

Emotionally Focused Therapy: Transforming Relationships

When Deborah Curtis, a United Methodist LICSW in Massachusetts, went for training in Emotionally Focused Therapy, she discovered an approach that has transformed her work with couples and has become her passion. She and another counselor, Naomi B. Rather, Ph.D., LCMHC, have launched a series of free podcasts to make these concepts and tools more accessible to couples. These podcasts would be excellent to share with your congregation. Hopefully you already make it clear that marriage is an ongoing process that can nurture personal growth and that there are wonderful resources to help couples work through the inevitable challenges of an intimate relationship. To access these podcasts (thirteen now available, with new ones added regularly), search at iTunes for “The Couch - Where marriage counselors have conversations about relationships” or follow this link: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/couch-where-marriage-counselors-have-conversations/id1236438115?mt=2>

Deborah describes Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy as the only scientifically studied and validated couples therapy with a 75% effectiveness rate. Based on the theory of adult attachment, that we humans are wired for love and connection, EFT teaches that distress in intimate relationships is related to deeply rooted fears of losing this connection and our significant other. An individual’s automatic response to these fears can be harmful to the relationship and may cause a couple to get caught up in a negative pattern because we often assign meanings to each other’s behavior that may or may not be true. EFT therapists work to help couples understand these negative patterns and restore the connection by learning to talk about these underlying emotions in a way that helps to improve and secure the bond rather than create distance. EFT was developed by Canadian psychologist Dr. Sue Johnson.

Deborah and Naomi have also created a website (<http://seacoast-efl.com/>), where you can learn more about Emotionally Focused Therapy and upcoming training events in or near New England and access helpful resources. Click on “Help for Couples” to open and download four worksheets that explain negative cycles and how to change them. You can learn more about Emotionally Focused Therapy at <https://iceeft.com/> and <http://www.dr.suejohnson.com/>. To find therapists in your area, visit <https://iceeft.com/find-a-therapist/>. Learn about an interactive online course at www.holdmetightonline.com.

The following books would be excellent additions to your church library and resources for groups of couples and groups of individuals interested in strengthening their relationships: *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (Sue Johnson, 2008); *Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships* (Sue Johnson, 2013); *An Emotionally Focused Workbook for Couples: The Two of Us* (Veronica Kallos-Lilly and Jennifer Fitzgerald, 2014); and *Created for Connection: The “Hold Me Tight” Guide for Christian Couples* (Sue Johnson and Kenneth Sanderfer, 2016). Therapists and counselors might be interested Sue Johnson’s 2004 work *The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy: Creating Connection (Basic Principles into Practice Series)* and training information available on the websites.

When we provide our congregations and communities with the most effective resources for living out their faith in their personal lives and relationships, we truly “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Strengthening the love bond of married couples transforms families into wellsprings of love and healing, empowering its members to serve as instruments of God’s love and peace for everyone with whom they interact and for the communities of which they are a part.

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