

What Is Emotion-Focused Therapy?

A psychoeducation guide for clients

What Is EFT?

Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) is a research-supported approach developed by Dr. Leslie Greenberg and Dr. Sue Johnson. It is grounded in the idea that **emotions are not problems to be managed — they are guides to be understood.**

EFT helps you access, make sense of, and transform the emotional experiences that shape how you see yourself, relate to others, and move through the world.

The Core Belief Behind EFT

EFT is built on one foundational idea:

"You cannot leave a place you have never arrived at."

To change how you feel, you first have to fully feel it.

Many of us learned early on — often without words — that certain emotions are too dangerous, too shameful, or too much. EFT gently helps you go back and make contact with those emotions in a safe, supported way.

What EFT Is — and Is Not

EFT IS:

- Collaborative and non-directive
- Focused on emotion as information
- Present-moment and experiential
- Trauma-sensitive and paced carefully
- Evidence-based for depression, anxiety, trauma, and relationship distress
- Suitable for individuals and couples

EFT IS NOT:

- About venting or catharsis for its own sake
- Re-traumatizing or crisis-inducing
- Telling you what to feel or think
- Only for people in crisis or severe distress
- A replacement for medication where clinically indicated
- One-size-fits-all — it is tailored to you

How EFT Works: The Core Tasks

Your therapist will work with you through a set of experiential tasks. These are not scripts — they emerge naturally from what comes up in session.

#	Task	What This Looks Like
1	Empathic Attunement	Your therapist listens closely to what you're experiencing and reflects it back — not just the words, but the emotion underneath. You feel genuinely heard.
2	Emotion Awareness	You begin to notice and name what you're feeling, including emotions that are usually avoided or unclear. Awareness is the first step to change.
3	Emotion Regulation	Your therapist helps you stay present with difficult feelings without being overwhelmed — working within your window of tolerance.
4	Emotional Exploration	You explore what the emotion is telling you — what unmet need, fear, or longing is underneath it. Emotions always carry a message.
5	Emotional Transformation	Painful, stuck emotions begin to shift — not by suppressing them, but by bringing in new emotional experiences (e.g., compassion, grief, assertion) that change the inner landscape.
6	Meaning Making	You make sense of your experiences in a new way. Painful patterns become understandable. A new narrative about yourself begins to form.

Who Can Benefit from EFT?

EFT has strong research support for:

- Depression and persistent low mood
- Anxiety, shame, and self-criticism
- Complex trauma and PTSD
- Grief and loss
- Low self-worth and identity struggles
- Relationship distress and conflict
- Emotional numbness or disconnection
- Difficulty with anger or sadness
- Processing childhood wounds
- Transitions and life changes

What to Expect in an EFT Session

Sessions are collaborative conversations — but they often go deeper than typical talk therapy. You may be invited to:

- Stay with a feeling a little longer than feels comfortable
- Speak to an absent person, a part of yourself, or a memory (using a technique called the 'empty chair')

- Notice what's happening in your body alongside your emotions
- Revisit a past experience from a new perspective

You are always in control of the pace. Nothing is done to you — everything is done with you.

EFT at Théla: An Integrative Approach

At Théla, EFT is often used alongside other evidence-based approaches to provide a fully tailored experience:

EFT + EMDR

EFT prepares you to access and process trauma-linked emotions. EMDR then helps reprocess traumatic memories. Together, they address both emotional meaning and neurological imprinting.

EFT + IFS

Internal Family Systems (IFS) identifies different 'parts' of you — some that protect, some that carry pain. EFT brings emotional depth to the process of reconnecting with those parts.

EFT + DBT Skills

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) provides concrete skills for emotion regulation. EFT gives those skills meaning by helping you understand what the emotion is trying to say.

EFT + Gottman

In couples work, the Gottman Method addresses communication patterns while EFT helps each partner access and share the vulnerable emotions beneath conflict.

Common Questions

"Do I have to cry or get upset in sessions?"

Not at all. EFT is not about performing emotion. Some people cry; many don't. What matters is genuine contact with what's alive for you — even if that's numbness, confusion, or relief.

"What if I've always struggled to feel things?"

Emotional numbness or difficulty accessing feelings is itself a meaningful experience in EFT — and one the approach is well-suited for. Your therapist will work at whatever pace feels safe.

"How long does EFT take?"

It depends on what you're bringing. Many people notice meaningful shifts within 8–16 sessions. Deeper trauma work may take longer. Your therapist will check in regularly on your goals and progress.

"Is EFT right for me?"

The best way to find out is to raise it with your therapist. EFT can be woven into treatment at any stage. There is no prerequisite — only willingness to explore.