

Stepping into Emotionally Focused Therapy: Key Ingredients of Change (2025) by L. L. Brubacher (Routledge)

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Support Material for Chapter 16, Forgiveness and Reconciliation with EFT'S Attachment Injury Resolution Model

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AIRM in EFCT: Attachment Injury and Racial Trauma, Case Example

Leon and Liliana illustrate the AIRM with an attachment injury and the additional complexities of racial trauma. They begin therapy as a preventive measure, sensing their relationship is a little shaky, and wanting to do what they can to strengthen it "so this one will last." They have both been married previously. After a few sessions, Leon and Liliana have a clear awareness of their repetitive pursue-withdraw pattern, which they have named the *downward spiral*. Together with Emily, they identify their core fears that drive their cycle. In addition to the typical attachment threatening triggers between partners, Leon, a dark-skinned African American, and Liliana, a light-skinned Mexican American, experience different *contextual and cultural distress cues* (see Guillory, 2022; Nightingale et al., 2019) and impacts of *colorism* (Burke & Embrich, 2008) that unavoidably effect their relationship.

Shortly after beginning therapy, Leon and Liliana experience a relationship trauma – an attachment injury. Liliana discovers a picture on Leon's phone of him in bed with a black woman. She is immediately flooded with attachment panic and flips between bouts of hysterical crying and rageful outbursts. The pursue-withdraw pattern, which existed in the relationship before this event, intensifies dramatically. While not physically violent, Liliana repeatedly says, "I just want to hit him over the head with a pan and find out what's wrong with him! What is inside his head? How could he do this to me?" Leon's "identity crisis" as he calls it and pressure from his people that he should be with a black woman tug at him in many different directions. Seeing this woman that he truly loves, in such an extreme frenzy over his actions, overwhelms him. He repeatedly perceives that he is the cause of her pain. When she gets frantic, he wonders if she'd be better without him? He is overwhelmed; yet certain he wants to repair with Liliana.

An Attachment Lens

Looking through an attachment assessment lens, Emily sees a rather typical pursue-withdraw pattern that is intensified exponentially after the attachment injury erupts. Liliana is a highly anxious critical pursuer, hyperactivating continually and Leon down-regulates, preferring to remain calm

and rational and to talk calmly or to leave a tumultuous situation until they can talk peacefully. It is evident that they love and value each other immensely and have a special bond; yet, they can flip quickly into escalating pursue-withdraw patterns. Emily notices attachment threatening cues that ignite this pattern: Liliana is threatened when Leon takes time to quietly read or explore historical movies and when he spends time on his phone. Perceiving these behaviors as signs that she is not important to him, Liliana becomes increasingly demanding and harsh. Leon is threatened when Liliana raises her voice, questions him, or complains about his emotional distance. Her demands sometimes fire him up to fight back and sometimes push him to seek ways to get “some peaceful distance.”

Emily: So, I hear you saying that you’re trying to heal the injury and yet you keep getting pulled into the cycle you’ve named the *downward spiral*. And the spiral spins faster and faster, making the pain worse, is that right? (Both nod.) So, the more you, Liliana, bombard Leon with questions, the more you, Leon, do your best to answer her; the more Liliana continues to question, the more Leon answers, and then finally, Leon, you say to yourself, “She looks like she is in as much pain as ever, no matter how I answer her questions. And it’s all over something I did; something I am so embarrassed about!” Inside you struggle with your worst dread and fear – that you are not enough here – that you cannot make her feel ok – that you are the cause of her pain and she’d be better off without you. To Liliana you say, “You’d probably be better without me. Maybe I should just leave.” Liliana, to you this sounds like your worst fear: that you are not his chosen one and that he will leave. And you get even more hysterical, yes? If I hear you correctly, it seems the deepest pain for you, Leon, is your sense that you are the bad one here and she is rejecting you, yes? (Leon nods.)

A Contextual Lens

Looking through a cultural, contextual lens, Emily sees their different cultural backgrounds having direct impacts on their relationship and, in particular, on their attempts to discuss the attachment injury. Liliana, part of a large Mexican family, is very light-skinned. As a young adult, she married, settled into her career as a dietician, and raised two sons with her husband from whom she is now divorced. Leon grew up in the United States, identifying as a black man with “multi-cultural roots.” He describes going through his own identity crisis and wanting to learn more about his family tree. He has five children from two previous relationships with all of whom he maintains close contact. Leon and Liliana are very supportive of each other’s children.

Leon : The plight of being a black man in America is that culturally, familywise, for the sake of self-protecting you have to learn to behave differently than the rest of the world. As a black person and particularly a black man, you are taught to not be your full self, in order to preserve yourself.

Emily’s heart falls as she resonates, to the best of her capacity, from her white perspective, with the chilling reality of this fellow human being needing to hide his full self in order to survive! She thinks of the assault minority stressors have on one’s sense of self and what a huge impediment they can be to feeling safe and sound in an intimate relationship! *Needing to hide one’s full self to survive* echoes through her soul and prompts her to read more about the impacts of racial stress that evening. Her go-to books are Guillory (2022), Hardy (2022, 2023), and Jana & Baran (2020).

While Liliana identifies with her family traditions and Hispanic culture, she mostly passes as white. Her family is critical of her for being with a black man, challenging her that she is just “afraid to be alone.” “It’s hard because in my family, they are not into black people.” She laughs.

“I’m the first one with a black man. They think I’m too desperate for a relationship.” She adamantly protests, “Contrary to what my family thinks, I choose Leon because I love him and find him to be an amazing person that I don’t ever want to lose!” Emily attunes to Liliana’s disappointment and frustration with her family and to the pain she sees in Leon’s eyes. She resonates with this *subtle act of aggression that*, while unintended from Liliana, must have shot through Leon’s heart like a dagger. To catch this bullet, she says, “You chuckle as you say your family is ‘not into black people,’ perhaps to distract from your discomfort? (conjecture). I imagine, given how much you love and value Leon, that your own disappointment and frustration with them take over, and it doesn’t occur to you how painful this must be for him in this moment as you talk casually about this (more conjecture). Am I close, Liliana?” After Liliana, pauses and nods, Emily invites her to look at Leon’s eyes and she turns to Leon, “It must cut to the core to be reminded of how her family excludes you, Leon. What comes up for you as she chuckles while telling this painful reality?” She pauses and Leon speaks fluidly about his pain. Emily processes and validates each of their reactions. She uses Move 2 to assemble Leon’s experience and to put words to the sadness in his eyes, shaping an encounter to Liliana. She asks them both, “I wonder how the two of you can discuss this painful experience of her family’s rejection, on your own?”

Stabilizing Current Cycle with Relationship Trauma and Racial Trauma (Client’s AIRM Steps 1 and 2)

Emily relies on the EFT Tango to guide her in stabilizing the interactive cycle that is fraught with details about Leon’s affair. There are times when the cycle gets highly escalated, with Liliana demanding and pushing and Leon bristling in defense and insisting on his privacy. These are wobbly moments for Emily as she almost gets pulled into Liliana’s fears and doubts about Leon’s claims that he does want to be with her. She draws on her knowledge of the de-escalation phase of the AIRM to regain her own emotional balance and to remain focused and attuned. The model helps her to recall that this reactivity is an expected dynamic when partners begin to discuss an injury. Client Steps 1 and 2 of AIRM’s de-escalation phase commonly involve the injured partner (IP) recounting the event with intense reactive emotions and the offending partner (OP) reacting, in turn, with defensiveness or minimizing. Knowing this is typical of clients’ stabilization process calms her and she stays grounded in Move 1, reflecting present process with the specific content of the affair.

