation, 2013)!

In other words, just as we needed our parents to be our safe haven when we were children, we need our partners to be that safe spot in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). To see how our early childhood attachments affect how we interact with our partners check out page 6. To see how that attachment plays out in conflict check out page 7.



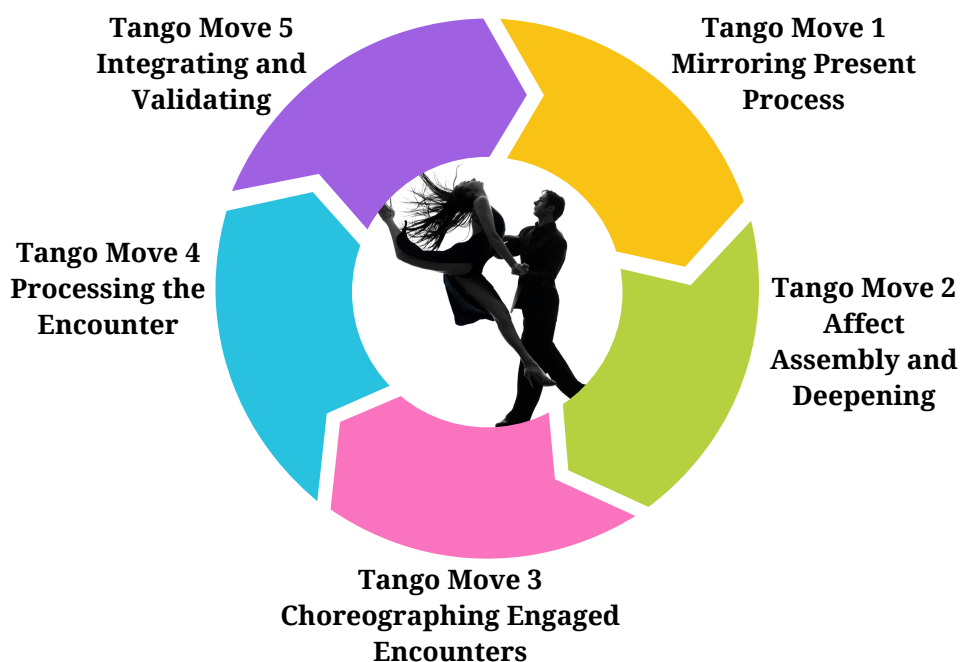
ATTACHMENT FORMATION

Get a head start on understanding how attachment is formed in early childhood by watching the YouTube video: The Attachment Theory: How Childhood Affects Life

[WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=WJOOWWXOXCg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJOOWWXOXCg)

Shall We Dance?

EFT has been explained by Sue Johnson as a Tango. There are 5 Tango Moves, or interventions, in EFT.



Just like any good dance, you need to know the moves! Sue Johnson breaks down EFT into 5 Tango moves that are choreographed by the therapist to increase communication, connection, and safety (Johnson, 2019). The descriptions of these Tango Moves are taken from Sue Johnson (2019).

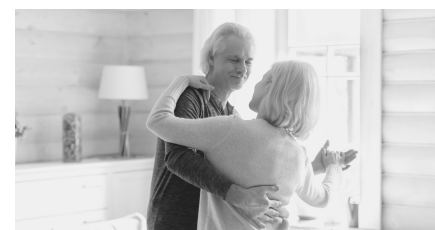
Tango Move One: is called Mirroring. Mirroring the present process means that the therapist gets tuned into your emotions and reflects them back in statements with the prime goal of bringing awareness to those emotions. This move also creates an increased awareness to some emotions we may not have realized we had, such as shame or guilt (Johnson, 2019).

Tango Move Two: During Tango Move two, the context of you and your emotions will be explored allowing you to have a more complete awareness of your emotions. The goal of this move is to continuously explore the deeper emotions (Johnson, 2019).

Tango Move Three: In Tango Move number three the therapist will guild a couple to connect and interact with each other in new, healthier ways (Johnson, 2019).

Tango Move Four: These new ways of interacting with your partner are explored and processed in Tango Move number four. Additionally, the new ways of interacting can be applied to the reason the couple decided to come to therapy. If there are any places a couple still feels stuck in the negative interaction cycle, they will be addressed here to help the couple move forward (Johnson, 2019).

Tango Move Five: In Tango Move five, the couple get to celebrate their successes! The feedback loop of our internal process, interactions with others and our self are explored (Johnson, 2019).



DID YOU NOTICE

Did you notice that the five Tango moves are not phases, but are displayed in a circular pattern? This is because, as with any good dance, we can mix things up and move from one dance step to another. When you are in therapy, your therapist will dance with you in and out of the various steps several times. Sometimes learning a new dance can make you feel vulnerable or even scared. Your therapist will always be there to help you find that sense of safety.

