



Emotionally Focused Family Therapy

Restoring Family Bonds and Promoting Resilience
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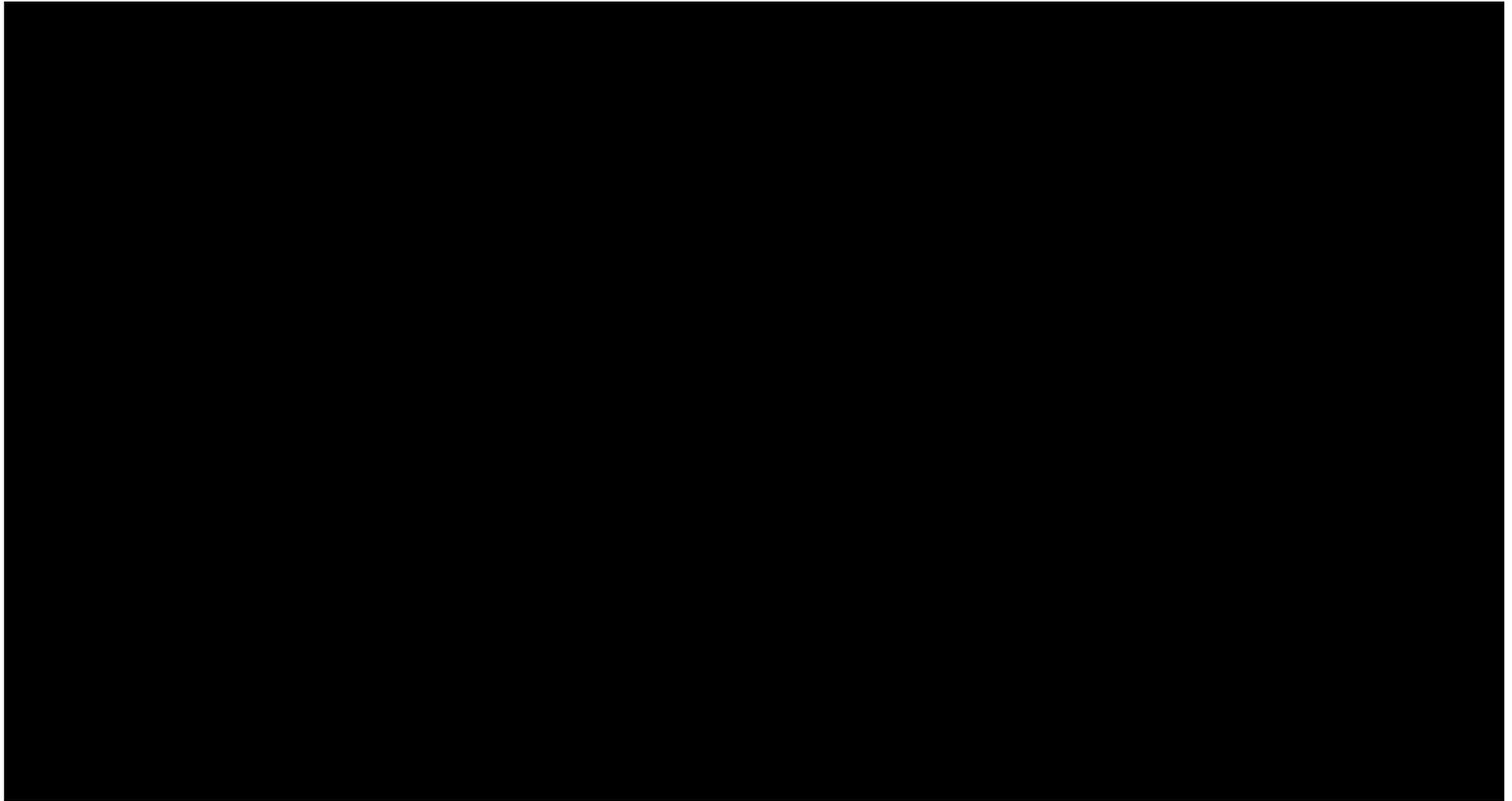


Dublin, Ireland October 22,23, 2018

Participants will...

1. Conceptualize family distress using attachment and emotion theories.
2. Identify common blocks that disrupt effective attachment and caregiving responses in the family.
3. Identify key stages and steps in the EFFT process of change.
4. Explore experiential interventions that engage family member blocks to emotional engagement, accessibility, and responsiveness.
5. Explore the use of enactments between family members to promote new patterns decrease rigidity and promote flexibility and connection within the family system.

Secure Families



We Change Together...

Being a family requires a life long process of change.

A parent's role and influence may change but her / his importance remains.

Growth requires exploration and exploration is more likely from relationships of safety and security.



