Emotion-Focused Therapy

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Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) Approach

- Integration of person-centered & gestalt therapies
  - Person-centered relational base plus methods from gestalt therapy
- Also known as: “Process-Experiential”:
  - Emphasis on client experiencing
  - Process orientation; use of stepwise process models
- “Emotion-Focused Therapy”
  - Emotion as the center of the change process in therapy
  - Builds on contemporary theory and research on human emotion
EFT: Distinctive Features

1. **Neo-humanistic**: Revival/ reformulation of humanistic/ experiential approach to therapy
2. **Emotion-focused**: Emotional awareness and reprocessing as central to client change
3. **Relational stance**: Active following of content with some direction of process
4. **Exploratory therapist response style**: Empathic exploration responses, exploratory questions
5. **Marker-guided**: Client indicators signal readiness for specific therapeutic tasks
6. **Evidence-based**: Grounded in research on client change processes; supported by outcome research
Humanistic Assumptions & Values

1. Presence/Authenticity. People function best and are best helped through authentic, person-to-person relationships.

2. Experiencing. Immediate experiencing is the basis of human thought, feeling and action.

3. Agency/Self-determination. Human beings are fundamentally free to choose what to do and how to construct their worlds.

4. Holism. People are greater than the sum of their parts, and cannot be understood by focusing on single aspects.

5. Pluralism/Egalitarianism. At the same time, differences within and between people should be recognized, tolerated and even prized.

6. Growth. People have a natural tendency toward psychological growth and development that continues throughout the life span.
Theory: Emotions are Fundamentally Adaptive

- The way we construct reality is highly emotionally based; emotions direct attention
- Emotions tell us what is personally important (provide information)
  - Emotions help us to survive by providing an efficient, automatic way of responding rapidly to important situations
- Emotions integrate experience; give it meaning, value & direction
- Emotions prepare us for action: emotions generate wishes/needs, which generate action
EFT Emotion Theory: Basic concepts

1. Emotion Schemes:
   - Organize experience around particular emotions

2. Emotion Response Types:
   - Primary Adaptive, Primary Maladaptive, Secondary Reactive, Instrumental

3. Emotion Regulation:
   - Accessing & moderating emotion as appropriate for situation
Two Summaries of EFT Emotion Theory:

I. Client Version:

A. Why Emotions are Important:
   1. They tell us what is important to us.
   2. They tell us what we need or want, and that helps us figure out what to do.
   3. They give us a sense of consistency and wholeness.

B. Three main ways to get stuck in emotions:
   1. Ignore important aspects of our emotions: Sometimes we get stuck in an emotion because we’re missing an important piece of it.
   2. Use other emotions to cover up adaptive emotions: The most useful emotion is sometimes underneath the most obvious emotion.
   3. Let our emotions get out of whack: Sometimes the level of emotion is too much or too little.
II. Therapist Version: Change Principles of Emotional Processing

1. In general, promote emotional awareness/symbolization (Emotion scheme model)

2. With overwhelming emotions, promote emotion regulation

3. With undifferentiated, avoided or secondary emotions, help clients deepen and differentiate experience: “You have to arrive at an emotion before you can leave it.”

4. With maladaptive emotions, change emotion with emotion: Help client transform or replace maladaptive emotion with more adaptive emotion (Withdrawal <=> Approach emotions)

5. With adaptive emotions, promote access to the related needs, and expression to others/self

6. After emotion work, promote reflection and development of meaning perspective
Theory in Practice: PE Therapy Principles - 1: Relationship Principles:

- Facilitate safe, productive relationship:
  - 1. Empathic Attunement: Enter, track C’s immediate & evolving experiencing
  - 2. Therapeutic Bond: Express empathy, caring and presence to C (bond aspect of alliance)
  - 3. Task Collaboration: Facilitate mutual involvement in goals and tasks of therapy (task/goal aspect of alliance)
PE Therapy Principles - 2: Task Principles

- Facilitate work on specific therapeutic tasks
  - 4. Experiential Processing: Foster relevant client micro-processes (e.g., attending, experiential search, active expression, interpersonal contact; self-reflection, action planning)
  - 5. Task Completion/Focus: Facilitate client completion of key therapeutic tasks
  - 6. Self-development: Foster client new experiencing, inner strength, agency or empowerment
Therapeutic Tasks