The map of de-escalation in the AIRM also helps Emily to recognize the couple’s resources and progress. She notices how clear Liliana is about her love for Leon, and how much she values him, despite her outrage. “He is my first love!” Liliana declares. Emily is struck with the attachment significance of this injury for Liliana: Liliana is in pain because of how important Leon is to her.

While assembling Liliana’s hurt (anger, sadness, shame, and fears) about the affair, Emily is focused on heightening the attachment significance of the injury (AIRM Step 3). Coherence about the significance of the injury being about Leon’s importance to Liliana is a fundamental element of stabilizing the cycle around the injury. Grasping his attachment significance to Liliana is also a prerequisite for Leon to take Step 4 of the AIRM, that is, to engage emotionally in describing how the injury evolved. Emily is encouraged to notice that, with her constant empathic curiosity, Leon is becoming increasingly open to discuss his racial stress and to engage in exploring his own pain (anger, sadness, shame, and fears) around the injury, even though his typical position is to withdraw when overwhelmed.

The complexity of racial trauma from outside and within a relationship compounds the task of repairing an attachment trauma, specific to the relationship. While Emily reflects and validates the content and process around this specific attachment injury, she does not lose sight of the reality that Leon, in addition to carrying the pain and shame of having wounded the woman he loves, is

also carrying the painful weight of daily racial trauma and *racial battle fatigue* (Smith et al., 2011), what he calls the “plight of being a black man in America.” *Racial battle fatigue* is the cumulative exhaustion of living with ongoing and repeated racial trauma that is defined as

dangerous events and real or perceived experiences of racial discrimination. Such experiences may include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing racial discrimination... Although similar to posttraumatic stress disorder, racial trauma is unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure and re-exposure to race-based stress. (Comas-Días et al., 2019, p. 1)

Reflecting the present moment reactions between Leon and Liliana (with Move 1), Emily contains and stabilizes their reactive pattern that is now heightened with the attachment injury in full view. The EFT map assures her that it is well worth taking time to stabilize a cycle with the explicit impacts of the attachment injury and the racial trauma before trying to move toward any resolution. Reflecting the present moment interactions, she helps each of them, in turn (with Move 3), to own their action tendencies in some simple encounters with each other, while she functions as the safe haven/secure base. Her role as a source of comfort and safety is imperative, given the immense pain they are both holding. She recognizes that they cannot be expected to empathize with each other at this point of escalation. The EFT map assures her that if they can each feel safety and empathic curiosity from her, they will be safe enough to continue to disclose to each other and to gradually stabilize their pattern of reactivity so as to set the stage for repairing the relationship wound.

With Move 2, Emily assembles and deepens each of their experiences, one by one. She is careful, in this Stage 1 exploration, to validate Liliana’s reactivity, core anguish, and fears while also attuning to and validating the pain and panic that is alive for Leon. Both partners, following an attachment injury, are living with emotional pain – fear, anger, sadness, shame, and regret. To herself, Emily says:

If I can join with Leon and Liliana, attuning to their each of their experiences and assembling each of their emotional experiences into a coherent story, I can return to Move 1 and help them take ownership for how the *downward spiral*, as they call their pattern, is blocking them from healing their injury. Then I will continue to track and reflect the present pattern that is blocking repair. I must also make space to assemble Leon’s story of racial trauma to deepen their understanding of each other and to strengthen their bond.

She helps Liliana, with Move 2, to assemble her rage and panic, that pours out in relentless questions and shrill accusations, including the expressed desire to hit him over the head to find out what is wrong with him! After assembling this emotion, they distill the core attachment significance in this rage and panic: her fear of losing her greatest love.

Using Move 2 with Leon, Emily does two things: She assembles his experience in response to Liliana’s questions and accusations; and she invites him to tell more about his “plight of being a black man.” Assembling his experience related to the injury of his turning to another woman, they acknowledge and assemble feelings of shame, self-doubt, and helplessness, linking them to his action tendencies to end the conversation, and sometimes to offer to leave the relationship, when his answers seem to give Liliana no relief. Emily trusts partners will be calmed and regulated amidst this difficult relationship trauma if she assembles action tendencies, meanings made, and bodily reactions to each one’s specific trigger, and shapes encounters (with Move 3) to help them share directly with each other. Seeing Liliana in relentless pain and hearing her loud voice are key triggers for Leon that push him to offer to leave if he makes her so unhappy. Liliana is triggered by

almost any movement or breath or sound from Leon, and particularly by seeing him on his cell phone. These triggers pull her to begin the endless cascade of questions. “His answers satisfy my curiosity,” she says, “but not my heart.”

Liliana’s blatant complaints and dissatisfaction with Leon trigger him to feel excluded from her love and never accepted as part of her family or her *inner circle*. Simple encounters Emily shapes involve Liliana owning, “I do bombard you with questions. I can be really mean, I know!” Emily shapes an encounter for Leon to disclose his action tendency and the emotional logic in it.

Leon: I do end up offering to leave you when you are so upset with me. I see this terrifies you, but it seems like the right thing to do, if I am the cause of what makes you so unhappy.

Delineating their cycle, with each of their fears and longings, gives the couple hope that together they can rebuild the trust and get to a place of feeling truly understood, wanted, and securely connected. This hope is enhanced as Emily continues to reassure them that they are moving in that direction, even though they have not yet rebuilt the trust. Validating they have not yet rebuilt the trust, they will later tell her, is very calming. “It felt so good to hear we aren’t there yet, because I felt we were supposed to be there already,” Leon says in a closing session.

Assembling Leon’s daily experience of racial trauma becomes a significant aspect of cycle stabilization and his incremental withdrawer engagement.

Emily: I’d like to go back a moment. Leon, I notice pain in your eyes again when Liliana speaks about her family not accepting you. Pain, yes? (Leon nods.) What is it like for you to hear Liliana talk causally/lightly about how her family does not accept you?

Leon acknowledges hesitantly at first that it does hurt. Emily is reminded of the stories of exclusion he shared in earlier sessions – as a child in the neighborhood and as a person at work – experiences of marginalization and pain of being excluded. She validates the pain and the fatigue that comes with this racial stress. Emily makes a note to return to invite Leon to share more about his fatigue and pain, after she is more confident there is enough stabilization that Liliana can be present to hear from him more deeply. She will take time to linger with Leon in his racial battle fatigue and pain of racial stress, because she wants him to experience Liliana’s interest in his story and she wants Liliana to get a deeper understanding of Leon’s emotional world. Not only does he live with the attachment threats of the woman he loves being angry at him; he also lives in the outside world with daily racial stress cues. Without referring to it as racial battle fatigue, Emily recognizes this stressor, through a cultural lens. She lingers with his description of being exhausted and shapes an encounter for him to share with Liliana how exhausting it is to live in a dangerous world that judges him and excludes him, and how he feels similarly at home when she fires up in fury and starts yelling at him – like there’s no place he is safe and wanted and can relax.

Leon: I’ve lived this exclusion all my life. The world is like warfare – never safe, always suspect – seen as a criminal.