Family Approaches

Attachment Focused Family Therapy (Hughes, 2007) - Primary focus is on restoring attachment security for the child through the therapeutic relationship and bringing parents into support and engage child's attachment related needs.

Attachment Based Family Therapy (Diamond et al. 2013) - Primary focus is on shifting family patterns toward greater security. Therapist reframes problem behaviors in terms of blocked attachment relationship and coaches shifts to more secure patterns of relating.

Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (Robinson, Dolhanty, & Greenberg, 2013) - Primary focus is on increasing emotion regulation through use of parental emotion coaching.

Emotionally Focused Family Therapy

EFFT is a brief process experiential approach that is designed to transform negative interaction patterns by restructuring attachment bonds and increasing parental accessibility and responsiveness to children.

EFFT is a natural extension of EFT.

The key difference is that there are multiple relationships that are horizontal and vertical and change over time.

EFFT Treatment Goals

“The goal of EFFT is modify relationships in the direction of increased accessibility and responsiveness, thus helping the family to create a secure base for children to grow and leave from.” (Johnson, 2004, p. 245)

- ❖ Change problematic interactional patterns that sustain attachment insecurity among family members.
- ❖ Create new patterns of accessibility and responsiveness that promote attachment security for children and secure connections between caregivers.

Greater security = Fosters resilience for children / youth.

EFFT Key Assumptions

Johnson, Maddeaux, Blouin, 1998

Fixed Patterns: Fixed patterns of negative interaction create states of fear, grief and anger. Working together these emotions and patterns limit communication and increase insecurity.

Felt Security: The enactment of typical attachment needs for security, protections and contact are adaptive - yet in a context of insecurity the enactment of these needs may prompt restraint or rejections.

Reorganizing: Accessing a reorganizing key emotional experiences is the most powerful route to new interactional sequences and intra and interpsychic change.



Dependency Paradox

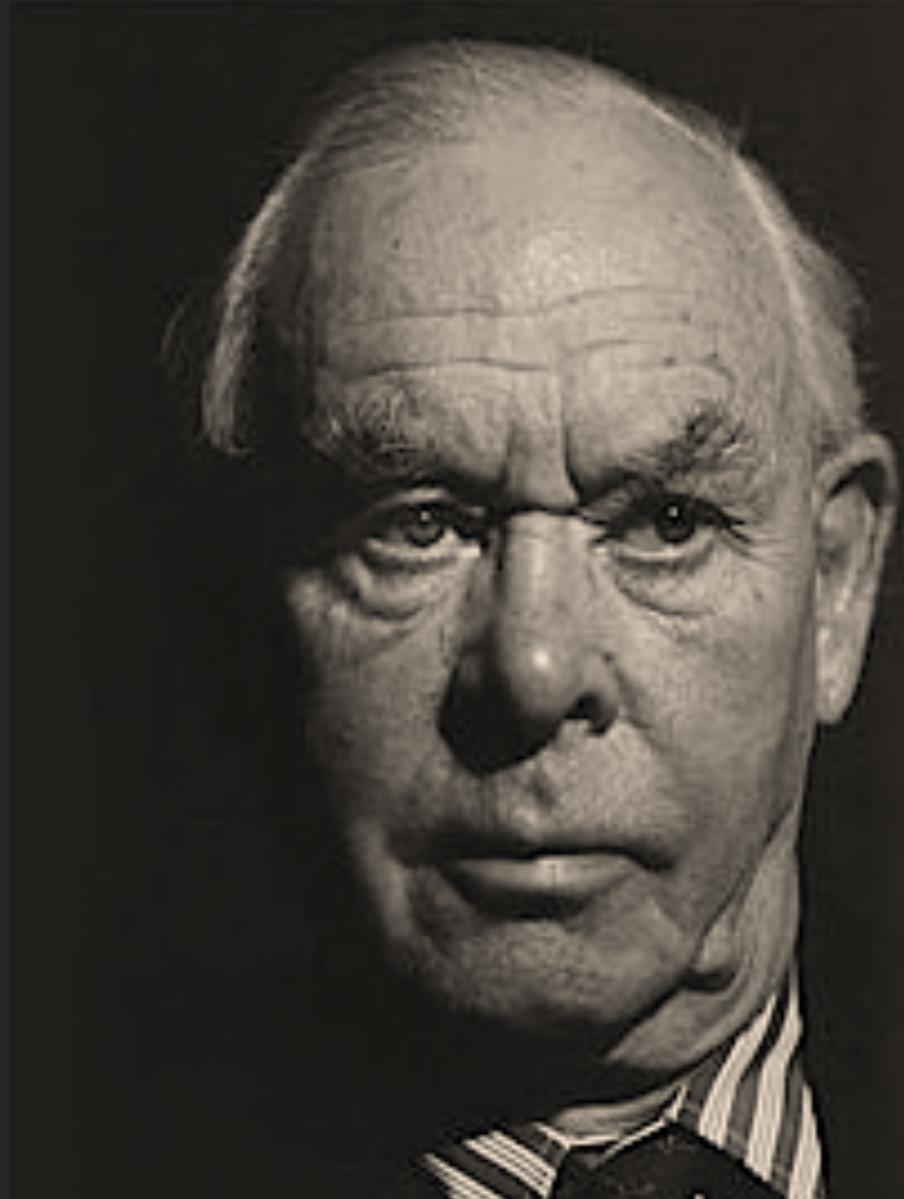
Accepting Dependence →
Independence
(Feeney 2007)

