

Key Ingredients for Change in EFT



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EFT therapists are privileged to have a bank of research that informs us about key ingredients contributing to therapeutic change. The simple acronym TEA provides a process roadmap of the three main process factors in EFT: **T**ask alliance, **E**xperiential depth, and **A**ffiliative interactions.

T for Task Aspect of the Therapeutic Alliance

The therapeutic alliance is commonly seen to contain three inter-related yet separable components: A warm trusting bond between therapist and client; agreement as to therapeutic goals; and perceived relevance of the tasks presented in therapy. In EFT, the *task* aspect of the alliance is found to be highly important.

To foster and monitor clients' confidence in the therapy process, EFT therapists are transparent about the process they are engaging in together. This begins with naming and taming the present interactive pattern in which clients (individuals, couples and families) are caught. Strength in the task aspect (T) of the alliance is needed to foster what process research has identified as the two key active ingredients of change - deepening emotional experiencing (E) and shaping in-session affiliative interactions (A). If clients do not perceive the relevance of deepening emotional experiencing and shaping in-session affiliative interactions or do not trust the therapist enough to engage in these processes, therapy may not progress.

Task alliance is built with an empathic, validating, genuine presence that includes being transparent

about how clients' best attempts at managing depression or saving a relationship are the very things that are triggering and triggered by their distress. Clients frequently express feeling awkward when they are asked to slow down and stay with emerging emotion or to disclose newly distilled emotional experience directly to another. Validating the discomfort and being transparent about the process builds trust. In couple therapy, for example: "I know this can feel awkward. I know you just told me, however, turning to share this same message with your partner will be a different experience. Will you please give yourselves a chance to have that experience?" When a partner finds it too difficult to turn and disclose, the EFT therapist accepts the struggle and remains focused on the task, slicing the request more thinly: "Tell her then, please, 'It is too difficult right now for me to tell you how I shut you out when you look so angry.'" The process is similar in family therapy with a family member and in individual therapy, where a client may be asked to stay with newly emerging emotion, and then to disclose to an imagined other or to repeat the disclosure to the therapist. In addition, EFT therapists build task alliance by maintaining control of sessions, validating reactivity, redirecting to create safety, and by reframing impulsive reactions as attempts to regulate attachment fears and underlying core emotions (termed *catching bullets*, by Johnson).

EFT therapists attend carefully to clients' perception of the relevance of these tasks, indicated by their willingness to participate in emotion assembly and deepening and in interpersonally intimate disclosures. We also assess clients' perception of task relevance by explicitly inviting their feedback regarding comfort and trust in the therapeutic processes. We check in at the end of sessions to elicit clients' openness about the therapy process, reflecting and validating discomfort with the tasks in which they are asked to participate, and offering genuine transparency. Reflections of present

the EFT community news

process as in EFT Tango Move 1 are essential for establishing and maintaining task alliance. EFT Tango Move 5 contributes significantly to task alliance as the therapist summarizes and integrates clients' work in each session, savoring the shifts and relating the movement of each session to clients' goals and longings.

E for Experiential Depth of Emotional Experience

To deepen emotional experiencing, we engage clients at a manageable working distance from their emotions. Clients flow between *distance from* and *closeness to* emotional experience. Tracking and validating this flow can increase awareness and depth. Gradually, within the client's window of tolerance, the therapist seeks to increase their client's attunement to their inner felt flow. EFT therapists contain the dysregulated client or evoke and heighten the experience of the client who is detached from their inner experience. Basic empathic reflections and EFT Tango Move 2 Affect Assembly and Deepening are rich tools for doing this.

A helpful process map for clinicians to attune to clients' level of experiencing is the Experiencing Scale (EXP; Klein et al., 1986) developed for research purposes. This scale has seven levels of emotional experiencing. At low levels of emotional experiencing (Levels 1-3) a client is distant from inner emotional experiencing. The client *talks about events, ideas or others* without expressing emotions or may talk *about* emotions and thoughts, without experiencing them. (A client can detach from present-moment experience by hyper-activating or de-activating.)

