



What is behind Emotional Focused Couples Therapy?

Emotional Focused Couples Therapy places the focus on the emotions in a relationship and how these emotions effect our living together. In the therapy room the client is the relationship of the couple. We are not looking for *the* bad guy who is responsible for the stress in the relationship. The focus is on how the individuals interact with each other and how their acting is influencing their partner's emotions, feelings and behavior. Sue Johanson, who developed this approach over the last 20 years with her colleagues, compares a relationship with a dance where two people are involved. Depending on the music and the steps the couple is doing, they are dancing a waltz, a tango or a polka. As in real life, it can of course happen, that we step on each other toes.

Research showed over the last 30 years that human beings are not so independent and self-sufficient as we thought and psychologists propagated over decades. The main idea is that individualism and positive thinking holds the key to self-worth and if we exercise this enough we will built up our self-esteem, which holds a certain truth. However when it comes to stressful situations our emotions take over and all the lists of good behaviors and positive reinforcements do not work anymore. In the past the positive and healthy power of interpersonal interactions and bonding was underestimated. We need to create secure and supportive connections with our loved ones (family or partner) to feel safe and built up our self-esteem from there.

Isolation causes a lot of stress in individuals and is a health risk factor like smoking or drinking. In addition it is shown that fear, pain and even traumatic experience decrease in the arms of a loved one, like Jim Coan showed in his "hand holding experiments". Through a close loving relationship we feel secure enough to explore the world and face new challenges.

How do I know that my relationship needs some help?

The ideal relationship does not exist. Every couple has its differences and arguments. And even if we step on our partner's toes by accident that does not mean that there is no love. It is difficult or even inappropriate to define **the ideal** relationship because there are so many good working models and each relationship has to be adjusted to the individual and cultural circumstances the couple is living in. The amount of arguments is not an indicator of how healthy or secure a relationship is. The difference is if you do not find a way to a good and safe feeling towards your partner later. Moreover you have the feeling that you are going in circles in an argument and you do not find a way out and cannot reconnect in a trustful way. The argument lasts for hours or even days. In the end you feel lonely, frustrated, hopeless, helpless and isolated. In a healthy relationship the argument will be solved soon and the couple is able to build on trust easy.



In a secure relationship both individuals should feel good, supported and accepted for who they are. As mentioned above, there should be an equal space for the individual dreams, needs and developments.

Some goals for couple therapy could be:

- finding a way out of stressful and frustrating arguments
- learning how to support each other more in the loving relationship
- learning how to support each other in a life transition, like going abroad, living in a long distance relationship (challenges of expat life), becoming parents, becoming empty nesters
- seeking some help in a difficult phase like severe illness, loss of a child
- learning how to deal with jealousy or the injuries of an affair

How does Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT) work?

EFT is divided into 3 steps

1. Step - Identifying your circle/dance

Together we will identify in a safe environment the dance/circle you developed in your relationship over time. Which means, that we will look at how your own emotions trigger your behavior and how this will influence your partners thoughts, emotions and behavior and the other way round. Most of the time we unintentionally hurt each other's feelings -"step on each other's feet".

As soon as we discover the process how your emotions effect your behavior and how this effects your partner's feelings and emotions you might not feel just like victims any more. Most of the time this step already leads to relieving some stress in the relationship.

2. Create a new circle/ dance

In step 2, I will help you to create your new individual circle/dance as a couple. This happens through a more open conversation in your relationship over your individual feeling, emotions and experience. Again, there is no bad guy. More important thing is that you discover and observe what you need in the relationship to feel safe and supported. During this stage the individual starts to open up towards their partner. Both will be able to build up on a more close connection towards the other.

3. Healing old injuries

In Step 3 the couple is supported to strengthen the new developed steps and is encouraged to learn from their new experiences. They are supported by building on the new changes and to look differently on old hurtful events of their relationship.



I hope this text could help you to get more an idea what to expect.

*Angelika Matthias
Therapeutic Counsellor*

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