“The attachment perspective views a secure emotional connection to significant others as an adaptive, wired-in survival mechanism that fosters optimal development and mastery of the environment (Bowlby, 1969) ... families ability to balance needs for individual growth and connectedness while providing nurturance...”

(Johnson, et al. 1998, p. 244)

I regard the desire to be loved and cared for as being an integral part of human nature throughout adult life as well as earlier and that the expression of such desires is to be expected in every grown-up especially in times of sickness and calamity.

J. Bowlby (1979) p. 184



Stronger Wiser Other

Confidence and Exploration

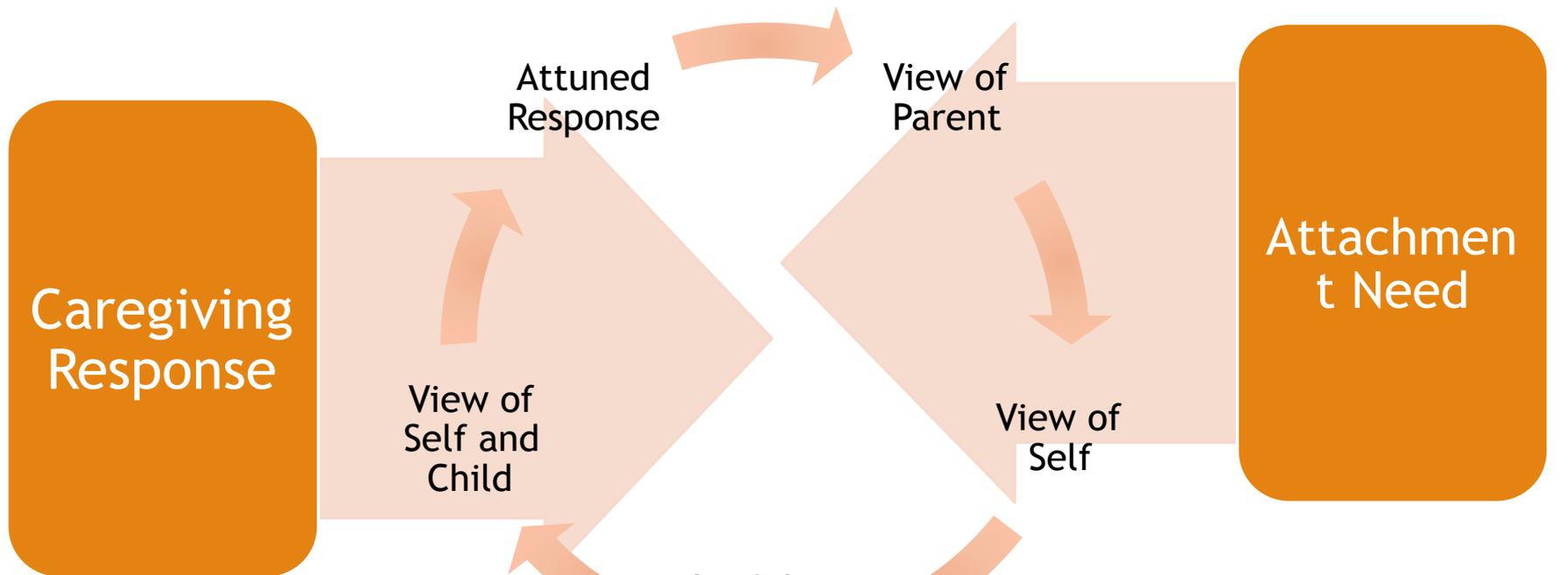
- Representational models / Regulation of experience
- Confidence in emotional experience
- Truthful and accurate communication
- Contact with another about what is most important

“Proximity in Bowlby’s meaning includes the availability of truthful, accurate communication with the attachment figure and the assurance that AF will understand and will respond in a sensitive way.” Costello (2013; p. 78)

EXERCISE

Think of a time when you experienced "felt security" from an attachment figure - a "stronger wiser other".

- What words would you use to describe that experience?
- What thoughts did you have about that person?
- What thoughts did you have about yourself?