A medium level of emotional experiencing (Level 4) is a minimum for experiential therapy. At that level a client is self-reflective, engages with the *felt flow* of inner experiencing, and experiences emotions in an alive, vivid manner in the present moment.

At higher levels of emotional experiencing (Levels 5-7) new depths, emerging edges, and felt shifts of emotional experiencing emerge. Clients gain awareness of previously implicit feelings and meanings and engage in new depths of experiences

and perspectives. Corrective emotional experiences occur at these levels.

Level 5 – focuses on emerging edges of vague, implicit experience – seeking to elaborate it.

Level 6 – explores emergent experience that is increasingly active, vivid, immediate, shifting or resolving.

Level 7 – experiences an expansive, trustworthy source of new meanings and actions; a fresh way of knowing.

A simple example of a rather hostile withdrawer named Marty moving from low levels of experiencing to an emergence of more expansive awareness of inner experiencing, could be characterized as follows. Low levels of experiencing: "Criticism flies constantly! There is endless ranting and raving even about the way I use a tissue!" Medium level of experiencing, as in Level 4: "It's so hard when I cannot please her. So difficult whenever I see she is not happy." Higher levels of experiencing: "For me – it's a series of crushing defeats – I keep hitting the ball, but I never get to first base. My gut is in knots with fear that I'm not her precious one."

As Marty's inner emotional experiencing deepens, he moves from vague frustration to a precise struggle related to his partner's unhappiness, his crushing sense of defeat at failing to please her, and his core attachment fear of being ultimately rejected. The expanding awareness at Levels 5–7 mobilizes his core attachment fear and grief at the distance between them into motivation to disclose assertively and vulnerably and to risk stepping into emotional intimacy with his partner.

An EFIT example can be seen in Tiffany who has a somewhat fearful avoidant pattern – revving up in panic and clamping down to control the pain. She blocks herself from feeling – particularly when flashbacks and re-experiencing of past trauma occur.

She describes a mirroring within / between pattern of being judged by others (between cycle) and of judging herself (within cycle). She speaks in a

nonchalant manner as she reports (Level 3) that she has cut her father out of her life for the past decade and has no interest in a relationship with him. Later, she deepens into new longings (Level 4) that she might still want a relationship with him. Deepening into Level 5, more emotional reactions emerge – anger, sadness, fear of her father’s non-acceptance of her racially mixed boyfriend. At Level 6 she accesses specific fears of judgement, rejection, and abandonment that she had “boxed up and put away.” She engages deeply at a Level 7 in an imagined encounter with her father when she expresses her pain and longings for him to hear how deeply he hurt her during a vulnerable moment in her adolescence. This Level 7 experience shifts her internal working model of self from being unlovable to being worthy of love.

Deliberately attuning, staying with, reflecting, and expanding emotional experience is how an EFT therapist helps clients to attend to their felt flow of inner experiencing and to then reprocess emotion and shape new ways of responding. Process research on EFT has identified that more intense emotional experiencing in clients is related to the second active ingredient of change – more affiliative responding in the encounters that shape corrective emotional experiences. Corrective emotional experiences occur during *encounters of affiliative reaching and responding* at heightened levels of emotional experience.

A for Affiliative Interactions

An affiliative posture is defined as warm, caring, tender, sensitive, curious, nurturing, and appreciative. In contrast, a posture lacking affiliation is defined as hostile, domineering, dismissive, cold, ignoring, belittling, or blaming. EFT therapists monitor, foster and heighten affiliation in Tango Move 3, shaping emotionally engaged, vulnerable, self-disclosure. Encounters of assertion and congruently expressed anger are also emotionally engaged and vulnerable, leading to increasing clarity and coherence and the emergence of new meanings and behaviors. In Tango Move 4, processing the encounter, EFT therapists elicit warm, attuned responding. In situations

where the responder is not warm and attuned, the EFT therapist will validate the present moment experience and continue to process present moment experiencing. Postures of hostility or disaffiliation call for the therapist’s increased empathic curiosity and validation to facilitate more vulnerable self-disclosure and engaged responding.

