

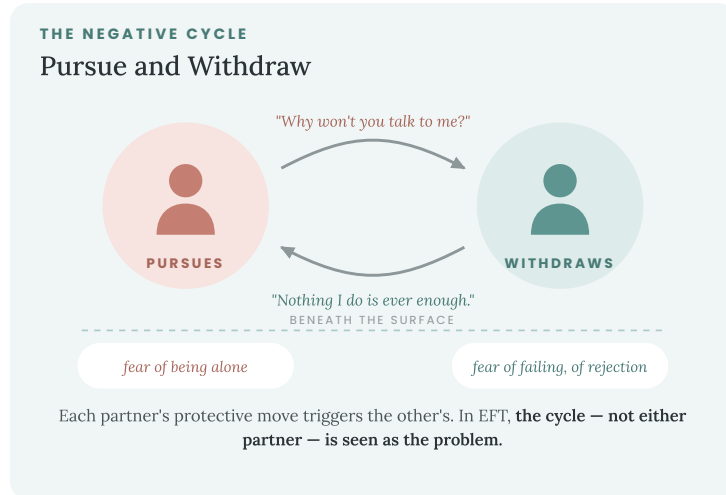
Sue Johnson

EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED THERAPY

Clinical psychologist (1947–2024) · Co-developer of Emotionally Focused Therapy · Founder of ICEEFT, Ottawa

Dr Sue Johnson co-developed Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) with Leslie Greenberg in the 1980s. Drawing on Bowlby's attachment theory, she proposed that adult love is an attachment bond — and that relationship distress often reflects fear of losing secure connection.

The Heart of the Model Attachment needs beneath the conflict



WHAT SECURE BONDS NEED

A.R.E. — "Are You There for Me?"

The core attachment question in her work

A

Accessible

Can I reach you? Will you stay open to me?

R

Responsive

Can I rely on you to respond to my feelings and needs?

E

Engaged

Do I know you will value me and stay emotionally close?

Anger, criticism or shutting down are often understood as protests or protection when these needs feel threatened.

The "Demon Dialogues" Three common negative patterns she describes in *Hold Me Tight*

Find the Bad Guy

ATTACK — ATTACK

Both partners blame and criticise, each trying to protect themselves.

The Protest Polka

PURSUE — WITHDRAW

One reaches out with protest; the other pulls away to avoid conflict.

Freeze and Flee

WITHDRAW — WITHDRAW

Both partners shut down, leaving the relationship distant and cold.

How EFT Works Three stages, nine steps

STAGE 1 · STEPS 1–4

De-escalation

- Build a safe therapeutic alliance
- Identify the negative cycle
- Access the emotions beneath it
- Reframe the cycle as the shared enemy

STAGE 2 · STEPS 5–7

Restructuring the Bond

- Explore deeper fears and needs
- Help each partner accept the other's experience
- Withdrawer re-engages; blamer softens

STAGE 3 · STEPS 8–9

Consolidation

- Find new solutions to old problems
- Strengthen new, secure ways of connecting
- Create a shared story of repair

Hold Me Tight & the Research From her bestselling guide and decades of study

HOLD ME TIGHT (2008)

Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love

- 1 Recognising the demon dialogues
- 2 Finding the raw spots — old sensitivities
- 3 Revisiting a rocky moment
- 4 Hold me tight — reaching and responding
- 5 Forgiving injuries
- 6 Bonding through sex and touch
- 7 Keeping your love alive

THE EVIDENCE BASE

A Well-Researched Approach

~70%
RECOVERED

An early meta-analysis found around 70% of couples **recovered from distress** after EFT, with a large effect size.

2 yrs
FOLLOW-UP

Later studies found gains in relationship satisfaction were **largely maintained** over time.

fMRI
STUDY

After EFT, holding a partner's hand **reduced the brain's response to threat** in a small imaging study.

+

Extended to individuals (EFIT) and families (EFFT).

The problem is the cycle, not the person — and connection is the antidote.

WHAT IS OUR MOST COMMON CYCLE?

WHAT FEAR MIGHT LIE BENEATH MY REACTION?

HOW COULD I REACH FOR — OR RESPOND TO — MY PARTNER?

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