- Shows interest in goals and problems affirming outcome and ability.
- Shows affection and love, provides guidance, not interfering with exploration, and celebrates success.

- Values attachment relationship, actively communicates needs.
- Confident in parent's response.
- Seeks out attachment resources when needed.
- Clear and coherent signals.

Emotionally Focused

Emotion is the language of attachment - signaling system.

Primary emotions provide adaptive responses that clarify attachment and caregiving related cues and meaning.

Secondary emotional responses - reactive responses to promote rigid interaction patterns that create absorbing states.

Restructuring parent - child interactions focused on attachment related affect promotes felt security through increased accessibility and responsiveness.

Process of Change: Emotion

Rigid patterns in families shaped by emotions at 3 levels.

- Individual: Individual ability to regulate emotion - Developmental / Disorders
- Dyadic: Attachment - Separation distress
- System: Emotional Climate - Emotional Contagion

EFT Therapist Focus with Family

Attachment Focus: Target for change is separation distress.

Systemic Focus: Transforming patterns through restructuring connection and caregiving.

Exercise: Emotional Communication

Attunement

Present: Affectively and cognitively present.

Matched: Vitality of affective states are matched

Shared Focus: Cognitive focus is the same

Shared Intention: Intentions are congruent.



**Master
or
Disaster?**

Common Emotions



Exercise:

Mismatching emotions:

Sadness

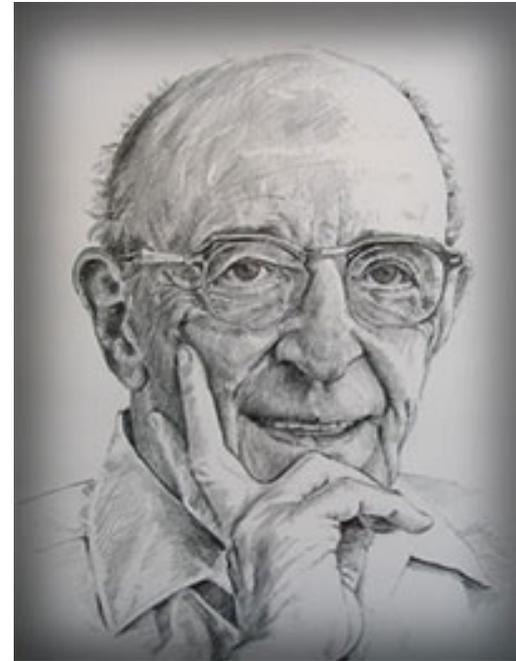
Anger

Fear

Joy

Carl Rogers

”I am inclined to think that in my writing I have stressed too much the three basic conditions (congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding). Perhaps it is something around the edges of those conditions that is really the most important element of therapy - when my self is very clearly, obviously present.”



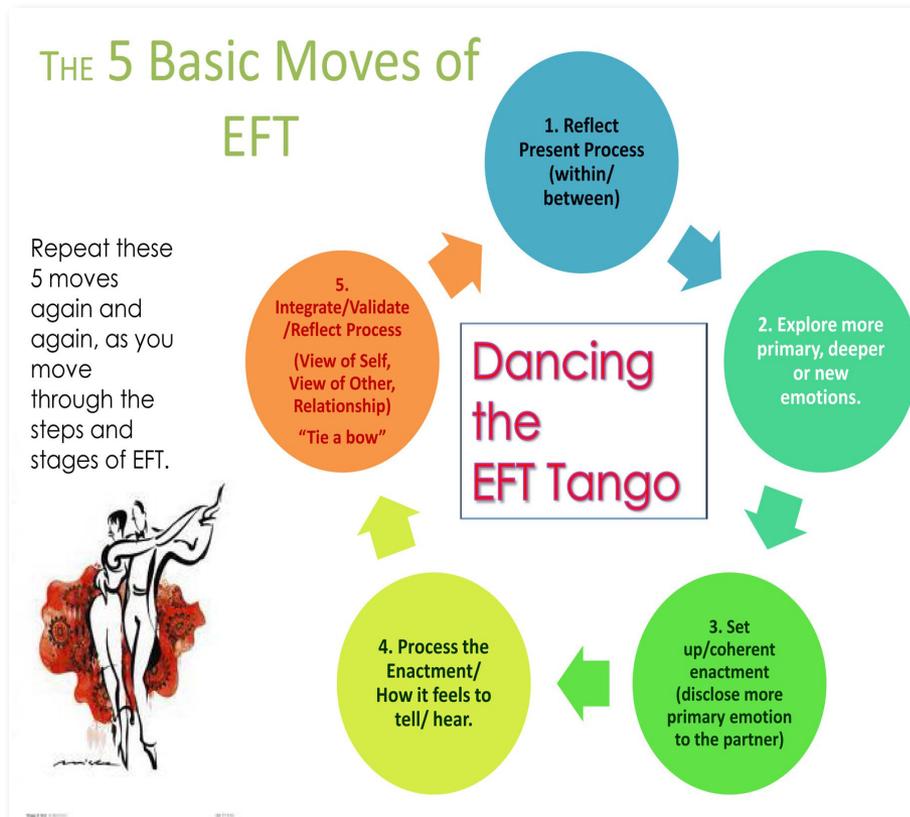
Therapist Presence

Presence is more than attunement - it is a felt confidence that the client has in the A.R.E. of the therapist - Related to matching mental states a therapist's presence is also an aspect of leadership the therapist brings to the process.

