

## What is Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy?

**Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT)** is the **Gold Standard of couple's counseling** and is **based on the science of adult love and bonding (attachment)**. Drs. Susan Johnson and Les Greenberg developed it in the 1980's in Canada. Dr. Johnson noticed that some couples failed to continue to thrive after counseling and began to pour over video of sessions to discover what was missing. She came to see that couples were focusing on each other's behavior but were unaware of the deep emotions and needs that lie beneath those behaviors. Once she began to help couples to understand what was driving their reactivity she saw remarkable change that remained even after couples left her office.

EFT is a highly researched, effective and **evidence-based theory** that helps couples understand and respond to each other's needs. EFT has been validated by **over 30 years of empirical research**. A short summary of EFT research can be found in Resources.

### How EFT Works

When we can't find a safe, loving way to stay connected to our partner we go into a state of emotional pain and alarm. We *automatically* respond by protesting or withdrawing (fight or flight) even when we aren't aware of our fear or panic. Partners will then respond with their own protest or withdrawal. **Each person is impacted both physiologically and emotionally**, which creates a negative feedback loop.

In EFT, **couples are helped to create nurturance, love, empathy and connection** in their relationships. Couples learn to identify their cycle, the emotions underling their reactions and their parts in the feedback loop as they come up in the session and at home. Problems are reframed in terms of attachment needs. Couples learn to regulate their emotions and send clear signals of their needs. They also learn how to respond in a healthy way to the signals that are sent to them.

Once we can send clear signals we actually **pull our partner closer when we are in need**. We learn to reach for our partner to help us to solve the emotional upset that we are feeling. By working together couples create the safety, trust and support that they have been yearning for. EFT is a **collaborative, experiential model** that encourages couples to be involved in the deconstructing of the negative cycle and the creation of a new, secure relationship.

EFT has **also been developed for use with Individuals and Families**. The basic fundamentals are much the same as the model for working with couples with a focus on the negative cycle and the emotions and needs that are driving the feedback loop people get caught in. With Individuals the cycle runs within us — our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In Families there are many cycles that exist

between family members that can become intertwined and are often masked by secrecy and shame.