

# Chapter Four

## Assessment and Alliance: The Attachment Experience of Steps 1 and 2

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Chapter four begins: “By having addressed the question, “What is this territory called love?” Johnson (2013) provides the kind of clarity and acuity helping professionals need if they are to be facilitators of lasting relationship change. In order to collaborate with a couple in Stage

1 assessment, alliance building and de-escalation of the negative cycle, a therapist needs to have his or her own solid felt sense both of how romantic love is an attachment dance and how emotion, like music playing in the background, is an active dynamic that is both the target and agent of change.”

In chapter four, I hold up an attachment lens for you to see and experience how attachment sculpts and forms the alliance building and assessment process in Steps 1 and 2.

Extras referred to in the book and provided on this website, pertaining to assessment and alliance include:

- An EFT Compatible Intake Form,
- Excerpts from an Early Session with Phil and Julie, and
- Guides to Early EFT Sessions
- Guide to Individual Sessions in EFT Couple Therapy.

Visualizations of the typical negative cycles of Kyle and Tara (pursue/withdraw) and Phil and Julie (*the frozen lake* withdraw/withdraw) are presented. These visualizations illustrate how the action tendencies of one partner cue the attachment fears and meanings of the other partner, triggering self-protective action tendencies in reaction, creating repetitive cycles of unsatisfactory strategies for connection. To help the reader differentiate who is the pursuer and who is the withdrawer in a negative cycle, I explore in this chapter, the emotional experiences that are connected to particular positions of withdrawal and pursuit

### **What a therapist sees *and* hears in Steps 1 and 2**

Two bonding mammals caught in a negative cycle, mostly unaware of the attachment fears and needs that are driving their cycle.

### **What therapist and clients *do* in Step 1**

Although assessment and alliance building are intertwined, the main aspects of Step 1 are

described as:

1. Creating safety in sessions.
2. Assessing for compatible agendas between partners.
3. Making a therapeutic contract.
4. Privileging process over content.
5. Having individual sessions.

## **What therapist and clients *do* in Step 2**

In Step 2 Clients and therapists collaborate to name the dominant attachment dance - including the moves each partner makes, the threatening cues that trigger these moves and the meanings each partner makes of the other's moves. Positions of pursuit and withdrawal are identified. Clients make contact with each other through simple enactments, acknowledging the self-protective moves they make in the negative cycle.

## ***How* a therapist does in Steps 1 and 2**

This section begins: "The therapist's manner makes all the difference as to whether Steps 1 and 2 become a collaborative experience with clients' emotional engagement in the present moment, or a non-engaged insight conversation, unlikely to influence lasting change." Elements explored in this section include:

- How an EFT therapist manifests the key ingredient for developing the safe haven, secure base alliance – that is, being fully present, attuned, and responsive. *Engaged resonance* is discussed, including tuning into one's own internal experience as a therapist, particularly in challenging, reactive therapeutic moments.
- Active empathic engagement, close to the here-and-now. "Practising an experiential therapy, EFT therapists are called on to step fully into the moment of their own and their clients' present moment experiencing."
- Transparency about the therapy process. The informal and conversational nature of making a therapy contract is discussed providing examples of how a therapist can provide partners with clarity about the therapy process and build task alliance.
- The final two elements in this section are "speaking clients' language" and how an EFT therapist can respond smoothly and helpfully to the common, yet daunting question, "Aren't you going to give us tools?"