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Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy

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.clt.ca; Psychology Today, March/April 2003