Some key aspect.

1. Therapist understanding: - Can I read emotional directions in session?
2. Therapist skill - Do I have a repertoire of resources I can use to help client stay in experience and mine experience?
3. Therapist experience of emotion - Do I trust the emotion I am working through? When do I encounter experiential avoidance? What are my triggers?

Common Sequence



REFLECT: MIRROR PRESENT PROCESS
Present Process - Within / Between

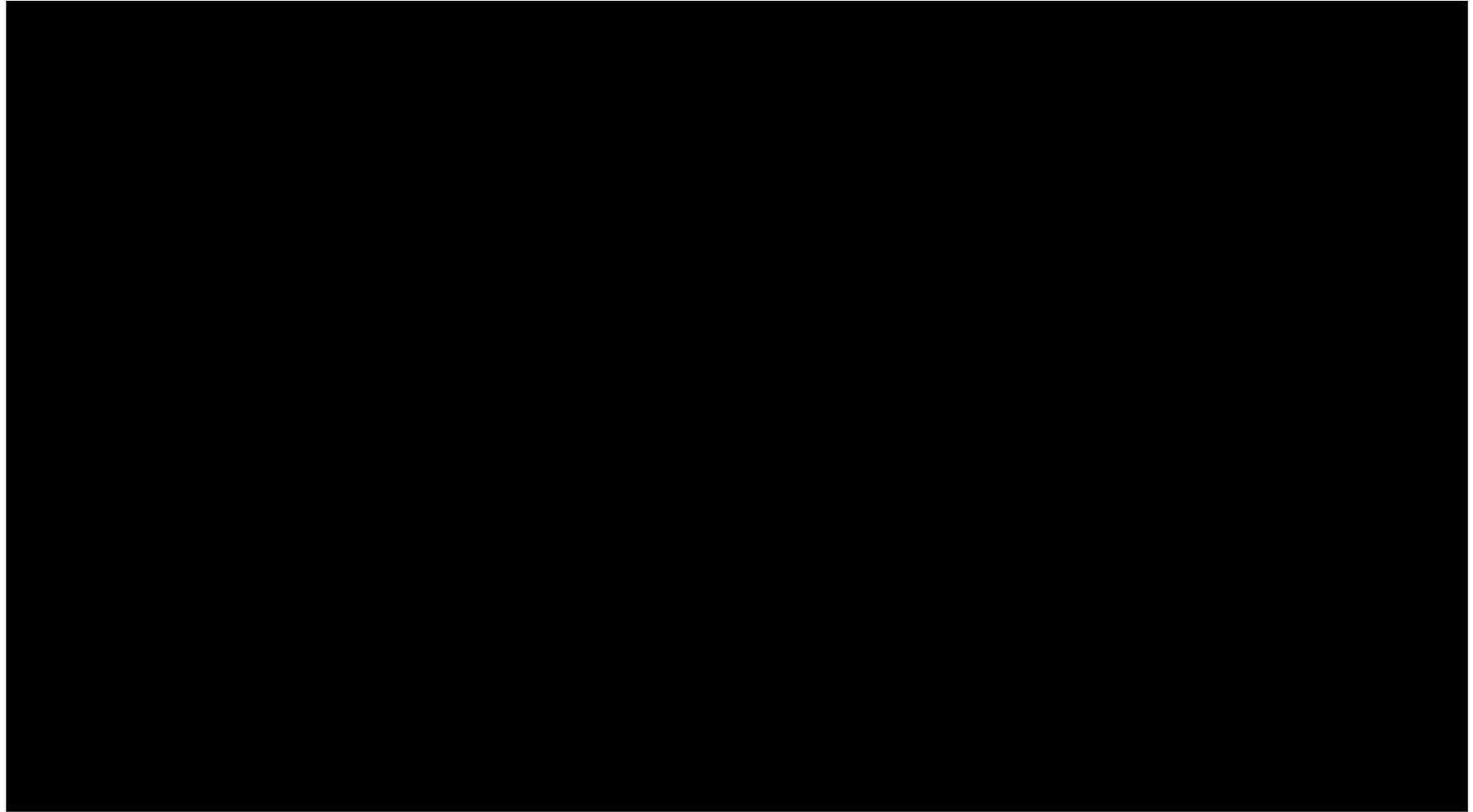
EXPLORE: ASSEMBLE AFFECT
Primary Emotions - Access, Expand, Symbolize.

