Mastering Competencies in Family Therapy

CHAPTER 11

Emotionally Focused Therapy

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Emotionally Focused Therapy

- One of the most thoroughly researched approaches in the field, an empirically validated treatment for couples
- Sue Johnson & Les Greenberg developed the model using a combination of
  - Attachment theory
  - Experiential theory
  - System theory

Softening Emotions

- Hallmark EFT technique used to create emotional bonding, change interactional patterns, and redefine the relationship as safe and connected
- Softening refers to the more critical partner’s softening his or her stance and words, allowing the other partner to reduce their reactivity

Significant Contributions to the Field

Emotionally Focused Contributors

- Susan Johnson with Les Greenberg developed EFT in the 1980's by refining methods based on the outcomes of their research on what worked and what did not
- Sue Johnson has continued research on the model and teaches internationally
- Les Greenberg has refined a version of the model he calls Emotion-Focused Therapy
Overview of Therapy Process

Three primary **therapeutic tasks**
1. Creation and maintenance of alliance
2. Assessing and formulating emotion
3. Restructuring interactions
   - **Three stages** with nine steps
     - Stage 1: De-escalation of negative cycles
     - Stage 2: Change interactional patterns
     - Stage 3: Consolidation and integration

The Therapeutic Relationship

- Empathic attunement
- Acceptance
- Genuineness
- Continuous monitoring of the alliance
- Joining the system
- Therapist role
- Expression of empathy: RISSSC

RISSSC

- The RISSSC technique is designed to express understanding of the client’s **affective reality**
- The technique uses the **following steps**:
  - Repeat
  - Image
  - Simple
  - Slow
  - Soft
  - Client’s words

Case Conceptualization

- Intrapsychic and Interpersonal Foci
  - Intrapsychic: how individuals process their experiences
  - Interpersonal: how partners organize their interactions into patterns and cycles
- Attachment and adult love
- Primary and secondary emotions
- Negative interaction cycle
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Goal Setting

Goals in EFT include:
- Creating secure attachment for both partners
- Developing new interaction patterns that nurture and support each partner
- Increasing direct expression of emotions, especially those related to attachment needs

Interventions

- Reflection of emotion
- Validation
- Evocative responding: Reflections and questions
- Heightening
- Empathetic conjecture and interpretation

Interventions (continued)

- Tracking and reflecting interaction patterns
- Contextual reframing of problems
- Enactments, restructuring, and choreography
- Turning new emotional experience into a new response to the partner
- Self-disclosure

Snapshot: Research/Evidence Base

- Excellent research support for EFT
- With the exception of EFT, there has been minimal outcome research done on the effectiveness of other experiential family therapies
- Researched for over 25 years, EFT currently one of the only empirically validated couples therapy
Working with Diverse Populations

- Experiential approaches are used internationally, especially EFT and Satir’s Growth Model.
- Approaches should be carefully adapted for patterns of and attitudes towards emotional expression in specific subpopulations and or cultures.