Learning Objectives

1. Assess and understand relationship dynamics important to Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy.
2. Recognize the impact of trauma on secure adult attachments, and the impact of insecure adult attachments and marital conflict on trauma symptoms.
3. Use specific methods for integrating EMDR Therapy and Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy into couples counseling, utilizing the 8-steps and 3-prongs of EMDR Therapy.

Agenda:

- Introduction to / Basics of Emotionally Focused Therapy and Adult Attachment Theory
- Impact of Trauma on Attachment and Relationship, and the impact of secure attachment on trauma symptoms
- Specific methods of integration
- Questions
EFT

- History and Background
- Integrative
  • Experiential and Systemic
  • Foundation of attachment theory

Couple Therapy Based on Attachment Theory:

1. Focuses on attachment needs and forms of engagement and disengagement.
2. Privileges emotion – the music of the attachment dance.
3. Creates the therapy session as a secure base.
5. Addresses impasses – attachment injuries.

Attachment Theory and Couple Therapy

This perspective offers:

- A map to the territory of distress and relationship
- A focus – A compass in internal emotional moments and interpersonal dramas
- A picture of transforming moves and moments in the process of the shaping of a secure bond
- A goal for therapy – an end point. Not just conflict containment.
EFT is an Experiential Approach

- All knowledge is experience. Everything else is just information.
  - Einstein

- Change occurs in therapy through a “Corrective emotional experience.”
  - Frank

Systemic Theory

- Causality is circular
- We must consider behavior in context
- The elements of a system have a predictable and patterned relationship
- All behavior has a communicative aspect
- Our task is to interrupt negative cycles of interaction so that new, more adaptive patterns can emerge

Empathic Responsiveness is the Essence of EFT

- The empathic responsiveness of the therapist creates safety. The goal is to guide partners into this responsiveness with each other.

Most Basic EFT Intervention: Empathic Reflection

- Validates – creates alliance & safety
- Focuses a session – repetition is key
- Slows processing – encourages engagement
- Better organizes – distills – creates coherence

“Grasp the moment as it flies.”
Radical Attunement/Empathic Responsiveness

“To listen is to continually give up all expectation and to give our attention, completely and freshly, to what is before us, not really knowing what we will hear or what that will mean. In the practice of our days, to listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.”

- Mark Nepo

Let’s Keep It Simple

– It’s all about responding to each other!

9 Steps of EFT (3 Stages)

1) Assessment
2) Identify negative cycle/attachment issues
3) Access underlying attachment emotions
4) Frame problem – cycle, attachment needs
5) Assess implicit needs, fears, model of self
6) Promote acceptance by other
7) Structure emotional engagement
8) Facilitate the emergence of new solutions to old relationship problems
9) Consolidate new positions and new cycles of attachment behaviors
### The Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions/Attributions</td>
<td>Perceptions/Attributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Emotion</td>
<td>Secondary Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Emotion</td>
<td>Primary Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet Attachment Needs</td>
<td>Unmet Attachment Needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### What is emotion?

- Emotion – an exquisitely efficient information-processing and signaling system
  - The great motivator
  - The great communicator

### Emotion in EFT

- Cue – Rapid appraisal – body arousal – meaning/reappraisal – action tendency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Emotion</th>
<th>Action Tendency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>assert/defend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>flee, freeze, give up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>seek support/withdraw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgust/Shame</td>
<td>hide, expel, avoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise/Excitement</td>
<td>attend/explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>contact/engage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Brain

- The brain is so relational that our nervous system is actually “constructed to be captured by the nervous systems of others, so that we can experience others as if from within their skin, as well as from within our own.”
  - Dan Stern, University of Geneva

Love Shapes the Brain

- Early interactions and brain development – “What fires together wires together”
- Early interactions organize the right brain
- Early interactions tune the social brain
- Survival of the fittest or Survival of the most nurtured?

The Science of Attachment
Attachment Theory:  
A Map to the Landscape of Love

1. Seeking and maintaining contact is a prime motivation  
Isolation is traumatizing!

2. A secure connection offers a safe haven to go to and a secure base from which to engage the world  
Needs for connection, comfort and caring are key. The more connected you are, the more separate and autonomous you can be.

3. Accessibility and Responsiveness builds bonds.

Attachment Theory:  
A Map to the Landscape of Love

4. Disconnection cues Separation Distress – A predictable process
   1. Protest
   2. Cling and Seek
   3. Depression and Despair
   4. Detachment

Attachment Theory:  
A Map to the Landscape of Love

5. Emotion is the music of the attachment dance.  
  Gives salience  
  Colors Events  
  Cues and organizes the dance  
  Has control precedence
Attachment Theory: 
A Map to the Landscape of Love

6. There is a finite set of predictable strategies in the drama of distress:

- Anxious – up the ante – “I’ll make you respond to me”
- Avoidant – Cool your jets – “I couldn’t care less”
- Anxious Avoidant (Fearful, Disorganized, Chaotic) – “Come here...don’t touch!”