Now that you know the dance steps, would you like to know the stages of therapy? Check out page 8 for details.

Relationship Quiz

How is conflict and connection handled in your household?

1) How is love shown in your relationships?

- A) We may express it differently, but I know I'm loved and I show that I love them.
- B) I don't know, but I want to feel connected to my partner.
- C) Too little or too much affection makes me uncomfortable.
- D) We end up showing each other we love each other after a big blow up and someone gets physically hurt.

2) When there is conflict:

- A) Both my partner and I can work it out.
- B) I need space and I try to avoid conflict at all times. I just shut down. (A withdrawer)
- C) I'm not even sure what happens. I'm just suddenly angry and frustrated. I can be critical of my partner. (A pursuer)

3) Is the conflict ending the way you want it to?

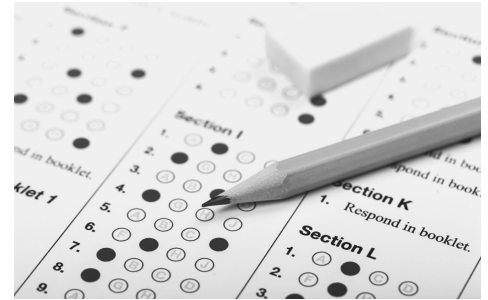
- A) Yes. Both my partner and I have disagreements, but we both listen and respect each other.
- B) I think it gets resolved, but then we keep having fights about the same things over and over.
- C) No. Sometimes I feel bad or guilty about what I do during conflict.
- D) No. In fact, I think our fighting has gotten worse. It is starting to affect our relationships with family, friends, or work.

4) What happens after the conflict?

- A) I feel heard and connected to my partner.
- B) I'm exhausted, but I feel better.
- C) I'm walking on egg shells and waiting for it to happen again.
- D) I'm not sure the conflict has been resolved.

5) How do you want to deal with conflict?

Although you may feel stuck in a negative interaction pattern, there are options for change! What would it feel like to be able to resolve conflict in a different way? What would it look like?

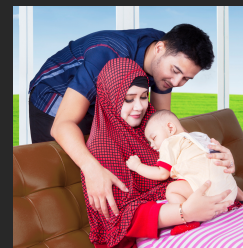


SCORING

How did you feel you did on the quiz? Remember, your answers are just the starting point in your journey, not the final destination! The pattern of how conflict is dealt with can change with practice and support.

PURSUER AND WITHDRAWER

You may have noticed the terms pursuer and withdrawer during the quiz. These are the terms used to identify our own patterns of emotions and behaviours during conflict (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2019). Both pursurers and withdrawers have the capacity for physical conflict in relationships (Allison et al., 2008). Nevertheless, just because you have some things in common with a pursuer or withdrawer does not mean you will engage in physical conflict.

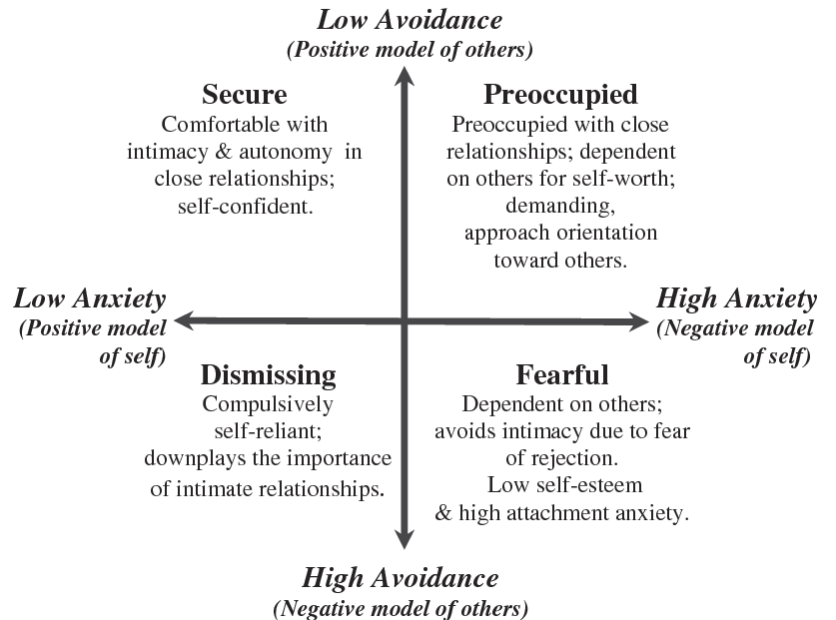


DID YOU KNOW?

That the way we talk to, feel about, and connect to our partners can reflect our attachment style? Attachment styles are often formed in our early childhood experiences with our care-givers (Hill, 2015). Learn more about the role of attachment on page 6.

What's Attachment Got to Do With It?

