

# Hold Me Tight: Insights from EFT

## Seven Conversations for Deeper Connection: A Relationship Enrichment Program for Couples (and for Everyone)

We all want a lifetime of love, support, and companionship. But sometimes we need a little (or a lot of) help. Dr. Sue Johnson has applied the most recent insights from the new neuroscience of love, attachment and social engagement to help us create, nurture, and protect our most precious relationships. She is the developer of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT). She is “the best couple therapist in the world,” according to bestselling relationship expert Dr. John Gottman.

EFT is a new way of understanding adult love relationships, drawing on attachment theory. This approach has met with unprecedented success in helping distressed couples improve their relationship and deepen their bond. This approach has also been acknowledged by the APA (American Psychological Association) as having valid research supporting its effectiveness.

### **What is EFT/EEFT?**

Emotionally Focused Therapy starts by acknowledging that people are inherently social, and that we are hard-wired to create and maintain strong emotional ties with our partner and loved ones. This means acknowledging that you are attached to your partner or loved ones and rely on this special relationship for comfort and support. In its essence, everyone wants a positive answer to the question “Are you there for me?” You want to know that your partner or loved one is accessible, responsive, and engaged.

More recently, Emotionally Focused Family Therapy (EEFT) has developed from EFT and utilizes the EFT approach with families, specifically children and parents. The aim of EEFT is to repair, instigate, and restore attachment bonds between the family members. (I added comments about EFT for “relationship partners” in this type face before I learned about EEFT. Not everyone is in a couple and EFT/EEFT can benefit many types of relationships.)

EFT sees distress in relationships as centered in the loss of secure emotional connection, and that a negative cycle or “dance” is established when that loss of connection is experienced. These cycles are often characterized by anger, criticism, leaving, appearing indifferent, to name a few. Once established, these cycles can crop up over the slightest issue, and over time be corrosive to the bonds of trust and security in the relationship.

EFT aims to help couples stop these negative cycles by first identifying and mapping out this cycle, then helping couples/relationship partners identify and articulate their needs and clarify their emotional signals in a way that helps their partner to have greater understanding, compassion and empathy. In turn, a more loving, compassionate response can be expressed. This process leaves room then for couples/ relationship partners to experience one another in new ways, and can be powerfully transformative in relationships. For more information about EFT, visit:

[www.iceeft.com](http://www.iceeft.com), click on "About Us" then "What Is EFT?". There is a "find a therapist" tab at the top. I was surprised at the number of EFT therapists.

In her book *Hold Me Tight* for the public who have wanted to know what we can do for ourselves, Dr. Johnson shares her groundbreaking and remarkably successful program for creating stronger, more secure relationships. The message of *Hold Me Tight* is simple: We can get to the emotional underpinnings of our most intimate relationships by recognizing that we are emotionally attached to and dependent on our partners in much the same way that a child is reliant on a parent for nurturing, soothing, and protection. We may also be turning to (or away from) friends or bosses/coworkers for some of these needs at times and in ways that may or may not be appropriate.

Dr. Johnson teaches that the way to enhance or save a relationship is to be open, attuned, and responsive to each other and to reestablish emotional connection. (All kinds of relationships feel and work better with some greater degree of openness and attunement.) With this in mind, she focuses on key moments in a relationship - from "Recognizing the Demon Dialogues" to "Forgiving Injuries" - and uses them as touch points for seven healing conversations. These conversations give you insight into the defining moments in your relationship and guide you in reshaping these moments to create a secure and lasting bond among couples and family - and safer and more respectful collaborations with friends and colleagues.

Each of us has certain vulnerabilities and triggers that no one else can understand unless we can feel safe enough to fully experience them within ourselves and share them in a non-judgmental, non-blaming way. These "raw spots" come out of our individual histories and often there is no way another person could understand them unless they are clearly spoken.

*Hold Me Tight* is a program created to help couples/relationship partners to strengthen their emotional connection. This enrichment and educational program assists people to create a safe and emotionally open relationship based on empathy and understanding and teaches practical strategies to improve their current relationships. **Note:** This program is educational and is designed for relationship enhancement. If you are experiencing intense relationship distress, it is better to find a couple's therapist in your community.

### What are the Seven Conversations?

1. **Recognizing Demon Dialogues**– This conversation helps relationship partners identify the negative cycles that they get stuck in. These habitual relationship patterns lead to reactions from each partner that tend to spiral into greater conflict or distance rather than facilitating communication leading to more trust and collaboration.
2. **Finding the Raw Spots**– This conversation helps partners to recognize their impulsive reactions and discover underlying emotions.
3. **Revisiting a Rocky Moment**– This conversation helps partners

develop emotional safety in their relationship which is basic for resolving conflict and reconnecting emotionally with one another.

4. **“Hold Me Tight”**– In this conversation partners are able to be more accessible to one another, more emotionally responsive, and deeply engaged. We can “hold each other tight” in many contexts, though of course this is most deeply needed in couple and family relationships.
5. **Forgiving Injuries**– At this point relationship partners are able to revisit past emotional wounds that are blocking intimacy and a secure connection. This conversation teaches partners how to identify these wounds and how to offer and accept forgiveness. By doing so, partners are empowered and their bonds are stronger.
6. **Bonding Through Touch (and Sex, for couples)**– Here partners learn how emotional connection enhances physical connection, which in turn creates deeper emotional connection: the best kind of cycle. Understanding when touch is helpful and what kind of touch is both acceptable and appropriate is key to creating safety in all environments and types of relationships. In the work place, a kind hand on the shoulder may or may not be received in the spirit it is given. It may be just what is needed between friends, parents and children and other family members as well as between lovers.
7. **Keeping Your Love Alive**– The last conversation in the program builds on the understanding that a love relationship is a continual process of losing and finding emotional connection, it helps relationship partners and couples to be deliberate and mindful about maintaining that connection.

**This program helps couples/relationship partners learn to use A.R.E.-based conversations (Accessibility, Responsiveness, Engagement) to create a new language of love/connection in order to:**

- Break away from negative cycles that lead to pain, frustration, and, ultimately, disconnection.
- Understand emotions underlying the reactions that lead to this negative cycle.
- Increase trust, intimacy, and closeness.
- Forgive wounds that interfere with trust and intimacy.

This program is presented in her book/audio book, *Hold Me Tight, Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*.

I recommend that you begin by listening to it in audio book form as the shifts in tone of voice are so important to the nervous system. Then read the book and do the exercises (which are easier to access visually). Soon I will have copies of the exercises so we can write our responses on them –

that seemed the best way for me to do them myself. (see <http://www.iceeft.com/guide.pdf>)

There are therapists who offer groups:

examples: <http://www.drctherapist.com/hold-me-tight-scc.php>

<http://www.couplesrelate.com/workshops/the-hold-me-tight-program.html>