Key Features of Secure Attachment in Strange Situations

2. When attachment figure returns, child gives clear unambiguous cues. (Asks for needs to be met without defensiveness)
3. When attachment figure responds, child trusts and takes in comfort – reassurance – is calmed and soothed.
4. Child then turns attention to environment, climbs down from mother’s lap – plays with toys – takes risks – engages in tasks/activities with confidence.

*Same process occurs in adult couples.*

A sense of “Felt Security” in a relationship is linked to:

1. Better affect regulation
   - Less reactivity (anger and protest)
   - Cling and Seek
   - Depression and Despair
   - Detachment
2. Better information processing
   - More flexibility, curiosity, openness
   - Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty
A sense of “Felt Security” in a relationship is linked to:

1. Better communication
   - More ability to collaborate, to meta-communicate, to be disclosing, assertive and empathetic
2. Sense of Self is more:
   - Coherent
   - Elaborated
   - Articulated
   - Positive

Safe Connection as the Antidote to Trauma

- Traumatic experience floods us with fear and helplessness
- Secure attachment soothes and comforts
- Trauma colors the world as dangerous and unpredictable
- Secure attachment offers a safe haven
- Trauma creates overwhelming emotional crises
- Secure attachment promotes affect regulation/integration
- Trauma threatens a cohesive sense of self
- Secure attachment promotes personality integration
- Trauma assails self efficacy and a sense of control
- Secure attachment promotes confidence/trust in self and others
- Trauma scrambles the ability to engage fully in the present
- Secure attachment promotes openness to experience, risk taking and new learning

The Vicious Cycle
The symptoms of trauma can make safe and secure connection very difficult!

Insecure attachment and relationship distress, compound the symptoms of trauma.

Our Research

Fort Hood, TX
2014-2015
Research Questions

1. Will participants who receive both EMDR and EFT have a greater increase in marital attachment than those who receive just EFT, and the control group?

2. Will participants who receive both EMDR and EFT have a greater increase in marital satisfaction than those who receive just EFT, and the control group?

3. Will participants who receive both EMDR and EFT have a greater reduction in posttraumatic stress symptoms, as compared to those who receive just EMDR, and the control group?

4. Will participants who receive both EMDR and EFT show a greater increase in posttraumatic growth, as compared to those who receive just EMDR, and the control group?

Independent Variables

- EMDR Only
- Emotionally Focused Therapy Only
- Combined
- No Treatment (Control Group)

Measures/Instrumentation

- Demographic Questionnaire
- Posttraumatic Checklist (PCL-M)
- Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS)
- Experiences in Close Relationships – Short (ECR-S)
- Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI)
Research Design

- Quantitative, Between Groups, Quasi-Experimental

- n = 80, Existing Groups, 4 Groups:
  - Group 1: Control Group, n = 20
  - Group 2: EFT Only, n = 20
  - Group 3: EMDR Only, n = 20
  - Group 4: EFT and EMDR, n = 20

Procedures

- Participants were military members and military spouses attending counseling at the Family Life Chaplain Training Center, Fort Hood, TX
- Participants were administered a demographic questionnaire
- Participants were administered the RDAS, the ECR-S, the PCL-M, and the PGI - pre- and post-treatment
- Existing groups received either EMDR, EFCT, or a combined protocol
- A control group received pre and post tests, but no treatment

Results

H₁: Participants who receive both EMDR and EFT will have a greater increase in adult attachment scores on the ECR-S than those who receive just EFT, and the control group.

Rejected Combined approach brought the greatest gains in adult attachment (M = 6.00), but not enough to be statistically significant (p = .03).
Results

H3: Participants who receive both EMDR and EFT will have a greater reduction in trauma symptoms, as measured by the PCL-M or PCL-C, than those who receive just EMDR, and the control group.

Rejected Combined approach experienced considerable reduction in trauma symptoms ($M = -10.15$), but not as much as the EMDR only group ($M = -12.25$).

Results

H4: Participants who receive both EMDR and EFT will have a greater increase in posttraumatic growth, as measured by the PTGI, than those who receive just EMDR, and the control group.

Rejected Combined approach showed very little posttraumatic growth ($M = 0.70$). The EMDR only group had the most posttraumatic growth ($M = 9.00$).
Bottom line...

The inclusion of EMDR in EFT brought greater gains in both marital satisfaction and marital attachment, while decreasing trauma symptoms.

*The most significant finding was the positive effect of EMDR on marital satisfaction.

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Application

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Precautions

- Be cautious with conjoint
  - How safe is the relationship?
  - …anything you say…can be used against you

- Contraindications for EFT:
  - Substance Abuse
  - Domestic Violence
Several Approaches

- Perhaps the ideal...multiple therapists
- Integration of calm/safe place, self-regulation, and resource development into couples sessions
- Consider timing and order of integration
- EMD and EMDr

Please feel free to contact me at:

Mark R. Knox, PhD, DMin, LMFT-S
sfchpln@gmail.com
www.safehavenhealingranch.com

References


References


