

grief of an earlier pivotal moment — the loss of his beloved father.

The therapist heightens a felt sense of the bond he has with his father and he invites his father to come close to him in this shameful, nonsensical trauma scene. In so doing, his father's presence lifts him out of the guilt and shame he feels for the attack and makes it possible for him to integrate two aspects of self that were disconnected since the traumatic event.

In the final minutes of the session, in an EFT Tango Move 5, the therapist integrates and summarizes the experiences of the session, celebrating the power of his father's presence to help him reclaim

the lost aspect of himself and to release his shame. Celebrated as well, is the corrective emotional experience of no longer being alone in a helpless, powerless moment of danger, but connected in a powerful and transformative way with his father who had also survived severe trauma.

Witnessing the power of the EAR of EFIT is to experience the courage of the human spirit and the restoration that comes from connection. It is the courage and transformation that is rooted in our innate dyadic nature and need for safe connection.

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Practical Micro-Strategies for Dancing with the Dragons of Trauma



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EFT therapists working with trauma survivors can benefit from practical micro-strategies to help them develop positive templates of caring and comfort. Because trauma survivors have often not had security, care, and comfort in relationship to other people, establishing this experience can take longer and needs to be more intentional. This can be confusing and painstaking for therapists. Here we present practical strategies for helping to create secure connection for the first time.

Couples who enter EFT therapy with some experience of secure connection from their past or from an earlier time in their relationship may be able to

experience moments of positive contact, often from the very first session. With these couples, the EFT therapist can quickly get underneath secondary emotions and action tendencies to access more vulnerable emotions and attachment needs, successfully completing enactments that culminate in some kind of connection, even if brief.

For those individuals who grew up with no experience of secure connection, particularly for those who suffered attachment-related trauma, the road to those tiny, golden moments of connection in the beginning sessions of EFT is much longer and more arduous. Without an internal template of secure connection and with a negative view of self and others, many individuals cannot even imagine what taking in love feels like and cannot even picture what it would be like to turn to another human being for comfort.

Trauma survivors may ignore or rush past tender verbal and nonverbal messages expressed by their partner. The threatened brain's primary focus is to scan for danger and there is no bandwidth available to recognize safety. This is called the negativity bias in trauma survivors. Imagine the armor, sword, and

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shield of medieval knights with a tiny opening for the eyes. All incoming is expected to be dangerous. Furthermore, survivors of trauma have learned to avoid lingering in the present moment and being in their bodies. Hence, the difficulty for the EFT therapist whose mission it is to process emotion, is that survivors have developed finely honed defenses designed to stay away from emotion, keeping out potential pain but also blocking love and connection.

In the initial EFT sessions, the role of the therapist is to build security with the client. EFT therapists aim to be accessible, authentic, and to show unconditional positive regard. With trauma survivors, this beginning phase in EFT is likely to take longer, as the therapist is becoming a safe attachment figure to the client, who does not have an internal template for this kind of relationship. It may not only take longer for the therapist to understand the client and to reflect accurately what the client is saying, but it may also take more time for the client to grow to trust that the therapist is genuine and predictable.

Our goal is to help survivors slowly dismantle their armor to let in little bits of caring, gradually building new templates of trust in others and a view of self that is deserving of love. In other words, we are seeding attachment. We can orchestrate mini corrective emotional experiences with EFT, which allow survivors to recognize that their partner is not the same as the dangerous, hurtful dragons of their past and that the one they love can become their safe haven.

Use Grounding Concepts to Heighten Present Moment Experience

Typically, we will observe moments of missed, ignored or dismissed connection as we track the cycle (EFT Tango, Move 1) or in response to enactments (Tango, Move 4). We can use micro-strategies to focus the client's attention on a present moment experience of care, contact, or comfort from their partner, which their brain may have coded as danger. Focusing survivors on their sensory experience grounds them in the present moment, brings them into their body, offering the possibility of having a

positive attachment experience or helping them begin to identify blocks to connection.

Case Example with EFT Tango, Moves 1 and 2

We can reflect the client missing or ignoring their partner's expression of empathy or support (Tango, Move 1, reflect present process) and then connect them with their sensory experience with grounding evocative questions.

Stephen came into an early session distraught about his visit to his aging father earlier in the day. The therapist tracked the cycle to reveal that Stephen is easily triggered by anger at his father and when his partner, Jack, tries to soothe him, he experiences Jack as dismissing his pain and the couple's cycle then escalates. The therapist takes Stephen back to the moment when Jack reached out to him and stated, "When Stephen gets so upset about his father, I want to take him in my arms and soothe him. I hate to see him so distressed." Stephen ignored the comment as he continued to complain about his father and about how Jack irritated him because he felt that he was not listening to what he had to say.

Therapist: "Stephen, can I bring you back to the moment when Jack said, 'I want to take you in my arms.' What is happening in your body as you hear him say this?" (Tango, Move 2, assembling and deepening emotion.) Stephen looked around almost as if he was stunned. "Wow. I don't even feel my body. I am just in my head with the anger and irritation." Therapist: "What happens if you slow down and take a deep breath and feel your feet on the floor? What happens when you look at Jack and see his face as he looks at you with concern and love about your pain?"

In this instance, Stephen's triggering by his intense feelings about his father had taken him out of his body and he was not really present as Jack expressed his caring for him. Stephen was able to start to recognize that once his pain about his father gets triggered that he is no longer present for what is actually happening in the interaction between himself and his partner. This helped Stephen recognize that leaving his body prevented

him from being able to accept Jack's support as a resource. Eventually, this client was actually able to reach out to his partner for a hug when he became so distraught by his father, a process that took many sessions. This shift began with Stephen's awareness that he leaves his body and misses what is truly happening between himself and his partner when he is triggered by his pain over his father.

