

Chapter One

Introduction to emotionally focused therapy (EFT)

In chapter one, we meet Emily, a therapist newly learning EFT and three of her couples who reappear throughout the book as we walk through the steps and stages of EFT.

Tuesday morning, autumn leaves swirling on the path between her steps, Emily walks towards her office, anticipating her first session of the day with Tara and Kyle. Emily enjoys working with this couple that is caught in a classic pursue–demand (Tara) withdraw–defend (Kyle) attachment dance. As much as she dislikes acknowledging it, Emily is also aware of feeling some dread about meeting with her second couple, Phil and Julie. Underneath their very calm exteriors and rather positive presentation of their relationship, Emily picks up hints of fragility in Julie, and an almost volatile protectiveness in Phil. Certainly this couple— two brave childhood trauma survivors— offer the biggest challenge for Emily in working collaboratively within the attachment frame of EFT.... Her heart also skips a beat as she wonders, with the usual excitement and trepidation, how the new couple – Sophie and Ella – whom she has scheduled first thing after lunch will present. It is typical for her to feel nervous excitement before meeting new couples and she doesn't yet know that Sophie and Ella have highly escalated attack–attack sequences that will prove to be very challenging for her to contain.

The chapter presents a brief history of the development of EFT, presents the steps and stages of the EFT map for change, and outlines the research validating EFT as an evidence-based approach.

Meet Three of Emily's Couples – Three Negative Cycles

Three couples in a typical clinical day for EFT therapist, Emily, represent the most common negative patterns of interaction in which distressed couples get stuck. Emily remembers that before she learnt to view romantic love through an attachment lens, she became overwhelmed with some of the volatility, hostility, silent distancing, and rationalisations that partners would evoke in one another. ... Now that she can see each of the following couples' different stories of relationship distress through an attachment lens, the chaos begins to have order for Emily...

Kyle and Tara: Pursue / Withdraw

Much of the time Tara is exasperated with Kyle's apparent nonchalance, and seeming unwillingness to move "even an inch to show he cares." Except for the constant shaking of his left foot crossed over his right, Kyle does look rather motionless and blank. Every now and then he turns and gently protests that Tara is being far too hard on him or expects more than anyone could accomplish, but mostly he shrugs his shoulders, and sighs, "What can you do?"

Powerful attachment panic is driving the escalating behavioral pattern: Beneath Tara's desperate anger at failing to get an engaged response from Kyle, is a panic of abandonment. Beneath Kyle's surface nonchalance and dismissal is his panic at Tammy's rejection and seeming determination to get him to change.

Sophie and Ella: Attack/Attack

Sophie and Ella, a same sex couple, both academics, begin their first therapy session in a highly escalated state. "The problem is her family", shrieks Sophie, "everyone is more important than me!" "The problem is her impossible, unending, ridiculous demands," sighs Ella, I just can't do it anymore. I am getting ill from the stress – nothing is ever enough for her!" Before long Ella too is raising her voice!

Clearly, this is an attack/attack cycle of attachment, but confusing for the therapist, about who is fighting for connection (protesting about the distance and lack of safety between them) and who is fighting back in defense (to protect herself from hearing blame and rejection).

Phil and Julie: Withdraw/Withdraw

Two highly intellectualizing partners, Phil and Julie ... gloss over any hints of distress, or become suddenly flooded and speechless when the therapist refers to their distress.... Phil withdraws from Julie, rather than reaches to her for support. Historically he withdrew, first to his alcohol and pornography habits, and now he turns to his 12 Step groups, his movies and novels and his protective intellectualizing. Julie ... finds it hard to get words to pass her lips. She wrings her hands, expresses fears, and uncertainties about the future of this relationship.