As Emily shows empathic curiosity and invites him to tell more about his experience of the world as warfare, Leon offers a painful picture, confirming, Emily thinks, why James Baldwin said, “To be a black man in America is to live in constant rage” (Simons, 2020).

Leon: I feel people looking at me, immediately assuming I am dangerous because I am black. Or they simply count me out – like they literally believe I have nothing to offer. People

assume I am not intelligent or have no education when in reality I am a data scientist. I was told as a kid I'd never amount to anything - that I wouldn't make it past 20. That was hard. The way people talk to me, if they do, they assume I am not intelligent or cultured, when in reality I am a history buff and a lover of music. I love watching historical films and listening to all kinds of music. People stereotype me as a thug or troublemaker who is up to no good, who is a deadbeat dad, when in reality I love my kids. I look forward to every moment I get to be with them.

Emily feels her own rage at this discrimination. She also appreciates that Leon can paint this troublesome picture so vividly for Liliana to hear. Following Move 2 assembly, linking Leon's triggers (Liliana's laughter about her family's exclusion of him; her tears; her accusations), his trembling shoulders, his meanings and his action tendencies, Emily distills and deepens his core emotion of shame and remorse linked to his action tendency to leave or offer to leave. She shapes an encounter for Leon to share the overwhelm in his trembling shoulders that is evoked by her family's distrust of him and "Liliana's unending pain that I have caused."

Emily: (Tracking and reflecting.) Your trembling shoulders are saying, "I get overwhelmed when I see Liliana's pain, and I feel so bad." So, when you say to Liliana, "Maybe I should just leave - maybe you'd be better without me," inside you're trembling with overwhelm that you've hurt her, yes? (Checking if her tracking is accurate for him.)

Leon: Definitely!

Emily: Can you tell her that right now? Can you let her know that at the end of the *downward spiral*, even though on the outside you might be saying, "Maybe I should just leave," that actually, on the inside you're trembling with overwhelm?

Leon: Yeah, um. On the outside I might seem cold, but inside I'm overwhelmed at thinking that I should just leave and make things better for you.

Emily: (Repeating, in proxy voice, to heighten and keep the message alive.) I tell you I should just leave and make it better, but on the inside, I'm overwhelmed, yeah?

Leon: Yes!

Emily: And can you tell her what you get overwhelmed with? (Evoking specificity.)

Leon: (To Liliana.) Just watching you hurt because of me. That's what overwhelms me.

Emily: You're telling this lady that you love so much, "I'm overwhelmed to see your hurt, because of me! And so I say maybe I should just leave you." (Leon sniffs and wipes away some tears.) It's hard telling her that, right?

Leon: Oh, yes. It's not something I want to do or say. But in those moments it feels like the right or best thing to do.

Emily: Ahhh, can you tell her that, too? Can you look at her and say, "This thing about you might be better off without me is not something I want to say."

Leon: It's not something I want to say, it just feels like the right thing, you know. (A new meaning for his action tendency in the cycle emerges and begins to shift her view of him, a key element in stabilization.)

Emily: How is it to tell her that? (Move 4.)

Leon: Difficult. (Sniffing and wiping away more tears.)

Emily invites him to say more about "difficult" and then she reflects what he shares: Difficult indeed! You live in the outside world being misunderstood and minimized and here with Liliana you are showing her how difficult it is to be hearing from her tears, her anger, and her family accounts that you are just not enough and that you are making things worse for her!

Leon: Yeah.

Emily: And what happens inside for you Liliana as Leon shares his anguish, feeling misunderstood, minimized, judged as not good enough, seen as the one who is causing you pain, that he finds no other option, but to offer to leave so you don't hurt so much? What happens to hear him say from his trembling shoulders and with tears on his face, "Offering to leave is not something I want to say to you,"?

Liliana: It feels very deep because usually when these things happen, he is very cold and inexpressive, more like mad, and to hear it now, it feels totally different - like he cares. When he tells me he wants to leave, it feels like, "Okay I'll get rid of her and that's it." But right now, it feels like if he leaves, he will feel the pain of not being with me.

Emily: Right. You can feel that. As Leon turned to you and said, "This isn't something I want to say. On the outside I may look cold, but inside, I'm overwhelmed with your pain and feel I don't want to say this to you." You really trust him about that, right? You're saying you can feel that he really doesn't want to leave you even as he says, "I may as well leave you then."

Liliana: Yeah. It feels different. It feels like if he leaves, he will really miss me.

With this moment of Leon's engagement, furthering the stabilization and connection between them, Emily turns to Liliana with more Move 2 to evoke and assemble the specific moment of injury and the crux of the injurious meanings she is making.

**Crux of Injury: The Bond Shattering Moment that Needs Repair
(Client's AIRM Steps 3 and 4)**

Liliana: I knew he talked to people and played around on the phone but to know that he really had sex with this person, to see a picture of them in bed together, I don't think he thought about caring for one second how much it would hurt me!

Emily: So, you're saying, if I am hearing you right, that in your heart, you can't imagine that he thought about you in that moment. The worst of it is your sense that he didn't think about how much it would hurt you, is that it? (Reflecting present process of the crux of the injury – the attachment meaning.)

Liliana: Right. Right. It, felt like, he would throw everything away for a stranger.

Emily (validating): You're feeling angry and you're saying the worst of it is when you say to yourself, "He didn't think about us." Those are the dreadful drums that beat in your head. "You didn't think about us. You didn't care about us." And you're angry, and you're telling him that it hurts so much to have those fears, yes?

With Emily's patient validation, Liliana deepens her emotional experiencing and discloses with deeper vulnerability.

Liliana: I think it hurts so much because he is the last person that I thought would hurt me. What hurts the most is my panic that you could go away and never come back; that I could lose you!

Emily: And what does it say to you that this other woman is a Black woman? (Evoking meaning making of the trigger.)

Liliana: (Eyes brimming with tears and speaking in a near-whisper.) It says that I'll never be able to be his chosen one, and I will lose him.

After more Move 1 reflecting Liliana's present process, as she reacts to the discovery of Leon's affair, Emily recognizes that Liliana's comments could be triggering Leon to feel shamed and blamed. She pauses to check in with him. She wants him to feel supported and unconditionally accepted as he manages two kinds of threats: (1) the racial distress of being excluded by Liliana's family and living with daily racial stress as a black man; (2) the attachment threat of having hurt his partner and carrying the pain, shame, and remorse for what he has done and the fear of never being able to repair the wound.

Emily: I just want to check in how Leon is doing, because he's been speaking so clearly about how important you are, and how he wants to build the foundation with you and I want to check how he is doing. I'm wondering if you are feeling on the hot seat here, Leon? What happens for you as Liliana talks right now about her interpretation that you didn't even think that turning to this other woman would hurt her? And how terrified she is that she will never be your chosen one?

Leon: Um, uh, yeah, definitely on the hot seat, but I'm really listening, like I'm trying to take in what she's saying. I think it's important that I sit here and listen. The only way I can truly understand what I've done is to really take in what she's saying and how she's feeling, so I can feel that, too.

As escalated as this couple can become, Emily's heart skips several beats as she hears how Leon intuitively senses this *key part of the interpersonal healing process*. He senses that as the offending partner, he needs to hear how his injured partner is feeling *in order that he can feel it too!* This will be part of the *forgiveness and rebuilding trust conversation*, Steps 5 and 6 of the AIRM, the crux of the repair process. Emily notices this couple has great potential for attachment injury repair in the moments that Leon's search for attuned empathy is stronger than his action tendency to disappear in shame or to fight back in defence.

