

The Foundation of Emotionally Focused Therapy

As new studies have been conducted in the field of couple therapy, a clearer understanding regarding the nature of love has emerged. Although love is a concept that often eludes a precise definition, Sue Johnson has offered a compelling theory. Johnson has been developing Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) since the 1980s, and it has now gained worldwide acclaim. Central to this therapeutic approach is the human need for safe emotional connection. Johnson believes that the main purpose of romantic love is attachment and emotional bonding. If a person can count on another human being to offer consistent emotional connection and comfort, then a positive love connection will be nurtured.

According to Johnson, there is much scientific research to support the argument that love is a fundamental survival mechanism of the human species. The EFT approach explains what couples are seeking from one another when they are in conflict. If love is viewed as the stronghold that emotionally protects us from the trials and tribulations of life and offers us a safe haven, then it is no wonder we fight so strongly for it. According to EFT, our innate attachment needs leave us no other option. Therefore, we must pay attention to the relational dynamic and how attachment needs are getting threatened during times of conflict, rather than get caught up in the content of an argument.

In order to be physically and mentally healthy, we require emotional attachments with a few special people whom we trust. The need to have someone upon whom we can depend is just as essential as the needs for food, shelter, and sex. Although I am offering the foundation of EFT Couple Therapy in simplified form, the basis of this approach is seven healing conversations that couples can initiate with one another when using Johnson's book. These conversations are designed to help couples develop emotional responsiveness to one another.

Emotional responsiveness is comprised of three components. First, partners need to be **accessible** to one another. Although you may struggle with understanding your own feelings about a given situation, it is important that you do not get overwhelmed so that you can stay open and accessible to your lover. Instead of allowing doubts or insecurity to take over your perspective, it is essential that you step back and tune into your partner's attachment cues so that he/she can reach you.

The second emotionally healing component is **responsiveness**. The main question of this aspect is whether or not you can rely on your partner to respond to you emotionally. It is crucial to be able to turn to your partner, and communicate that you care about how he/she feels. Each partner must be able to clearly communicate messages of comfort and caring to the other, so that both people can be soothed.

Finally, the third component of emotional responsiveness is **engagement**. Special attention and focus must be given to your partner so that he/she will feel valued and that you are present

with him/her. Being present emotionally, gazing at your partner, and touching him/her frequently can all be part of engagement.

These three aspects of Johnson's healing conversations can be easily recalled through the acronym A.R.E. and the phrase, "Are you there, are you with me?". All of us can help to build the vital close connections that we need for health and happiness in our lives through taking the time to respond to loves ones in an open, caring, and present manner. If this approach to relationships resonates with you, then you may want to read more about EFT in Johnson's book, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*.