Case Example with EFT Tango, Move 4 (Processing the Enactment)

Alexa and Taylor are both trauma survivors. Taylor just completed an enactment (Tango, Move 3), sharing compassion for Alexa's feelings of loneliness. Alexa ignores Taylor's loving words and softened facial expression, rushing on to bring up a list of complaints about Taylor's past behavior. The therapist brings Alexa back to the present moment by asking her questions and referencing auditory, visual, and/or body-centered experiences, whichever is most salient.

Therapist: (Leaning in and speaking slowly and softly.) "Yes, I really hear you. You have felt so much hurt for so long and you have such good reason to keep track of a long list of those hurts. Would it be OK if we put a bookmark on that list and come back to it? (Pause for client to answer.) Your partner just took a big risk to open his heart to you. When you hear Taylor say _____," (insert client's key words from enactment), "What do you see in his eyes?" And/or, "What do you feel in your body? What do you feel in your body as Taylor puts his hand on your shoulder?" And/or, "What do you hear in his voice?"

Helping survivors stay in the present moment with their experience allows them to bypass their defenses, address the discomfort they feel with taking in caring, and leads the way to a deeper and more meaningful experience.

Validate the Client's Discomfort with Taking in Comfort, Care and Contact, and Slice it Thinner

When a client like Alexa expresses a sentiment such as, "I don't even know what it would look like to be comforted," the therapist can validate in an attuned

manner and reassure the client that it makes very good sense that their brain cannot understand such an experience, much like hearing a foreign language for the first time. The EFT therapist might reply in a soft and comforting tone, "Of course, of course you wouldn't know. How could you, when you haven't experienced that before. It's too hard to take this comfort in. You would have so much to lose if you start to believe that Taylor really cares for you, if you allow yourself to take this in and to depend on it. You could be so badly let down and you've been let down too much in life, right? Is that it? You can't afford to be hurt anymore and so you shut that message out?"

The therapist can help the client then explore the feelings of fear or distrust, "What happens inside when you see your partner's loving eyes?" Often it is hard for survivors to believe or trust such feelings. The therapist can then slice it thinner by asking, "What would it be like to tell your partner in your own words, 'I see the love in your eyes, but it is so hard for me to believe it. No one has ever really been there for me before. I know you try but it is truly hard to believe you because that is how it has always been for me. I cannot really take it in right now'?"

Use Metaphors

We can use metaphors to validate a client's difficulty with taking in care and comfort. Working with a trauma survivor husband in a live session, Kathryn collaborated with Spokane therapist, Stacy Card, to pursue the goal of going deeper into the husband's fears. The client's wife offered words of compassion and the husband struggled to take them in, expressing feelings of shame for not knowing what to do with her words of comfort and support. Kathryn used two metaphors to validate his struggle and also to support the possibility of future growth. Having used these metaphors for over 10 years, Kathryn is not sure whether she heard these metaphors from another therapist or if they are original.

As a child in South Africa, I was so distressed by the images of starving children I saw on TV suffering from the famine in Ethiopia. My wish was to make a huge feast to feed them all. Ultimately, I realized that when a child has a bloated belly from starvation, the

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child's stomach is tiny and only tiny bits of food can be digested. Giving them a feast would actually have hurt them rather than helped them.

Newborn baby birds have newborn stomachs, so they need to be fed slowly and gently with an eye dropper, drop by drop. Their little bellies grow day by day. Eventually, they can gulp down an entire worm! (Last sentence not for the squeamish client!)

Before using our metaphors with adjustments made to attune to each individual client, we suggest that each therapist first try to come up with their own metaphors that are attuned to the client's own unique language and/or framework. For example, some clients cannot tolerate any sweet or loving language or suggestion of weakness or vulnerability (i.e. being like a baby bird) and we need to adjust our metaphors accordingly.

Empower Clients to Set Limits on Whether to Go Deeper into Fears and Vulnerabilities

As EFT therapists, we want to be particularly transparent, patient and collaborative with survivors of trauma as we approach working with deeper and more vulnerable emotions. Offering clients a true choice as to whether to step into deeper waters is essential. When the client resists and says "no" to going deeper into fears, it may actually be a sign of health that they are asserting themselves in a more adaptive way rather than using old coping strategies. Because clients who have experienced abuse often did not have a voice and could not speak up to protect themselves, their taking a stand in the session and using their voice to say, "This is far enough for today," etc., is a big step for them.

Once again, the therapist can slice it thinner for the trauma survivor, offering an experience of empowerment and acceptance. The therapist might say, "Can you tell your partner, 'This is just too hard for me. I feel overwhelmed and feel that I have done all I can do for today. I am too tired and it feels too scary to go any further with this now.'" While the partner may become frustrated, the therapist can offer patience and acceptance for the survivor to be

as they are, offering new positive templates of self and other.

Survivors can be instantly and unexpectedly triggered in session, taking us by surprise and leaving us struggling to respond wisely. When we have a storehouse of strategies to draw upon, we will be less likely to be drawn into the dance with the dragon ourselves.

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ICEEFT News

2019 ICEEFT Awards

The 2019 **John Douglas Award** was presented to three people this year – selected for their exemplary efforts supporting ICEEFT on a volunteer basis – often behind the scenes.

They are: **David Von Kohorn** and **Bev Tuel** (North America); and **Ben Kneubühler** (Europe).

The 2019 **EFT Innovation Award** was presented to two individuals this year – selected for their dedication and unique contribution to helping to grow EFT and/or HMT.

They are: **Heather Tulloch** (Canada); and **Keijo Markova** (Finland).

Congratulations!

ICEEFT is pleased to congratulate:
Anne Belgram-Perkins
and **Andrea Pagani**
on becoming Certified EFT Trainers.
Well done!