It turns out our early childhood experiences have a lot of influence on how we see ourselves, our partners and the world around us (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018). That means it also influences the way we communicate and deal with stress in our lives (Hill, 2015).



Bartholomew's Two-Dimensional, Four-Prototype Model of Adult Attachment.

Retrieved from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/>

After taking the relationship quiz you might have noticed how you and your partner deal with stress and conflict. How we deal with conflict is often a result of our attachment styles (Doumas et al., 2008; Sloommaecker & Migerode, 2019).

A person's attachment style is formed in early childhood by the interactions of ourselves and our parents (Hill, 2015). Our caregivers are the first people who help us regulate our emotions (Cassidy, 2018). When we were scared as children, our nervous system was activated and our caregiver's job was to help soothe us and make us feel safe (Hill, 2015).

When our caregivers were consistently successful in soothing us and making us feel safe we develop a secure attachment style (Cassidy, 2018).

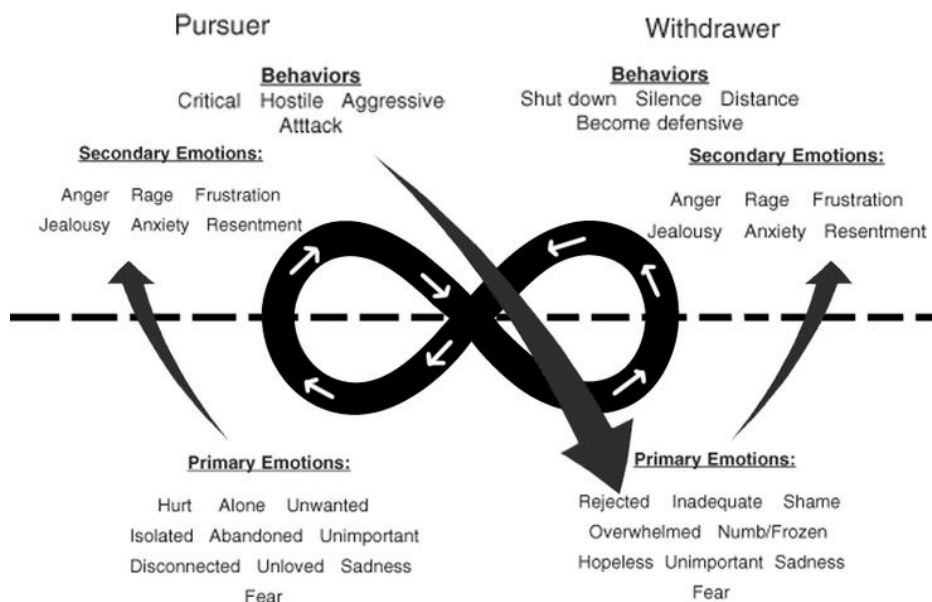
Looking at the above model (Allison et al., 2008), you can see securely attached people have a positive outlook of themselves and other people (Hill, 2015). If our caregivers are not able to consistently help us regulate our emotions and give us a secure base to return to when we are scared we can become anxious or avoidant (Allison et al., 2008;). As human beings, we want to feel comfort and love from the person we feel attached to (Schneider & Brimhall, 2014). For many adults, the person we feel most attached to shifts from our parents to our intimate partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2018; Rouleau et al., 2019).

Bowlby (1984) says we can understand unhealthy or abusive conflict as exaggerated and distorted attachment behaviours used in an attempt to maintain the relationship. As such, people may pursue or withdraw in the

relationship (Sloommaecker & Migerode, 2019). Individuals who have insecure attachment styles are more likely to engage in behaviours that are harmful to their partners during conflict (Babcock et. al, 2000). For example, a child will cry out to their caregiver if they are afraid of being separated from them. Likewise, in an adult relationship people can be afraid of being separated from their partner. They may become a pursuer and try to force their partner to talk with them (Bowlby, 1984; Sloommaeckers & Migerode, 2019). Basically, our attempts to reconnect with our partners and feel safe have lead to us repeating negative patterns of behaviour (Schneider & Brimhall, 2014).

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE CONFLICT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP, UNDERSTAND YOUR ATTACHMENT STYLE

THE NEGATIVE INTERACTION CYCLE



The negative interaction cycle is often driven by the individuals' attachment style resulting in people reaching out for connection in unhealthy and hurtful ways (Slootmaekers & Migerode, 2019)

Image of the Negative Interaction style retrieved from:
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/f7/62/49/f762498c4810bde352f853d84ab5c24.jpg>

When Safety Comes First

SAFETY WILL BE THE FIRST PRIORITY DURING ANY FORM OF COUNSELLING

As you can see with the Negative Interaction Cycle, there are some pretty heavy emotions that come up during conflict (Slootmaekers & Migerode, 2020). Sometimes we are not even aware of them. When we feel pain, we can respond in toxic and unhelpful ways (Bowlby, 1984). As can be seen in the diagram, our actions then influence our partner's emotions and behaviours - just like a feedback loop (Johnson & Milton H. Erickson Foundation, 2013). When we work with conflict in relationships we need to make sure people are as safe as possible. Your therapist will address safety matters throughout therapy (Slootmaekers & Migerode, 2019). Here are some things to consider:

How bad does the explosion get? How often does it happen? When you are feeling primary and secondary emotions, do you or your partner become fearful of the other person? Does the conflict flow both ways, or mainly from one person to the other? If the conflict feels out of control, it may be a good idea to call the family violence hotline with your partner to make a shared safety plan. A safety plan can give you both a list of alternatives to try before the conflict feels out of control (Rouleau et al., 2019).

Are either of you using substances? Let's face it! We don't make great decisions when we are high or drunk. Substances can magnify our actions and emotions as a pursuer or a withdrawer (Allison et al., 2008). Reducing your use could decrease the likelihood of negative consequences during conflict.



COUPLES VS INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

Safety must be maintained for both people throughout the therapeutic process (Rouleau et al., 2019). Some patterns of conflict are not a good fit for couple's counselling such as if one partner is afraid of the other (Slootmaekers & Migerode, 2020). Nevertheless, there are still counselling options if safety for both people can not be guaranteed. If that is the case, you can access EFT by yourself rather than as a couple (Rouleau et al., 2019). Your therapist will continue with safety plans during the therapeutic process (Schneider & Brimhall, 2014).

Want Alternatives?

Here are other contacts and resources you can access to start your journey!

SUBSTANCE ABUSE HOTLINE:
1-866-332-2322

FAMILY VIOLENCE HOTLINE:
403-529-1091 OR 1-800-661-7949

WEBSITE:
LOVEISRESPECT.ORG

EFT in Action

Now that you know what EFT and have a better understanding of the Negative Interaction Cycle it is time to learn about what you can expect in therapy.



STEP

1

BUILDING SAFETY

Remember, safety always comes first! Your therapist will build a genuine relationship of understanding and acceptance with each of you (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). This is the time that your goals for counselling are outlined. Remember, there is always hope for a healthier relationship! Your therapist will be right there with you and will help you understand your emotions and actions (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020).

STEP

2

EXPLORING THE NEGATIVE INTERACTION CYCLE

Part of this step is about becoming more aware of the negative interaction cycle (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). This means you may be tracking your triggers, reactive emotions and if you are a pursuer or withdrawer (Slootmaecker & Migerode, 2020). It is helpful to find out what can lead to physical conflict or emotional hurt. Your therapist and you will try to figure out how you can get stuck in this negative interaction cycle.

STEP

3

PRIMARY EMOTIONS & VIOLENT PATTERNS

This is when all the information about how your attachment was formed, any distress you have from your childhood that created your attachment style, and all those primary emotions come together (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). These topics will be brought together and explored with the safety of your therapist so that they are not overwhelming. you can begin to see how these emotions drive the negative interaction cycle. You will gain a more empathetic view of your partner as you understand their

attachment, primary emotions, and hurts (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). You will gain the ability to soften your primary emotions and reactions (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020).

STEP

4

EXTERNALIZING & ATTENDING TO ATTACHMENT NEEDS

That negative interaction cycle does not define you as a person, but it is a threat to your relationship (Slootmaeckers & Migerode, 2020). Recognizing you and your partner are on the same team to get rid of that cycle is powerful! In this stage you are recognizing your primary emotions and addressing them in a healthier way. You are connecting with your partner in a safe and secure way.

REMEMBER

Being in negative reaction cycle does not define you as a person.

This moment in time, is just that... a moment, a starting place.

If these reading have caused any distress please speak with your therapist or contact the 24 hour distress line at:

403.266.4357

SOFT-HARD-SOFT

Got something that is hard to say, but still needs saying? Try saying something nice first; something that is going well or acknowledge your partner's effort. Then say the the thing that is hard to say. Follow it up with another soft statement like a compliment or let them know you love them (Papernow & Psychotherapy Networker, 2012). Your partner might be more receptive to your request!

3 PRO TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION

2

JOINING

Ever feel like the more you rant about something the more upset you get? Try keeping your part of the conversation to two sentences. The first sentence should reflect back what your partner is saying. Try to get their emotion in your reflection. Then, in the second sentence say what you need them to hear (Papernow & Psychotherapy Networker, 2012). It can take practice, but it is well worth the effort!

3

COUPLE NEGOTIATED TIME-OUT

Do you feel like you are heading for the explosion in the negative interaction cycle? Try taking a time-out or a break. When both of you are calm and relaxed, try a time-In, where you sit down and use the first two skills on this page to talk about it. This process works best when both of you plan for this before you need it (Schneider & Brimhall, (2014).

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