Leon: I am trying to listen because I am the one who did this to her. A lot was going on for me, but when you're *in the middle of things* sometimes, you're not aware yourself of the exterior damage you're doing to *somebody that you love and that loves you*.

Emily senses this openly congruent statement of *hurting someone you love* to be a powerful attachment message of possible comfort to Liliana. She wants to slow down and shape an encounter for Leon to share it directly with Liliana. She also hears Leon allude to his untold story of being *in the middle of things*. Here she faces a choice point. She asks herself, "Will I do Tango Move 2 with Leon and assemble more of his emotional experience, perhaps saying, 'Tell me about the things you were in the middle of? Perhaps more about the identity crisis you referred to earlier?' Or will I do Move 3 and shape an encounter for Leon to share these beautifully soothing words, '*Somebody that you love and that loves you*'?" She opts for Move 3 to shape an interpersonal moment of connection, while also making a note to return later to his story of being in the middle of things.

Emily: Leon, I want to come back to hearing more about your story of being in the middle of things, but first, you just said some very powerful words and I'd like to savor them. You said you're not aware yourself of the damage you're doing to *somebody that you love and that loves you*. (Sharpening a message to share.) Liliana, I wonder if you would be ready to hear Leon turn and tell you this? (Anticipating an encounter.) He says he's really listening to you, but that when he gets caught up in the middle of things, he is

- sometimes unaware of the damage he's doing *to somebody that he loves and that loves him*. Do you want to hear him tell you that? (Liliana looks expectantly into Leon's face, and he speaks immediately.)
- Leon:* I didn't realize or wasn't unaware of how much I was hurting you, the one I love, and how I was making you feel bad. (Liliana looks directly at him, with soft eyes, filling with tears.)
- Emily:* (Move 4 processing.) How is it to tell her that right now? There come her beautiful tears again that are so difficult for you to see (reflecting present process of a common trigger for Leon). What is it like telling her that right now? (Leon smiles.)
- Leon:* Um, it's uh, I don't know how to describe it. It feels like the truth is really made between us! (Sending and receiving authentic, clear messages is an affiliative experience: open, vulnerable and engaging.)
- Emily:* Wow! Liliana, what it's like to have him say it feels like the truth is resonating between you? What happens when he turns to you and admits he has hurt you deeply? Says he didn't realize how much he was hurting the person he loves. What are your tears saying right now?
- Liliana:* That I believe, I believe in him. I believe that he did not want to hurt me. I believe that he just got caught up.

Confirming Readiness for the Forgiving Injuries/ Rebuilding Trust Conversation

Emily returns to Leon's comment about being in the middle of things. He is understanding the attachment significance of the injury – that in Liliana's eyes the crux of the injury is about how important he is to her. Now Emily wants to assemble Leon's experience more, so he can elaborate on how he could betray her in this way (completing Step 4 of the AIRM).

- Leon:* I was confused with the racial, political turmoil in society. You were my best friend but my black identity mattered too. And I felt confused. Did I need to be with her? How could I find out? I was confused. I wanted to talk with you, but I got overwhelmed by your anger and pain. When we fight, I pull away. I got afraid I couldn't make you happy, that I only made things worse. And I stepped back and I went to her.
- Liliana:* (She has been listening intently and lets out a big sigh!) I know this guy! I get it!

She now sees him in a more predictable light. Leon's honest disclosure is an essential ingredient for rebuilding trust and it is a clear marker of his growing engagement. Leon and Liliana can identify their moves and fears in their protective pattern, which is triggered by danger cues from the attachment injury, and from the societal racial trauma. This is stabilization. They are rarely getting caught in their *downward spiral* of Liliana weeping frantically or bombarding Leon with questions and Leon getting overwhelmed by her pain and questions, and eventually offering to leave if he is the source of so much grief. When the spiral approaches, they are increasingly able to step aside and remind each other of the core elements they have discovered together in their conversations *to assemble and stabilize*. Liliana reminds Leon of the attachment significance of the injury, "It is you I want but I'm Hispanic and sometimes I put too much salsa in my panic!" They are stabilizing and Leon adds, "I like salsa."

Leon reminds Liliana of how, when he loves her so much, he was able to betray her as he did. Each time he shares it, he feels a tolerable amount of shame and remorse. "I turned to her because I was confused about me and overwhelmed with doubts that I could make you happy. In our downward spiral, I just seemed to make things worse."

Summarizing Their Stabilization

Emily, with Move 5, summarizes how far they have come, “Look how much work you’ve done already! You can name so clearly this is the spiral that you get caught in. Your best attempts to try to talk through this event and repair things – to rebuild the trust – have been getting derailed but your rapid repetitive pattern of questions, answers, escalating demands, and emotional overwhelm is slowing down. You are beginning to have some new conversations where, Liliana, you are taking in that Leon didn’t want to hurt you and sincerely wants to rebuild trust. You are beginning to understand that when he walks away or offers to leave the relationship, he doesn’t want to leave you, but he is overwhelmed and feels helpless to make you happy. You are starting to trust that. And, Leon, you are taking in that she is not angry because you are faulty or inadequate in her eyes, but that her anger is code for her panic she that will lose you. You are beginning to trust again that to her you are a very special person that she is fighting for – fighting to keep you in relationship with her! She reaches you with her message that you are her first love, even though she was in a previous relationship for many years! You are beginning to trust that indeed, you are her first love! In these new conversations, Liliana, you talk about how good it feels to be sharing openly with Leon without screaming or yelling or trying to explain. And, Leon, you are feeling connected when she trusts that you would truly miss her if you left her.”

Confirming Engagement of OP

Before approaching the second key dialogue of attachment injury repair, the *forgiveness and rebuilding trust conversation* (client Steps 5 and 6 of the AIRM), Emily helps Leon to complete his withdrawer engagement which has been slowly emerging. She knows he will need to be engaged to tolerate the depth of Liliana’s vulnerable disclosure of pain and fears over what he has done.

Leon: What puts alarms in my system are her complaints – not her requests for reassurance!

He shares with increasing vulnerable and assertive engagement how destabilizing Liliana’s complaints and questions can still be.

Leon: I feel like I am losing myself and the end zone keeps moving. I’m overwhelmed – feeling unwanted, misunderstood, and overwhelmed to see you hurting because of me. There is nothing I can say. You don’t hear me! I need you to stop the yelling and talk – hear me and see my goodness. Can you be my old *best friend*, like in the beginning of our relationship when we could talk without you freaking out and yelling at me? Please? (Making an assertive reach, with vulnerability and wiping tears.)

Liliana’s response is that she will try, that she doesn’t want to yell at him so much, and that she will listen more and not ask so many questions.

Facilitating the Forgiving Injuries Conversation (Client’s AIRM Steps 5 and 6)

Emily struggles to assemble and deepen Liliana’s vulnerable emotions to shape forgiving injuries/rebuilding trust encounters (Liliana’s Step 5 of the AIRM). She sees that Liliana is reluctant to discuss the injury and needs much support. Liliana protests, “I don’t want to remember. I don’t want to trigger the old.” It is very difficult for Liliana to vulnerably engage with her fears and to share them with Leon. Emily has recognized this hesitancy in many couples. There is such relief to have stabilized and to have occasional connecting conversations.

