Welcome to EFT for Individuals

Dr. Susan Johnson has been an inspirational mentor to us all. Her ability to envision the road to healing attachment distress in individuals, couples, and families has transformed our work and helped shaped the field of psychotherapy.
Learning Objectives

After this workshop, participants will be able to:
1. Describe an individual’s presenting problem within an attachment frame.
2. Track negative cycles of internal and interpersonal interaction that maintain individual’s presenting problems.
3. Access and reprocess primary emotion to revise working models of self and other.
4. Create therapeutic tasks and experiments that engage clients in corrective emotional experiences.

Goal of EFT with Individuals

- To help client move “from defensiveness and rigidity” to be more open to his or her experience, more able to engage with strong emotion and more able to create a coherent meaningful narrative about self and key relationships.

- Clients learn to trust their own experience and to accept their own feelings. They learn that they are able to be themselves in relation to one another. They are confirmed in their existence as worthwhile people.  
  - Johnson, 2009
Health as emotional accessibility and flexible responsiveness

“Health is being able to engage fully in current moment-to-moment experience and use this experience to make active choices in how to define the self and relate to others.” - S Johnson, 2009

Individual Issues are about Attachment Insecurity and Affect Regulation, and are Usually Relational in Nature

In EFT we focus on problems of affect regulation and interpersonal relationships as the arena in which our clients’ issues are expressed, and reinforced.

As with couples, we use the lens of attachment theory to understand our clients’ distress: personal fears, insecurities, and internal working models are expressed interpersonally.

Our clients’ problems are maintained in the present by how they engage in behavioral patterns – reinforcing their core attachment meanings and fears.

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The Nine Steps

Stage 1: Awareness and De-escalation of Distress
Step 1: Assessment of client’s presenting issues and context, including stressors, coping, social support, safety. Begin creating the therapeutic alliance.

Step 2: Identify stuck patterns of how client relates to own emotions or opposing parts of self (intrapersonal) and to others (interpersonal patterns).

Step 3: Access and expand awareness of unacknowledged emotions underlying interactional positions in relationship to the self and others.

Step 4: Reframe the problem in terms of the cycles, underlying emotions, and unmet attachment needs.

The Nine Steps, cont’d

Stage 2: Reconnecting/Restructuring
Step 5: Expand awareness of (disowned) primary emotions, model of self and other, and attachment needs – through contact with therapist, parts of self and/or imagined other.

Step 6: Promote validation and acceptance of emotions and attachment needs – by therapist, parts of self or imagined other.

Step 7: Facilitate the expression of needs - with therapist, self and others to create secure, positive cycles with self and world.
The Nine Steps, cont’d

Stage 3: Consolidation of Change

Step 8: Facilitate the emergence of new solutions to presenting/ problematic issues. Support client to enact new positions in internal and interpersonal worlds outside of therapy.

Step 9: Create new narratives with new working models of self and other, and consolidate new positive interaction cycles

Identify the Negative Interaction Cycle that Maintains the Client’s Distress

- Individuals get caught in negative interaction cycles with themselves internally and in real life contexts (with friends, family, the workplace, school, etc.)

- They are often unaware of how they relate to themselves and how they present in the world and impact others

- We need to ask them questions about their position, probe and track the sequences that occur in the situations where they are experiencing problems

- We can also use our own experiencing of clients to mirror and reflect their responses
Distress is Maintained by Strategies Developed in Insecure Attachment Relationships

Identify basic attachment strategy client uses to regulate distress and unmet needs.

The response, when interpersonally threatened can be organized along two dimensions:
- Anxiety
- Avoidance

(Fraley & Waller, 1998)

Presentations of Anxiety and Avoidance

- **Anxiety**: Attachment behaviors become heightened and intense when fears of abandonment or unresponsiveness are triggered:
  - anxious clinging, pursuit, controlling and efforts to get a response become more strident

- **Avoidance**: When there does not appear to be hope for safe responsiveness, attachment needs and emotions are suppressed:
  - minimizing, withdrawal, avoidance, task orientation and a focus on how to limit distressing engagement.
Access the unacknowledged emotions underlying the interactional position of the client

- Most clients struggle at the level of secondary emotions when they enter individual psychotherapy (depression, anxiety, “anger problems”, frustration over job, work conflicts, etc.)