SHARE: CHOREOGRAPH ENGAGEMENT
Primary emotion with partner.

PROCESS: IMPACT
Impact to share and to hear.

INTEGRATE: NEW MEANING
Reflect and Validate Experience (View of Self / Other)

Life as a House



Exercise: EFT tango

Gail: Stage 1 Example: “It’s
Hard”

EFT Stages and Markers of Change

Process experiential: Present focus

Emotion focus = Language of attachment

Systemic: First-order and second order change

Re-engaging attachment and caregiving systems

Stage 1
De-escalation

De-escalation
Openness

Stage 2
Restructuring

Child Reaching
Parent Responding

Stage 3
Consolidation

New meaning

Key Differences in EFT with Families

Family Process

- Developmental System - Changing Needs - Attunement
- Hierarchy - Needs reciprocal not mutual
- Generational Influences - Parental attachment histories

Complexity

- Role of the therapist - Flexible, Leading
- Treatment modes - Moving between dyad, triads, family
- Intensity of EFFT - Moves quickly, enactments

EFFT Steps and Stages

STAGE 1 DE-ESCALATING FAMILY DISTRESS

STEP 1 Building alliance and family assessment

STEP 2 Identifying and processing negative interactional patterns.

STEP 3 Accessing primary emotions underlying rigid positions associated with family patterns.

STEP 4: Reframing negative interactional patterns in terms

of the stuck patterns and in terms of attachment needs and responses.

Step 1: Alliance and Assessment

Making room for all to be seen and heard

Sub-system assessment (caregiving system and sibling system)

Join and prioritizing parent initiative

Assessing safety and decision



Exercise

Working in pairs how would you describe the fixed pattern of distress in this family?

Where would you want to intervene?

First Session

Goal: Every family member is seen and heard

- Provide safety: Block interruptions and threats
- Validate and reframe reactive responses in terms of the cycle.
- Foster collaborative alliance with each member
- Therapist provides model for secure attachment through empathic responding (Empathy+ Curiosity)
- Empathic responsiveness and engagement provides safety and support.

Parent Session

Foster working alliance- normalize struggle and build empathy for their parenting dilemma (Empathy is key).

Assess and prime support in caregiver alliance - how able are partners to provide comfort and support to each other?

Invite parental engagement as a joint venture. Reinforce parental irreplaceability and intimate knowledge of child

Begin to identify parental blocks to caregiving- explore attachment history

Help develop alternative attachment perspective on child's problems

Sibling Session

Create safe space for children to express their experience.

Assess child's level of safety, ability to make clear bids for comfort and caring

Extend problem perspective away from child or parent to family interactional patterns

Assess and strengthen support system between siblings

Help children experience parents previously "unseen" intent to care or protect.

Contraindications to EFFT

Domestic violence: Patterns of power and control making vulnerability unsafe among members.

Substance abuse/addiction: Acting out parents and / or youth require treatment for these disorders prior to family treatment.

Disengaged parents who refuse to actively participate in treatment or hostility at caregiver level

Very young children: Play therapy and parent sessions are indicated.

Decision Tree

Flexibly tailor sessions to meet needs of each family.

Some families may demand mostly family sessions while others call for an emphasis on dyadic work.