- Liliana:* (Starting out in a strong voice.) I just want his reassurance every day. I love him with my life, but... (She stops herself and begins to weep.) But I'm not sure if he is with me for me. Maybe he thinks I ask questions just to get information to use against him and it's not that. It's me getting information to try to be a better person; to be someone he wants.
- Emily:* (To assemble Liliana's tears and fears, reflecting in proxy voice.) If I can be a better person, he'll want me. It's hard to trust that you already are the lady he wants, yes? (Conjecture/ seeding attachment.) It's really hard to trust that? That fear is still there, yes? Is it ok if we visit that fear? (Liliana nods.) Do you feel it as a fear in your body?
- Liliana:* Yes! It takes me to day one. I...I...I really have the emotions like day one. It is so vivid! (Fear so heightened she feels what she felt the day of the attachment injury.)
- Emily:* (Evoking.) Say more about vivid.
- Liliana:* The picture on the phone. His confusion that he was going through about who he is.
- Emily:* You still hurt with that vivid, alive memory. I see your arm shaking just now.
- Liliana:* I get this twitch in my arm when I'm anxious. It shakes. It's like me fighting to hold on. I just want him to know that he hurt me and that was a moment that I never thought I was going to go through with him.

Emily shapes an encounter for Liliana to disclose this deepened engagement with her pain and fears and losses of the injury with Leon.

- Liliana:* I hope you know that I don't want to hurt you, but I still feel the hurt. I try not to...but it hurts. (Weeping.)
- Emily:* (Move 4, processing the encounter; repeating to heighten and contain.) Just slow down and notice how it is that you just said to Leon so courageously, "I don't want to hurt you, but I still feel the hurt." How is it to be looking in his face again and telling him, "I still hurt"? It must take a lot of courage. You try so hard not to feel. What's happening in your body as you say, "I try not to, but I still hurt"?
- Liliana:* Just, um...anxious...and scared. (She feels the fear of her pain at a Level 5 or 6 on the EXP scale. See Box 12.1 in *Stepping into Emotionally Focused therapy: Key Ingredients of Change*, 2nd ed.)
- Emily:* So...so just look at him again. You feel anxious and scared that you've just admitted to Leon that your fears and your hurt are still alive with vivid images of him being with her. So anxious letting him know you are still hurting from his secret affair. And so scary to wonder whether he still wants you. And now you're saying to Leon, "It's risky. I don't really like to feel it, but I still feel the pain and the panic."

To facilitate Leon's engaged response (his Step 6 of the AIRM), Emily processes with Leon, with Move 4.

- Emily:* What's happening inside your body, Leon, as she's taking this big risk to let you know as much as she doesn't want it to be true, that she still hurts and shakes with fear that she could still lose you?

Leon describes how he braces himself. That is a good sign he is engaged with his present moment experience. Emily shapes an encounter for him to respond to Liliana.

- Emily:* So, can you look at Liliana and tell her, "I get it Liliana. I brace myself because I get how my turning to this other woman terrified you. I get how terrified and hurt you are." Can you just let her know that you can feel it in your own being?

Leon: Yeah, definitely I'm bracing myself when we approach this. I can hear the genuineness of how you feel. And I can see you and I get you. You're not wrong or bad to have these feelings considering what happened. I did betray you. I felt confusion in where I was and what was going on. And I lost my way. It is especially painful to hurt someone I love. I can feel how much you are hurting. I am so sorry I hurt you.

Emily: And Liliana how is it to hear Leon's message? "You're not wrong. You're not bad. It's normal that you would feel this way after I cheated on you... I lost my way and hurt someone I love." What's coming up for you as he tells you this?

Liliana: It just calls calms me down and makes me feel close to him. And more at peace.

Emily reflects Liliana's words to heighten and savor, and then invites an encounter in reply: Can you tell Leon how his words are calming you?

Liliana: It's good to hear you expressing yourself. Always hearing you talk is reassuring. It calms me down and helps me feel you understand what I went through. And I imagine you went through something too, not only me. (She is opening to hearing about his experience, as she feels he understands her pain and she feels his empathy and his soothing remorse and care.)

Emily feels it is important to be flexible with the model – knowing it need not be strictly linear. Although they are in the midst of the forgiving injuries conversation, she hears Liliana has a growing desire to understand more of what Leon was going through. After heightening this shift in their *forgiveness and rebuilding trust conversation*, Emily responds to Liliana's attunement to Leon as a longing to understand him better, to invite him to expand more on what he was going through at the time of the injurious event. She senses it is safe and important for Liliana to hear more from Leon and she trusts this will bring them even closer to each other.

Leon: There's so much chaos as a black man in America and I wanted our home to be peaceful. I just wanted us to have peace ...not all these battles between us. Outside it's like warfare you know...like war out in the workplace... ..out with other people. Home should be a place of peace and we were having moments where these battles were ensuing. When we were getting into battles it made it even worse. (Liliana nods.) A lot of times it just didn't feel peaceful at home. Even if we weren't arguing, some storm was brewing... And...and home should be a sanctuary... your partner should be a sanctuary.

Emily: (Processing Leon's disclosure with Move 4.) How are you doing? What's happening in your body, Leon, as you tell Liliana that very honest message and you see her beautiful face looking right at you?

Leon: Good to share with her. I did seek refuge... away from you. I am so sorry!

Emily: (Turns to Liliana. Move 4, processing impact of Leon's disclosure.) What happens when he makes more sense out of this for you? Right in this moment what happens as you look at him and hear his open honesty?

Again, Liliana confirms she is calmed and feels closer to Leon.

Consolidating and Integrating the Repair (Client's AIRM Steps 7 and 8)

Following this dialogue of forgiveness and rebuilding trust, Emily consolidates the repair process, guiding Leon and Liliana through consolidation (Steps 7 and 8 of the AIRM), where Liliana

reaches for more reassurance and Leon responds with gratitude that he is now making a difference for her. Together, they create a new narrative of the event.

Liliana: That f'ing picture does bother me. But the fear of not being able to be with you ... to lose you... That's the worst: the panic that you could go away and never come back.

Leon: I can imagine how you feel. You did feel like you'd lost me – I know – but you haven't lost me, you never have. (Liliana is smiling.)

This becomes a bonding moment of reaching–responding–receiving.

Liliana: I feel relief talking to you about it, but also hoping for understanding that I wasn't trying to hurt you and put you in danger – that I was trying to tell you how much I care. Can you understand how much I love you? And can you assure me you don't judge me for getting so enraged with you and bombarding you with all those questions...Can you assure me it is me you I want today and always? That you really believe in us? (Reaching with a clear request – helps to consolidate the bond.)

Leon: Absolutely! (He reaches out to hold her and she dissolves in tears.) I'm getting a whole new feeling with these tears. I feel like I'm on the same alignment with these tears. We've gotten a lot stronger. They chuckle as they snuggle together.

Liliana: These are tears of joy and relief. Not tears for you to fear.

Attachment injury content and REC trauma need to be considered by EFT therapists. As Emily follows the AIRM with flexibility and cultural humility, she is assured that it is a reliable model to keep her focused and effective in helping couples to repair relationship-specific attachment injuries. Just as we need to boldly name the moment of attachment injury, we need to explicitly explore the individual and collective impacts of ongoing minority stress. As Leon says, minority stress is “ongoing and everlasting.”