- We need to help clients access their underlying primary emotions in internal negative cycles and interpersonal contexts

- Often our clients have never been validated at this level

Reframe: the problem is the pattern!

- When our clients are stuck, it is often because the way they are trying to resolve their issues is actually reinforcing their problematic situation

- They continue to use their familiar strategies, and actually increase their own distress and pain

- We directly link their presenting issues and negative cycle to their fears, insecurities, and other attachment related emotions

- It gives them hope to see that they can have an impact on their own situation
Therapist Interventions for Stage 1

**GOAL: Awareness**

*Access emotional experience & link to patterns*

- Track and reflect internal and external negative cycles (Steps 1 and 2)
- Empathic Reflection of client emotions (Step 3)
- Evocative Questions/Responding at the leading edge of emerging experience.
- Validation of client realities and emotional responses
- Reframe: the problem is the negative cycle (Step 4)

Distress as Conflicting Aspects

Frequently there are parts of self in conflict (e.g. the avoidant part that does not want to risk depending on others, and the part that longs for connection; or a conflict between self and the representation of an attachment figure).  

Johnson, 2009

Support the “ongoing emergence of different aspects of self and different emotions so new emerging aspects can be brought into contact with older dominant ones to transform them.”

p.105 Elliott et al, 2004
Distress as Conflicting Aspects

Stage One de-escalation and Stage Two change events can be enhanced with “parts language” and the attachment perspective of the distress as an attachment drama between two parts.

Conflicting attachment Strategies: anxiety fights against avoidance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety: critical of self and others</th>
<th>Avoidance: dismissive of self and others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>complains, “flails” to make contact</td>
<td>shut downs, holds back complies, gives up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agitated</td>
<td>numb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fearing abandonment</td>
<td>fearing rejection &amp; failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longing to feel valued, connected, prized</td>
<td>Longing to keep me safe and calm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enactment Experiments – Corrective Emotional Experiences

Choreograph enactments between two conflicting elements:

- Two opposing parts of self
- Two conflicting attachment strategies or blocks in experiencing emotions
- Unresolved issues with an inner representation of an attachment figure
- Processing interpersonal trauma.

Two-part Enactment Process

1. Set Stage – context of aspects in conflict
   - ensure emotion is online, heighten split
2. Direct enactment/dialogue
   - block detours, maintain focus
   - explore and express needs and wants
3. Process each part’s experience
   - support new experience - safety and empowerment
   - integrate previously withdrawn and softened critical parts
   - consolidate integration / bond
Enactments for a Stage Two Change Event
Unresolved Issues with Attachment Figure
Case Example
◆ self-doubts, depression, anxiety, despair
◆ cycles of dismissive treatment from others ↔ doubting self and withdrawing
◆ inner conflict: giving up/withdrawing vs. fighting to make contact - avoidance/anxiety
◆ previous session: enacted negative cycle between self and representation of mother.
◆ de-escalated cycles of criticism and self-doubt
◆ demonstrates a readiness for stage 2 restructuring

Imaginal Confrontation: Enactments for Processing Interpersonal Trauma

◆ Similar to process for resolution of unresolved issues with an attachment figure.
◆ Taking position of abuser optional.
◆ Access primary anger and sadness - hold other and not self responsible
◆ Validate need for permanent distance from abuser
◆ Forgiveness optional.
  ◆ Primary Source: Paivio & Pascual-Leone, 2010
Stage 3: Consolidation

- Newly developing positive models of self and/or other allow for internal and external positive interaction cycles
- Remaining issues can be addressed from a place of increased security
- Positive narratives are contrasted to old ways of coping, highlighting the positive impact of newly occurring broaden and build cycles

References

References (Cont’d)

