

Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) is an experiential therapy that uses systems theory and attachment theory to help individuals create new experiences which can have a transformative impact. An important goal of therapy is to help clients learn how to see their emotions as information to use in figuring out how to get their needs met, this is called *emotional intelligence*. Many people are taught to avoid their feelings, which makes it harder for them to get their needs met, especially in relationships.

The role of the therapist is to provide the client with a secure base from which they can explore the various unhappy and painful aspects of their life, past and present. Therapy assists clients to recapture memories and express feelings and attachment needs that have been disallowed in previous relationships. This, in turn, helps clients to create a more coherent narrative or unified vision of themselves — a 'story' about the self. This capacity to construct a coherent narrative about oneself and one's difficulties is directly linked to secure attachment and the capacity for mutuality in relationship.

EFT is primarily a process of directing attention to internal cues so that an individual can put their emotions into words and then make sense of what they are saying. EFT has proven to be effective working with individuals in addressing anxiety, depression, childhood traumas as well as interpersonal or relational conflict.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is not so much a method of treatment as a way of thinking about relationships. It helps us to understand why we feel the way we do. Whereas secure attachment experiences lead to unconscious beliefs that others are available, understanding, and responsive, insecure attachment experiences lead to unconscious beliefs that others are unavailable and unresponsive, or rejecting, abandoning, and abusive.

- *Secure attachment* leads to a positive view of self and other. Secure individuals can establish close relationships and use others as support when needed
- *Preoccupied attachment* leads to a positive model of others, but negative model of self, eliciting a demanding and dependent style
- *Fearful attachment* is where others are viewed as uncaring and the self as unlovable. Intimacy is avoided because rejection is expected
- *Dismissing attachment* leads individuals to distance themselves from others to maintain a positive view of self. Compulsive self-reliance and self-control offer protection from rejection

Most people have a predominant pattern, but use multiple attachment strategies. Each of us has our own unique repertoire of relationship experiences, beginning with our very earliest experiences with our mother and other caregivers. From this repertoire of early life experiences, each of us develops our own unconscious 'agenda for relationship', the uniquely personal pattern of what we look for, expect, fear and long for in our adult relationships. This becomes our personal template through which we instinctively, and largely unconsciously, manage our experience of relationships.

Emotional Intelligence

One of the purposes of EFT is to increase an individual's emotional intelligence, to enhance their ability to perceive, access, understand, regulate and transform emotions. This involves being aware of emotions and having the ability to enable emotion to inform reasoned action. The healthy function of emotion is to help reorganize and mobilize self. It is by organizing and increasing self's ability to respond that an emotion becomes curative. Emotional intelligence can be seen as having four components; the ability to perceive emotions in self and others, the ability to access and/or generate feelings to facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotions, the ability to regulate emotions to promote growth.

Gaining an understanding of our emotions is important because emotions enhance learning and guide reasoning. When people experience unpleasant emotions, it means there is something wrong that they need to attend to. Feelings are information, not conclusions, yet people also need to make sense of the emotions and decide how best to express them and behave in any emotion-evoking situation. People need to learn to live in harmony with emotions and this is done in EFT by the creation of new emotional experiences that helps people change their emotional memories.

Change Process in Individual EFT

Change in EFT revolves around the premise that change come out of the attainment of a new experience of emotion in the therapy process. This occurs when primary emotions can be expressed and responded to.

Change in Individual EFT is achieved through the facilitation of two 'movements'.

- **Arriving** involves gaining an awareness of the individual's feelings and welcoming and accepting these feelings for what they are. Then exploring the feelings and describing the feelings in words that paint a clear picture of where the emotion is coming from. This leads to the discovery of the primary emotions behind the feelings.
- **Leaving** involves evaluating the primary emotion to see if it is a healthy emotion that can be utilized to develop a new narrative of the experience, *leaving* the old behind. If it is an unhealthy emotion, the work is to facilitate a re-owning of the need and access an alternative more adaptive emotion. Once this is done the new emotion can be utilized to develop a new narrative of the experience, again *leaving* the old behind.