Box S16.1 AIRM Steps: Client Tasks and Emily's EFT Tango Moves

Cycle De-escalation Related to the Injury

Step 1

Injured Partner's Task: Articulate the injury and impact of an event in which they felt betrayed, abandoned, helpless, and experienced a shattering of trust in the relationship. The recollection is not calm but is painfully alive.

Therapist's Intervention: Primarily with Move 1, process injured partner (IP)'s account of the incident of injury, helping them to repaint the scene and articulate the “never again” impact. Validate reactive emotions. Emily keeps her balance during these recollections, by expecting that they are typically very anguished accounts.

Step 2

Offending Partner's Task: Respond to the IP. The offending partner (OP) frequently discounts, denies, or minimizes the incident and their partner's pain and moves into a protective stance.

Therapist's Intervention: Primarily with Move 1, process OP's response and support them to hear their attachment significance. Emily is constantly reassured by research that shows

the OP's reactivity is common. It helps her validate and normalize the present moment process without panicking or thinking she is going in the wrong direction. "Of course," she says to herself, "the offending partner is filled with shame and panic at what they have done, and it must be incredibly difficult to hear their partner describe the pain they have caused, without becoming reactive and wanting to minimize."

Step 3

Injured Partner's Task: Integrate the narrative with their emotional experience and access their attachment fears, shattered trust, and longings associated with the injury event.

Therapist's Intervention: Primarily with Move 2, *support* the IP to stay in touch with the attachment significance of the injury. Assemble emotions and access the core pain of the experience. Here, Emily, keeps a keen, attuned focus on assembling the concrete, vivid crux of the injury with the attachment meaning at the core of their shattered assumptions about the reliability of their partner.

Step 4

Offending Partner's Task: Begin to hear and understand the attachment significance of the event as a reflection of their importance to their partner, not as a sign of their inadequacy or defect. Expand on how it evolved, to become predictable again.

Therapist's Intervention: Primarily with Tango Move 2 (and some Move 4 to process) support the OP to assemble their emotional reactions, and to become accessible to the attachment significance of the incident. Evoking their engagement and sense of responsibility ask them to elaborate on *how* the incident evolved. Emily recognizes how important it is to help the OP to truly hear and absorb that the injury is because of their importance to their partner. She monitors and heightens the OP's emotional engagement with their attachment significance to their partner and with the gravity of the trust-shattering moment, before she courageously asks, "How is that you were able to do this very hurtful thing to your partner?"

New Cycles of Emotional Engagement: Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Step 5

Injured Partner's Task: Move toward a more integrated articulation of the injury and expand on how it threatened the attachment bond. That is, the IP tells the story of the injury, linking their core pain more clearly to the shattering of the trusting bond in that one traumatic moment. There is a sharper, more vulnerable expression of the loss in that cataclysmic, *never again can I trust them* moment.

Therapist's Intervention: Primarily with Move 2, process the IP's core emotional experience of the injury. With Move 3, direct the IP's expression of the pain, loss, attachment fears and longings to the OP, letting partner witness their vulnerability. Emily relies on slow pacing, the RISSSSSC manner, and very conscious heightening to shape increasing depth of emotional engagement, vulnerability, and openness. In particular, she shapes disclosure of the profound loss of the trusting bond in these very transformative encounters.

Step 6

Offending Partner's Task: Become more emotionally engaged. Access a “felt sense” of partner's pain and be visibly moved by it. Express core emotion – empathy, regret, remorse – and acknowledge responsibility for their part in causing the pain.

Therapist's Intervention: Process OP's core emotional responses (sadness, remorse, regret, empathy for IP) to facilitate a “felt sense” of partner's pain. Promote owning responsibility, expressing empathy, regret, and remorse – while staying attuned and engaged. To shape and process these encounters, Emily focuses first on Move 4 to attend to how the OP is impacted by their partner's disclosure. She heightens and then with Move 3 shapes encounters for the OP to disclose their empathy (feeling the other's pain), responsibility and remorse.

Consolidation of the Restored Bond

Step 7

Injured Partner's Task: Risk asking for attachment needs to be met – usually the comfort and caring that was unavailable at the time of the injury. Occasionally during these healing moments, the formerly injured partner will say, “That was it – seeing that remorse and empathy is all I need.” Other times they may say, “That is absolutely what I needed at the time! That you could see how badly I was hurting and not disappear and make excuses, but rather feel my hurt –and show me right then and there your regret and your care!”

Therapist's Intervention: Process, with Move 4 and then with Move 2, assemble and deepen the IP's accessibility and responsiveness to their partner's emotional expressions. Emily asks herself, “Are they accepting their partner's apology? Is it reaching them? Are they sensing their partner truly understands and feels their pain?” With Move 3 invite and support the IP to ask for what they need (and frequently needed at the time of the injury) to rebuild trust.

The immense relief and connection between partners at this point, is frequently so palpable that Emily finds it almost counter-intuitive to invite more of a reach at this point. Knowing, however, that inviting a specific request can deepen and consolidate the repair, she shapes one more encounter for the injured partner to ask their partner for the reassurance they need and then processes the OP's responsiveness to the IP's expressed needs.

Step 8

Offending Partner's Task: Respond in a caring manner that acts as an antidote to the traumatic experience. Relationship is redefined as a safe haven.

Both Partners' Task: Create new narrative of event.

Therapist's Intervention: With Move 5, integrate and summarize partners' reaching and responding and evoke creation of new narrative by partners. Heighten the interpersonal process of repair. Emily reminds herself that her role is still important at this point. She stays actively engaged as she summarizes and integrates the specific healing reaches and responses that the partners have just made. She heightens how their vulnerable disclosures and engaged responses are the antidote to the relationship trauma and heightens this *two-person healing activity*. She invites them to create their own narrative of the event from the experience of their newly secure bond.

AIRM steps, client tasks and therapist interventions are validated in outcome and process studies (Makinen & Johnson, 2006; Zuccarini et al., 2013).

Box S16.2 Steps of the AIRM from the Injured Partner's Perspective

Presented here are the steps of EFCT AIRM as conveyed from an injured partner to an offending partner, created by L. Buchanan and intended to be sung to the melody of “Habanera” from Bizet’s opera *Carmen*:

Because I told you about my pain (Step 1)
 Despite your minimizing and denial (Step 2)
 Then I could share about my attachment fears and longings (Step 3)
 And then you told me that you understood (and something of
 how it came about) (Step 4)
 And so I was able to integrate and show my vulnerability (Step 5)
 Then you engaged and owned your part and you expressed your
 deep remorse. (Step 6)
 And then I was able to ask for comfort and caring (Step 7)
 And you responded in such a caring way that I could say that we were one
 And once again had an attachment bond. (Step 8).

(Brubacher & Buchanan, 2014)

AIRM in EFIT: Attachment Injury Resolution with a Parent, Case Example

Sahra has an imaginal encounter with her mother where their AIRM dialogues repair an attachment injury from her childhood. Although she doesn’t expect her real mother, were she still living, to have been able to respond with the assurance, validation, and vulnerable self-disclosures she imagines emanating from her heart, the corrective emotional experience through this encounter strengthens her shifting view of self. Additionally, the imaginal experience of eventually hearing her mother’s vulnerability, after many dismissive and cold responses, shifts her sense of her mother and their relationship.