In the example of Marty above, his expressed fears of being a disgrace in his partner’s eyes and his risk to ask for her acceptance and comfort drew a surprised, warm, and compassionate response from his partner. In the example of Tiffany however, her congruent, vulnerable disclosure to an image of her father was not met with an imagined affiliative, warm, supportive response. To the contrary, she perceived a response of dismissal and minimizing. The therapist’s validation of this congruent yet disappointing encounter, nevertheless shifted Tiffany’s sense of self as deserving of love and support and helped her to distinguish her internal working model of others. She consolidated a growing capacity to distinguish between others who are unreliable and dangerous (father) and those who are reliable and trustworthy (her close friend and the therapist).

TEA provides a simple reminder of the three active ingredients central to success in EFT: **T**ask alliance; **E**xperiential depth; and **A**ffiliative interactions. EFT research has consistently shown that depth of emotional experiencing and more affiliative interactions in EFT sessions predict better outcomes in emotion regulation, trauma resolution and relationship satisfaction. EFT therapists’ transparency and openness with clients about the process, helps to build and maintain clients’ confidence that these therapeutic elements are relevant to meeting their needs.

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— Presented as *Practical Applications of Process Research on the Mechanisms of Change in EFT*, EFT Summit, 2017. For further reading, [click here](#).

Hone your TEA Skills

Review EFT training videos and your own therapy videos.

1. To increase your attunement to client's confidence in the relevance of the therapy process, look for examples of therapist transparency about the process. Identify times the therapist elicits client feedback and speaks openly about the present moment process. Attune to how transparency about the process can increase clients' engagement.
2. To enhance your capacity to engage clients'

emotional experiencing at Level 4 and above, observe clients moving *towards* and *away from* present moment experience. Identify what the therapist does that deepens experiencing.

3. To increase your ability to facilitate affiliation and to validate non-affiliation, identify when and how affiliation and congruence are reflected or heightened during encounters. Also identify when a therapist's validation of the absence of affiliative responses can help to move the process forward.

Updates from EFT Centres & Communities

In each issue of our newsletter, we typically have an article providing news from one (or two) ICEEFT-affiliated EFT Centres and Communities. As part of the ongoing ICEEFT growth, we continue to add new organizations and don't necessarily get to share news about the ongoing developments

from existing ones. So we decided that rather than just highlight newer locations that have not yet submitted articles, we wanted to also provide updates from some of those long-standing EFT Centres and Communities. Here are another couple of "updates."

New York Center for EFT (NYCEFT)

The Greater New York Center for EFT (NYCEFT) has continued to grow and develop since the last newsletter update in 2017. Since her move to Vancouver Island, we dearly miss Sue Johnson who has been teaching, along with our own George Faller, a yearly Externship at the Ackerman Institute for the Family from 2008-2018. George and Elana Katz continued the tradition of teaching the Externship at the institute with the support of local supervisors and therapists, while George also taught his annual Externship in Greenwich, CT. Every year three Core Skills courses are led and coordinated in our area, with two in NYC and one in Connecticut, and more than 25 supervision groups run in different parts of our region and online. We continued educational events by bringing EFT trainers from around the world to present master classes, as well as learning from local trainers and supervisors in quarterly seminars, monthly video events and specialty workshops.

As Lieven Migerode and Jef Slootmaeckers from

Belgium presented their excellent workshop on EFT and intimate partner violence for us in February of 2020, the world changed and the COVID-19 pandemic hit NYC. In the first week of our city shutting down, we organized a free webinar, Working with Couples Online, with Romanian EFT Trainer Simona Herb, and our own EFT Supervisor Irina Wen, both of whom have extensive experience with telehealth. Our Core Skills groups transitioned to an online format, as did seminars and video events. Therapists from the area and other places began to join us to connect and get support in helping our clients deal with isolation, relational distress, and other stress the pandemic has been causing.

The murder of George Floyd awoke our country and the rest of the world to the importance of fighting racism and injustice not only personally, but also in our roles as clinicians and in running our organization. Our Board of Directors met regularly over the summer to develop a statement and an