Therapist’s Core Competencies in Utilizing Emotionally Focused Therapy

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Four Essential EFT Process Skills
1. CREATING AND MAINTAINING AN ALLIANCE
   A. Creating a safe, responsive, therapeutic atmosphere and rapport with each partner
   B. Taking a genuine, collaborative, non-pathologizing, and accepting stance
   C. Continually monitoring the alliance and actively working to repair ruptures

2. CREATING A NEW NARRATIVE (an Experientially Derived Attachment Narrative)
   A. Empathically exploring how each partner constructs his/her experience of the relationship
      a. Negative sequences and patterns (pursue/withdraw)
      b. Underlying emotional experience (primary emotion/view of self & other)
      c. Attachment needs and experience (closeness, loss, aloneness)
   B. Delineating and framing the negative sequences and cycles of interaction as the enemy, not one’s self or one’s partner
   C. Piecing together and framing an attachment narrative
      a. Reflecting attachment themes in how both partner’s behavior, perceptions, and miss couple’s longings for connection
      b. “Seeding” possibilities of a safe, responsive attachment relationship

3. CREATING NEW EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE
   A. Accessing, exploring, heightening one partner’s experience of the cycle, attachment needs and view of self and other
      a. First—validating secondary (reactive, defensive) emotion
      b. Second—evoking, expanding, and heightening underlying primary emotional experience using RISSSC
   B. Formulating and owning the emerging emotional experience
      a. Supporting the experiencer and validating the new experience
      b. Making sense of and putting into words newly evoked experience, integrating it into sense of self and other
   C. Preparing the experiencing partner to engage the other with newly evoked experience by processing fears of engaging and imagining possibilities of connection

4. CREATING NEW INTERACTIONS
   A. Supporting one partner to engage the other through an enactment
   B. Processing the reach or risk of the newly engaged experience
   C. Processing the receiving partner’s reaction
   D. Fostering emerging bonding interactions

**Empathic Attunement (includes Reflection)**—Therapist communicates that s/he is clearly tracking with the client’s experience. Often these are short utterances and body language that join with what the client is experiencing in the moment. It uses an accepting stance that tries to “lean into” the client’s experience. Can expand into restating and mirroring client communication
**Validation**—Therapist reinforces that each partner is entitled to his/her emotional response and experience. A clear message is given teach partner that there is nothing wrong or deficient about one’s response. Validation is important both for present responses and especially for newly expressed primary emotion.

Example—“Yes, when you are in this kind of pain, of course you have a hard time concentrating, that is completely normal.”

Main Functions: Legitimizes responses and supports clients to continue to explore how they construct their experience and their interactions. It also build alliance.

**Evocative Responding**—Therapist elicits and captures the implicit aspects of a client’s experience in a tentative manner. The therapist will often ask questions about a client’s present experience including internal responses and reactions to in-session dynamics.

Examples—a) “What’s happening right now, as you say ‘what about the kids?’ What’s that like for you?” b) “Your face just seemed to change now, can you tell me what is happening for you right now?”

Main Functions: Increases awareness and expands elements of experience to help reorganize the experience; accesses unclear or marginalized elements of experience and encourages exploration and engagement.

**Heightening**—Therapist highlights specific responses or interactions to intensify a client’s emotional experience. This enables the client to better engage his/her experience as it is made more evident.

Examples—a) “so you want to crawl into a ball, a tight ball, this is painful, so painful, when he says he still loves her, it hurts so deep, it’s so painful, so difficult that you just want to crawl into a tight ball.” b) “It seems like this is so hard for you, like climbing a cliff, it so scary, you’re right on the edge, it’s awful.” c) “Can you turn to him and tell him, ‘it’s too hard to ask. It’s too hard to ask you to take my hand?’”

Main Functions—Highlights and intensifies key emotions, experiences and new formulations of experience that help reorganize the interaction and relationship as important and yet vulnerable.

**Reflecting Underlying Emotions**—Therapist offers reflections that draw upon emotions not immediately apparent to the client(s). Often these emotions are acted upon as the therapist raises the couple’s awareness.

Example—“Of course you close up because this arguing is so painful, so awful that you just close up. Am I getting that right?”

Main Functions: Focuses the therapy process; clarifies emotional responses underlying interactional positions.

**Empathic Conjecture**—Therapist works on the “leading edge” of a client’s experience to move the client forward in his/her experience such that a new meaning can emerge. Often these conjectures address the attachment fears related to self and others.

Examples—a) “You don’t believe it’s possible that anyone could see this part of you and still accept you, is that right?” b) “I am getting the idea that underneath your frustration you may feel some sadness. Am I getting that right, that really you are feeling loss and and sadness.”
Main Functions—Promotes a more intense awareness of emotional experience, meanings, or action tendencies.

**Reframing**—Therapist reframes each partner’s behavior in terms of the attachment needs and wants informing each partner’s position in the relationship.

Examples—a) “you freeze because you feel like you’re right on the edge of losing her, is that right?” b) “You freeze because she matters so much to you, not because you don’t care.”

Main Functions—Shifts the meaning of specific responses, clarifies their attachment significance, and fosters more positive perceptions of the partner.

**Restructuring Interactions**—Therapist offers a directive for the couple, which builds on a new emotional experience and seeks a new response to one’s partner. This shift challenges the couple’s old relationship patterns and links the intrapsychic focus of the previous work to an interpersonal action.

Examples—
Tracking, reflecting and replaying interactions—“So what just happened here? It seemed like you turned from your anger for a moment and appealed to him. Is that right? But Jim, you were still paying attention to the anger and stayed behind your barricade, yes?”

Main Function—Slows down and clarifies steps in the interactional dance

Reframing in the context of the cycle and attachment processes—“You freeze because you feel like one wrong move could end up with you losing her, is that right? You freeze because she matters so much to you, not because you don’t care.”

Main Function—Shifts the meaning of specific responses, clarifies their attachment significance, and fosters more positive perceptions of the partner.

Restructure and shape interactions (enactments)—a) “can you turn and tell him directly, ‘that really hurt me.’” b) “this is the first time you’ve mentioned being ashamed. Could you tell him about that shame?” c) “Can you ask him right here, right now for what you need?”

Main Function—Clarifies and expands negative interactions patterns, creates new kinds of dialogue, new interactional processes and bonding events; lead to positive cycles of accessibility and responsiveness.

**Disquisition**—Rarely used intervention used with highly resistive or traumatized client where the therapeutic offering is offered in an indirect way,