Prior to this session, Sahra has stabilized the imprisoning patterns of being mistreated and dismissed, making repeated futile attempts to please and help her mother, and, in turn, doubting herself and her loveability. She has engaged newly with herself and in this imaginal relationship with her now-deceased mother, has a more powerful, positive view of self and an assertive sense of deserving her mother’s compassion. Her longing, however, to experience her mother’s support and compassion remains unmet. Mother continues to feel distant and cold, filled with doom and gloom.

Emily: You describe feeling such relief to recognize that you do deserve you mother’s support and compassion even though you have not received it! And how does it feel inside for you to sense her distant coldness, filled with doom and gloom? (Replaying the trigger and evoking an emotional sense of incomplete resolution.)

Sahra: (Speaking slowly; pausing between words.) It feels constricted. It feels heavy inside. As if I’m stuck. It’s like a stuck kind of physical feeling where the muscles are tight and you don’t have the flexibility and you don’t have the movement. It just feels very tight. (Clenching her fists in front of her torso the whole time.)

Emily: (Mirroring Sahra’s clenched fists in the core of her body; reflecting the bodily arousal of her emotional experience and validating the constriction she feels.) That tight constriction sounds like your picture of your mother, yes?

Sahra: It does (Chuckles.)

Emily: She has that holding—

Sahra: Exactly.

- Emily:* What is it like to have this sort of clutching, holding you back?
- Sahra:* It's how I survived. After Aabo (Her father.) left, Mother was doom and gloom and I just held back. Just hid my opinions, hid my thoughts or ways of doing things, in many ways conform or just give up. And you know, it separated me from myself.
- Emily:* Yeah, your voice sounds very sad! (Reflecting the leading edge of emotion.) All your thoughts and dreams just got strangled, separated from you!
- Sahra:* It hurts! Hard to breathe.
- Emily:* (After more assembling and heightening of Sahra's pain of her internal experience of constricting herself, just as she felt constriction from her mother.) Let's see if we can shape a message to an image of your mother, to tell her how she held you back, how she kept you from yourself.

Emily sharpens and heightens Sahra's message and helps her anticipate how her imaginal mother looks as she prepares to speak to her.

- Sahra:* OK. Mom (Big sigh.) there was a time when you broke me! I said I thought I wanted to ... um ... to ... to become a pediatrician and you never supported that idea. (Pausing between words.) I don't know why you didn't support it, but you didn't. And you chastised me for not being able to spell "pediatrician." And you got upset. After Aabo left, I always had this sense, whatever I'd suggested, whatever I had thought I'd like to be or had a dream or a hope for myself, you always found a way to, to derail it. But for me, for you to say, "You can't spell it, you can't be it," crushed my very sense of goodness and my little girl dreams and hopes. You cut me off. Stopped me cold.
- Emily:* (Heightening with RISSSSSC: Repeating the image of attachment-salient emotion, simply, in a soft tone, slow pace, echoing Sahra's assertive tone in a slightly stronger voice, using her word *crushed*; crushed by the attachment figure she looked to for validation.) Tell her again, "You crushed my very sense of having dreams."
- Sahra:* (Weeping as she speaks.) You just crushed my very sense of hope and goodness. You crushed who I am—someone who likes to think open, think options and you just crushed it—like now I don't have hope. I got here. I am a pediatrician, but you just killed my hopefulness and joy, my trust in who I am. You just arrested that.
- Emily:* (Move 4.) How is it inside for you to be giving her such a clear picture of how she crushed you? (Replay cue.) How do you feel towards her right now? (To evoke internal experience, to access core emotion.) I see your tears and your trembling voice. (Tracking bodily arousal.)
- Sahra:* It's heartbreaking and maddening!
- Emily:* Tell her again, "How dare you do this to me!" (Heightening core anger.)
- Sahra:* How dare you treat me like someone you could control like a puppet! You didn't know me. You didn't understand me. You didn't know who I was anymore because you crumbled when Aabo left. You never asked who I was. When I said I wanted to be a pediatrician, I was taking a big chance in sharing it with you and you crushed it.
- Emily:* (Repeating to heighten.) Right, "I was taking a big risk sharing it with you and how dare you crush it!"
- Sahra:* How dare you do that to me!
- Emily:* Can you feel inside what it is like to be saying this to this image of your mother, "How dare you laugh at me and crush my dream?"
- Sahra:* It's just that tightness (Gasping.) And you did it in front of the whole family too! (Sobbing; gasping for breath.)

With more Move 4, Emily checks how it is for Sahra to be sharing this.

Sahra: Good. I am glad she is hearing me, but I need to hear back from her.

Emily shapes an encounter for Sahra to hear back from her imaginal mother. There follow several encounters between Sahra and her imaginal mother, Inna. Inna struggles to acknowledge Sahra's hurt. She is dismissive and defensive. Emily remains calm, trusting the process. This initial minimizing and defensiveness has unfolded many times in her injury repair work with couples.

Emily: (To validate Sahra's need and to gently confront Inna, while also validating Inna.) You didn't know how she needed you?

Sahra as Inna: No.

Emily: As Inna, you had no idea that Sahra needed you to hear her hopes and dreams; to cheer her on?

Sahra as Inna: No.

Emily: As Inna, you didn't even know that you hurt Sahra so deeply? (Validating Sahra's pain and betrayal.)

Sahra as Inna: I knew she was upset, but I thought it was because she couldn't spell the word. I didn't know it was because of what I said! And what's the big fuss now after all? (A cold, flippant voice.) You are a pediatrician, to-day. You got there. Didn't need me cheering you on!

Emily: As Inna, you didn't know Sahra needed you, her mother, to keep her safe, to believe in her. You didn't know that?

Emily: (Move 4, returning to Sahra.) As Sahra, how are you doing as you hear this image of your mother totally missing what you needed and deserved from her?

Sahra: She totally missed it.

Emily: Yes, she did! (Refocusing on processing Sahra's present moment experience, with Move 4.) What's it like to hear that she just doesn't get that you needed her? (To evoke core attachment emotion.) She totally misses that you need and deserve to have a mother supporting you, not humiliating you! (Switching to present tense to bring the emotion alive in the present moment.)

Sahra: It's my worst fear coming true – that she isn't there for me. She doesn't get it. She never reaches out to try to understand. She just assumes I'll be fine, even as she makes fun of me in front of all my aunts and cousins!

After Sahra persists, with Emily's support and guidance, to send clear messages to this image of her mother about the depth of her pain, Sahra perceives that her imaginal mother is beginning to truly hear how badly she crushed and constricted her young, beautiful, feisty daughter, and that she eventually takes ownership to elaborate on how it evolved. With Emily's guidance, Sahra replies from her image of her mother, Inna.

Sahra as Inna: When Aabo left, I gave up my dreams. I dropped out of medical school and I didn't want you to hope for things that may never happen. I wanted to protect you from dreaming big. I was so crushed and without realizing it, I crushed you too. (Weeping.)

Sahra: (To Emily.) I'm not sure if these are Inna's tears or my own tears. I think we are both weeping – weeping for little Sahra.

Emily's eyes fill with tears too. She feels Sahra is ready to move to the *forgiving injuries/rebuilding trust conversations*. She doesn't know if Sahra's imaginal mother will respond with the compassion, empathy, and remorse that Sahra needs, however, she trusts the model. She has confidence that if Inna remains cold and aloof, Sahra's clear messages of need and longing will expand her sense of self and will restructure her working models of self, other, and system.

