**Exiting Negative Cycles: Shaping A Secure Base**

[www.iceeft.com](http://www.iceeft.com/) [www.drsuejohnson.com](http://www.drsuejohnson.com)

What creates change in Couple Therapy – in particular in EFT?

Necessary conditions for change: Sessions are a Safe Haven. A collaborative alliance exists. Clients engaged. Therapist blocks: not emotionally present, distracted and off focus, or uncertain due to no clear map or goals for the session.

Two Key Tasks: First, to expand emotional experience and shape new experience into new signals to the partner. Second, to use new signals to shape new interactions that lead to a secure bond.

Key Challenges exist in both tasks.

First Task. Challenge: in Stage 1 of EFT: Dead-ends in de-escalating the negative cycle.

A. Under-regulated emotion - Extreme “Find the bad guy” cycles – unending escalation.

*Strategies: Put on vulnerability glasses. Relentless empathy. Reflect emotion and validate. If lost, go back to last place you were clear – emotional experience. Stay in present not endless past. Reflect Process – Pattern – not content issues. Self disclose, as in “We’re stuck – right here”.*

B. Over-regulated emotion -Withdrawers who are unaware of emotion, intellectualizing and disowning/avoiding.

*Strategies: Learn to unpack experience to develop emotional awareness- change level, shape engagement with evocative questions, reflection, attachment interpretations and heightening with repetition and imagery. Slow pace. Repetition. Use EFT map to emotions/meanings.*

Second Task. Challenge: Stage 2 of EFT: Creating positive cycles of attachment responsiveness. Shaping enactments into Hold Me Tight Conversations

A. No map for how to create new emotional moments – how to set up deepening and shape enactments – how to sequence.

1. Focus down on present moment – process – attachment frame – primary affect in that moment – “handles”.
2. Deepen primary affect in experiencing partner
3. Distill affect into core, clear attachment message – fear/need
4. Set up enactment. If too hard, back off and unfold resistance
5. Process enactment with experiencing partner
6. Process enactment with other partner. Heighten responsiveness – second enactment
7. Reflect on and consolidate the new dance – integrate into new models

*Strategies: Slice it thinner, titrate risks, validate defenses, catch bullets, block exits, consolidate/make coherent- generalize.*

B. Blocks in trust - Attachment Injuries – “Never Again”. Use AIRM model of forgiveness/reconciliation

References: The practice of EFT: Creating connection. 2004. Brunner/Routledge

Hold Me Tight – Seven conversations for a lifetime of love. 2008 Little Brown.