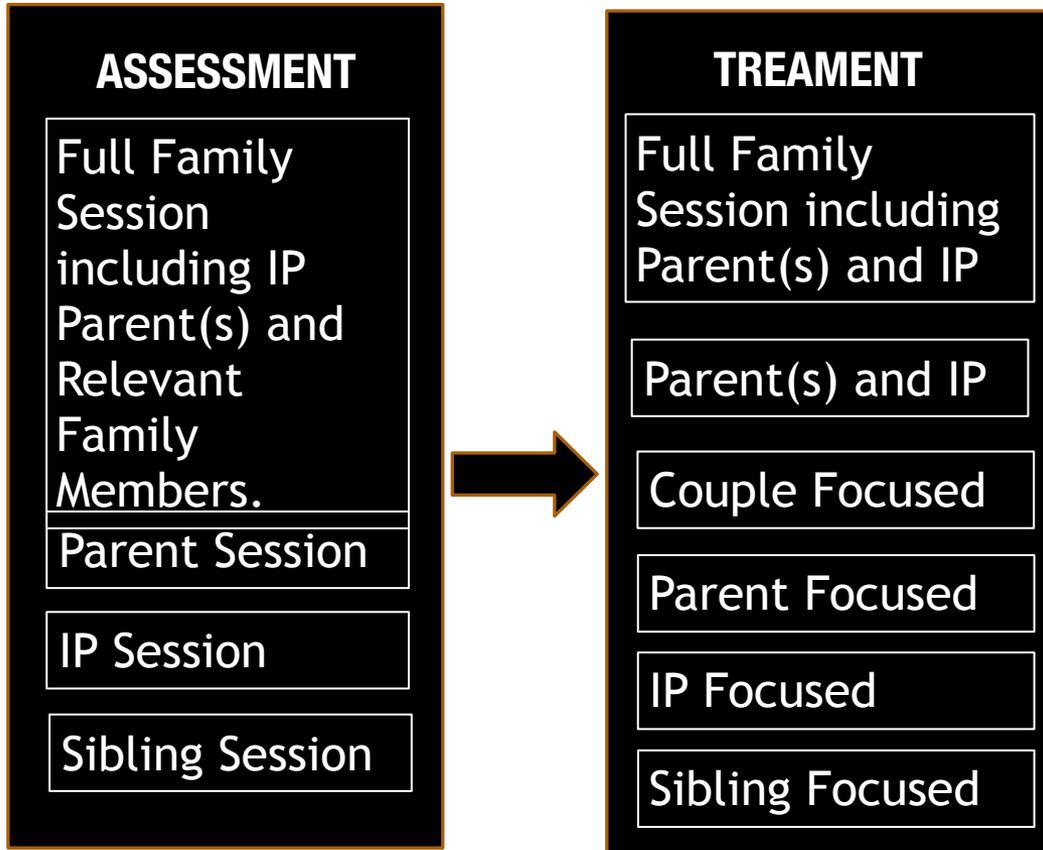
Focus where major change events occur / needed.

In best case scenario it occurs in family but some factors dictate the need to break up into smaller units (e.g. Dyads, Triads)

Target is moving but same target- attachment is dyadic

EFFT Treatment Guide

Furrow, Palmer, Johnson, Faller, & Palmer (In Press)



The structure of EFFT sessions may vary by factors related to the composition of a family, their presenting problem, and the evolving process of treatment.

Considerations

Attendance / Participation

- Priority given to most distressed dyad.
- Appropriate developmental age of siblings.
- Relevance to presenting problem.

Impact to Process

- Threats to accessing vulnerability.
- High levels of reactivity and triangulation.
- Alliance repair or maintenance.
- Distress in co-parental alliance.
- Competing attachments.

Step 2: Identifying Negative Patterns

Identifying the negative patterns that create and fuel attachment insecurities-shifting focus from problem individual to problem between individuals

Various overlapping and reactive cycles amongst all family members are made explicit and reframed as an attachment struggle that is shared by all family members

Therapist gives clarity and attachment meaning to family distress

Tape Demonstration:Nick

Step 3: Accessing Primary Emotions

Working with parental blocks

Accessing caregiving vulnerability

Accessing child vulnerability

Over Responds

Caregiving responses range from over protective to overly permissive

Caregiving
Response

Relational
Blocks

Empathic
Failures
Attachment
Injuries

Intensifies

Child reacts to block with anxious related responses.

Attachment
Need

Under Responds

Caregiving responses range from frozen disengagement to distant rejection / withdrawal.

Minimizes

Child reacts through distancing, withdrawing, minimizes attachment emotions

What is blocking the care-giving system?

Insecurity: Internal Working Models

- Negative View of Self: Failure, shame, over-focus on self
- Negative View of Child: Bad, spoiled

Caregiving Alliance: Relationship distress

Contextual Factors : Poverty, traumatic loss

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Parental blocks

Rupture in the caregiving alliance - Working against each other.

Parent sees child as representing the worst of their estranged spouse.

Parents are caught in a over/under functioning negative dance.

Family members take sides that align with parental split.





Exercise: Working with Parental Blocks

Parental Blocks to Caregiving

Anxious Reactive Block

1. **Demanding / Critical:**
Anger- negative view of child - over focus /cares too much / control
2. **Over Protective: Anxious-Preoccupied with child -**
lack of self awareness,
Emotionally intrusive
3. **Overly Permissive-Enabling Anxious:**
Negative view of self

Avoidant Reactive Block

1. **Rejecting/ Cold:**
Uncaring- negative view of child - dismissive /
Judgemental
2. **Absent- Indifferent:**
Preoccupied with own lives
3. **Inadequate/Freeze-**
Indecisive, negative view of self, Fear of getting it

Step 4: EFFT Reframe

Care Seeking Intent

When you understand the implicit positive, “care-seeking intent” in the destructive behaviors of the negative cycle, you will be able to see the family members distress more clearly through the attachment lens.

Problematic Attempts for Connection

The EFT cycle is rigidly maintained by each member’s way of managing the disconnection, while searching for care, connection, and closeness.