- From research on human problem-solving
  - Research method: Task Analysis
- Clients bring specific immediate problems (cognitive-affective tasks) to sessions
- Elements of a therapeutic Task:
  - 1. Marker: observable sign that client may be ready to work on a problem
  - 2. Client steps to resolution
    - Measured by 6-point Degree of resolution scale
  - 3. Therapist interventions: What therapist can do to help client resolve
  - 4. Resolution state: What resolution looks like
# EFT Client Tasks – 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Marker</th>
<th>Task Intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Empathy-based Tasks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Problem-Relevant Experience (≠generic task)</td>
<td>Empathic Exploration</td>
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<td>2. Vulnerability (painful emotion related to self)</td>
<td>Empathic Affirmation</td>
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<td><strong>B. Relational Tasks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Beginning of therapy</td>
<td>Alliance Formation</td>
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<td>4. Therapeutic Alliance Problem (complaint or withdrawal)</td>
<td>Alliance Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Experiencing Tasks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Attentional Focus Difficulty (confused, overwhelmed, blank)</td>
<td>Clearing a Space (from Focusing)</td>
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<td>6. Unclear Feeling (vague, external, abstract)</td>
<td>Experiential Focusing</td>
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<td>Task Marker</td>
<td>Task Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>D. Reprocessing Tasks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Narrative Marker</td>
<td>Trauma Retelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>(internal pressure to tell difficult life stories; e.g., trauma)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Meaning Protest</td>
<td>Meaning Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>(life event violates cherished belief)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Problematic Reaction Point</td>
<td>Systematic</td>
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<tr>
<td>(puzzling over-reaction to a situation)</td>
<td>Evocative</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfolding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task Marker</td>
<td>Task Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>E. Enactment Tasks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10. Self-Evaluative Split</strong> (Self-criticism, tornness)</td>
<td>Two-Chair Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11. Self- Interruption Split</strong> (Blocked feelings, resignation)</td>
<td>Two-Chair Enactment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12. Unfinished Business</strong> (Lingering bad feeling re: significant other)</td>
<td>Empty Chair Work</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13. Anguish</strong> (Stuck, disregulated emotional pain)</td>
<td>Compassionate Self-Soothing</td>
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Two Chair Work for Conflict Splits

A. Conflict Split Marker
   1. Two wishes or action tendencies
   2. Description of contradiction, conflict between
   3. Expression of struggle, coercion

Prototypical Split = Decisional conflict

Experience: uncomfortable "tornness"

Alternative Forms:
   1. Self-Evaluation (criticizing yourself) (e.g., Depression)
   2. Coaching splits (forcing yourself)
   3. Self-interruption (blocking yourself)
   4. Attribution splits (projecting your conflict on other people (e.g., Social Anxiety))
Two Chair Dialogue for Conflict Splits: Client Resolution Model

- Role Play
  - Critic
    - Harsh criticisms
    - Specific criticisms
    - Values standards
    - Softening
      - Negotiation
      - Integration

- Role play Experiencer
  - Affective reaction
  - Differentiated feelings
  - Emerging experiences
  - Wants and needs

Self Critical Marker

Secondary Maladaptive Adaptive
Two Chair Work: Client Process Steps/ Task Resolution Scale

<table>
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<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Marker/Task Initiation</td>
<td>Describes split in which one aspect of self is critical of, or coercive toward, another aspect. Broadly: Describes two aspects, whether attributed or in somatic form.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Entry</td>
<td>Clearly expresses criticisms, expectations, or &quot;shoulds&quot; to self in concrete, specific manner.</td>
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<td>3. Deepening</td>
<td>Primary underlying feelings/needs begin to emerge in response to the criticisms. Critic differentiates values/standards.</td>
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<td>4. Emerging shift</td>
<td>Clearly expresses needs and wants associated with a newly experienced feeling.</td>
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<td>5. Softening</td>
<td>Genuinely accepts own feelings and needs. May show compassion, concern and respect for self.</td>
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<td>6. Negotiation</td>
<td>Clear understanding of how various feelings, needs and wishes may be accommodated and how previously antagonistic sides of self may be reconciled.</td>
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## Two Chair Work: Therapist Facilitative Responses

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<tr>
<td>1. Marker/Task Initiation</td>
<td>Identify client marker (including pre-marker work)&lt;br&gt;• Elicit client collaboration in task</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Entry</td>
<td>Structure (set up) experiment&lt;br&gt;• Facilitate separation &amp; contact between parts&lt;br&gt;• Promote client owning of experience&lt;br&gt;• Intensify client arousal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Deepening</td>
<td>Access and differentiate underlying feelings in the experiencing self&lt;br&gt;• Differentiate values and standards in the critical aspect&lt;br&gt;• Facilitate identification, expression of values, standards or acting upon organismic need&lt;br&gt;• If needed, bring contact to an appropriate close (=stopping without resolution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emerging shift</td>
<td>Facilitate emergence of new organismic feelings&lt;br&gt;• Help Client create meaning perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Softening</td>
<td>Facilitate softening in critic (into fear or compassion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negotiation</td>
<td>Facilitate negotiation between aspects of self re: practical compromises</td>
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Practical Suggestions for Chairwork:
Allow creativity, flexibility

- Don't follow rigidly - adopt "experimental attitude"
- Follow evolving/deepening splits
  - Use as exploration tool; don't set resolution as a standard of "success": e.g., clarifying impasse can be useful step
- Provide “coaching” such as:
  - Repetition/heightening
  - Dramatizing/enacting
- "Side trips" are OK (e.g., mini-unfinished business within split)
Introducing Chairwork to Clients

- **Prior use** of language/framework
- **Start with clear markers**
- Use **Experiential Teaching**: Explain purpose (clarify, get to deeper issues, identify central underlying needs, values)
- Use “**nonheavy**” manner: gentle; humor; propose as "experiment"; but not wishy-washy
- Be sensitive to **client "safety"** issues (depth/intensity, self-consciousness, performance fears)
- **Respect but explore** client discomfort, refusal (exploring refusal may prove very useful)
Book: Elliott et al. (2004). Learning Emotion-Focused Therapy

websites:

- Robert Elliott:
  - www.process-experiential.org

- Les Greenberg:
  - www.emotionfocusedclinic.org

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