Sahra: Growing up I had the sense you weren't there for me—I needed a mom, not a mother. I needed a mom who would sit with me and ask how my day was ... But you were preoccupied.

Emily: (Proxy voice, to heighten.) I needed you so much! (*Sahra:* I did.) And you weren't there for me. (Heightening.)

Sahra: I did—I needed you there so much and you weren't there for me. And it hurts. It hurts a lot.

Emily: It still hurts. (Proxy voice.) You can still feel the hurt deep in your soul, yes? (Evoking present moment experience; heightening.)

Sahra: Yes, I can.

Emily: And I'm still waiting for you to somehow get it, Mom. I still need you to get it. (Proxy voice, to promote ownership of position.)

Sahra: I do. I still need you to get it. I need you to know that I needed you. I needed you to talk with me. I needed you to listen – to actually listen and hear me and be happy with me for my dreams. I needed you to take me seriously and to know me; not to make fun of my dreams. If you'd known me and accepted me, you couldn't have done that! You broke something between us that day! I've continued all my life to try to help you and be good to you, and to get you to see my goodness but I never trusted you since that day. You made fun of me! And from then on, I have done it all alone; always without your support. (Weeping intensifies.)

Emily: I need you to hear me and see me—to know me and accept me. (Reflecting, heightening, in proxy voice.)

Sahra: Right—I need to know that you accept me for who I am. That you could see my goodness and take me seriously that day. I needed you to be proud of me and say in front of the entire family, "She can do it!" I needed you to say, "She will get there. I know she can do it! She is clever and determined and she can make all her dreams come true." Please can you tell me that now? And most of all never laugh at me! I need you to know that I have missed you almost all my life. I still need your warmth. It is cold and lonely in this family.

Emily: (Prompting Sahra to ask her imaginal mother for what she needs to heal the injury.) Can you ask her for that acceptance, that warmth, that encouragement and belief in you?

Sahra: Can you do that Mom? Can you accept me for me? (Voice is quivering.) Can you try and be the mom I need you to be, to love me and believe in me and show me that you are proud of me? (She takes the risk of asking for what she needs to heal the injury.)

Emily: Just take it in—take in how huge this is that you asked Inna, your mother, "Can you accept me for me? Can you be the mom I need you to be?" (Heightening the courage and the risk—not knowing how Inna will respond.)

Sahra: (Deep sigh.)

Emily: It takes a lot of guts, a lot of courage, to speak from that pain deep down in your being. (Validating courage, heightening the risk.) What is it like that you asked her this? Pretty scary?

- Sahra:* Very scary.
- Emily:* Right. Can you tell her how scary it is to be asking for this most important thing of all; Daring to imagine she will respond with remorse and compassion? (Heightening the fear, seeding attachment.)
- Sahra:* I am *so* afraid. (Shaking, sighs.) So afraid you won't be able to or won't understand what I'm talking about.
- Emily:* Right, right, it's very scary, so you've taken a huge risk to ask her, right? (Validating courage; keeping emotion alive.) So, do you feel ready to hear back from your imaginal mother? (Inviting a response from imagined other while client is engaged with her attachment need.) You don't know how long it's going to take for her to get this, right? A while ago she didn't get it. She had no clue. (Validating the risk; supporting anticipation of possible non-acceptance and dismissal from mother.)

Emily invites Sahra to speak from her image of her mother. As her imaginal mother, Sahra feels the impact and elaborates more on how the injury evolved.

- Emily:* What happens, Inna, as Sahra says, "Can you accept me for me? Can you see how much I need you as a mom to see me and know me and never push me out to be made fun of?"
- Sahra as Inna:* It makes me sad. The sadness is even deeper than before. (Sigh.) I didn't give you what you needed. I left you out in the cold to suffer. I made fun of you and belittled you. I crushed you that day in front of the entire family. And I'm so sorry! (Weeping; Imagined other owns responsibility, feels the impact, expresses remorse.)
- Emily:* Yeah, you are so sorry. (Heightening.) So, when she says, "I need you *now* to get it, I still need you like I did then to get just how much I need you!" I think you are replying, "I get it. I'm so sorry I wasn't there for you like you needed. I crushed you that day in front of the entire family." (Heightening other's responsibility, in proxy voice; validates client's emerging positive view of self and other.)
- Sahra as Inna:* No, I wasn't there. I devastated her. Left her out in the cold!
- Emily:* She really deserved your love and care, didn't she? (Seeding attachment, validating positive view of self.)
- Sahra as Inna:* She did.
- Emily:* Can you tell her about that? (Directing encounter. For imaginal other to acknowledge the hurt and respond to attachment need; to shape the antidote bonding event.)
- Sahra as Inna:* You really did. You needed so much more from me back then. If I had given it to you then it would have brought us closer together, which is kind of ironic. (Sigh.) You grew up being the one who was most interesting, most different – most like her own self. I just didn't realize how lonely that was for you. I didn't see that you needed me. Your brother needed extra help – but you always seemed tough and strong!
- Emily:* (To imaginal mother/Inna.) Now you are saying—I really wanted a connection with you.
- Sahra as Inna:* I did. I wanted it. I was just afraid.
- Emily:* You were afraid to let her know. And you have Sahra sitting here saying, "I still need to know, can you accept me for who I am?"

- Sahra as Inna:* I do. I love you for who you are Sahra. I do. I think you are a great person. In so many ways you are the person I always wanted to be. (Sighs.)
- Emily:* Wow, you really do love her and accept her. You really get deep in your soul how much she is hurting—how much she needed you when you weren't there for her.
- Sahra as Inna:* I wasn't there for you. I dropped you! I crushed you.
- Emily:* And now you are saying...
- Sahra as Inna:* I want to—I want to be there for you, I really do. I want you to feel I'm there for you—I do...

More dialogue between Sahra and her image of her mother follows. Their relationship is redefined as potential safe haven.

- Sahra:* And now I feel that you love me too. It feels good. (Integrating.)
- Emily:* So, what does it do to that part of you that felt disconnected from yourself? (Pointing to part of her body where she expressed the constriction earlier.) Is there a sense of that in your body? (Evoking bodily felt sense of the new models of self and other.)
- Sahra:* It is more relaxed. It's not tight. I have more, I feel I am more flexible. I can breathe. Instead of being locked up, I am now free to move.
- Emily:* Free to be Sahra and find what she really needs and wants?
- Sahra:* Yeah, I am free to hope and dream again! Our relationship continues to be very much alive in my heart, but I don't feel like fighting against her anymore or exhausting myself to please her! She is weak and lost and ill, and I am proud that I supported her the best way I could while she was alive. I now feel her as a resource. She is my cheerleader uplifting me and encouraging me.

Sahra's unfolding experience confirms that the process for repairing broken bonds between romantic partners can be extended to the resolution process in individual therapy. When the attachment figure or imagined other is not a safe other, then, as shown in *Stepping into Emotionally Focused Therapy: Key Ingredients of Change*, 2nd ed. in Box 16.5 and as the case example of Sahra with her abusive ex-partner shows, the therapist will follow a modified version of the AIRM to help the client engage differently and congruently with this imagined other, shaping a corrective emotional experience – a reparative experience – that shifts internal working models of self and other. The new view of other contains the capacity to identify safe, reliable others.

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