Markers of Family De-escalation

Family system is less emotionally reactive.

Patterns are acknowledged.

Parent(s) is more accessible and responsiveness to child's vulnerabilities.

Parent(s) express intent to do thing differently-unlatched from blaming IP child.

Parental goal alliance.

EFFT Steps and Stages

STAGE 2 RESTRUCTURING FAMILY INTERACTIONS

STEP 5 Accessing and deepening child's primary emotion and attachment needs.

STEP 6 Promoting caregiving responsiveness and acceptance of child's pain and attachment needs.

STEP 7 Restructuring family positions.

STEP 8 Processing and expanding impact of change event to other family members.

Step 5: Deepening Child Vulnerability

Accessing and deepening child's attachment related affect / needs means getting specific about emotions and needs.

Accessing vulnerability with parents and children may have a similar relationship impact but key difference in focus.

- **Similar Impact:** Vulnerability is a door that opens both ways - primes a softer response.
- **Key Difference:**
 - Allowing someone into my experience (Parent and Child Focus)
 - Making a bid for care, contact, and comfort (Child Focus)

Step 6: Promoting Parental Responsiveness

Expand and organizes a parent's response to child

- Promoting parental confidence and making explicit parental accessibility
- Organizing parental responses to child's needs
- Processing parental fears and blocks to engagement
- Engaging caregiving alliance as a caregiving resource

Unseen and alone: Thomas

Step 7: Restructuring

Restructuring family positions focused on parent responding and child receiving.

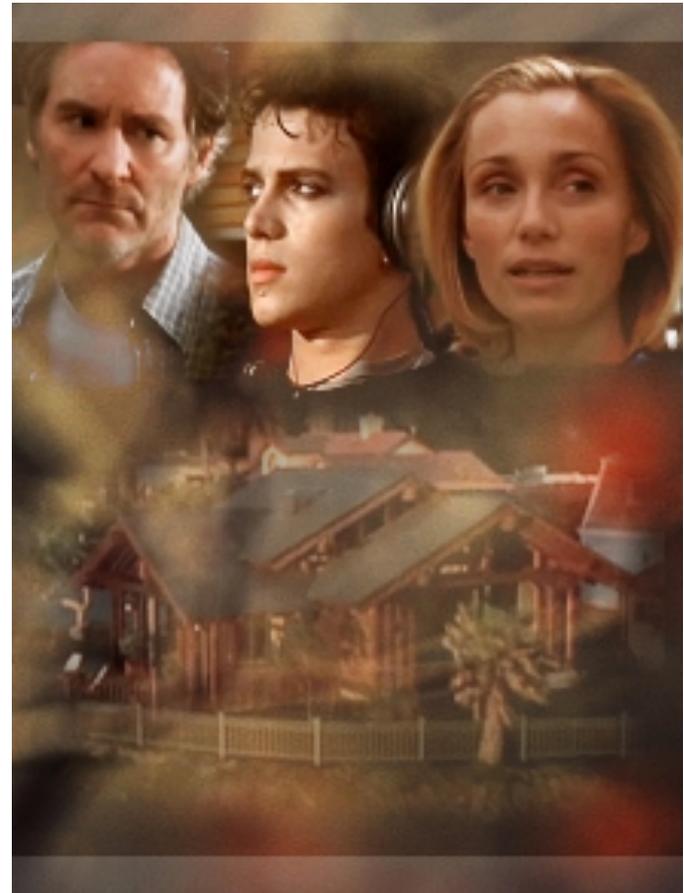
- Making caregiving intentions explicit.
- Structure parental enactment with attuned response to child or child's vulnerable reach to the parents.
- Promoting child receiving parental response.
- Processing impact of child response with parent.

Marker: Child receiving parental response.

Video Demonstration: Nick

Role play with mother and son

- Focus on mother
- Honor Secondary Response
- Match Affect
- Therapist models empathy & responsiveness



Step 8: Exploring Impact of Change Event

Exploring parental availability to other family members - systemic assessment.

Exploring impact of family vulnerability on other children / family members.

Refocusing on emerging blocks to caregiving responsiveness and child vulnerability.

Spring board to additional restructuring. (Steps 5 - 6 - 7).

Inviting members to explore vulnerable engagement in the family.

Stage 3 Family Consolidation

Step 9: Strengthening new patterns of secure responding in the family and promoting new understanding of family as secure base.

- Creating new narratives of family connection
- Highlighting ways they are making repairs and confidence in new patterns.



Building Strong Bonds Together

A secure emotional connection does not stop fights, differences, or hurt feelings in relationships...

A strong bond gives us the best place to rest, to heal, and to thrive with the challenges of life.

What are families looking for?



Son, don't leave, son!