

A Personal Journey with Shaping Encounters in EFIT

Attachment-oriented EFIT encounters are an integral part of the EFIT change process in EFT Tango Moves 3 and 4 throughout Stages 1 and 2. For many years I was adapting the Gestalt use of empty-chair and two-chair dialogues to an attachment framework, and felt that the actual physical movement between chairs, though not required, invariably increased awareness of the distinction between parts, heightened emotional experiencing, and facilitated bonding and integration through the deep dialogue that ensued. Dr. Sue Johnson argues, however, that one can more organically stay with a client's inner and interpersonal process, by simply *imagining* the other person or aspect of self, rather than shifting between chairs.

I have discovered that a therapist can shape powerful imagined dialogue to and possibly from an imagined other or aspect of self without movement between chairs. In fact, I have observed that asking clients to move between chairs can actually disrupt the natural momentum of emotion. Additionally, therapists using Gestalt two-chair and empty-chair techniques can get distracted from closely following, expanding and assembling clients' emotions. The imaginal process can be less awkward or embarrassing for clients, thereby allowing for more fluidity in following clients' emotional experience and in keeping clients engaged in their own emotional experiencing.

Shaping and processing imaginal encounters can support the hallmark of EFIT put forth by Dr. Sue Johnson (2019). That is, that EFIT is fundamentally based on following and reshaping clients' emotional experience to create corrective emotional experiences where clients "explore new ways to engage with their own experience, with others, and with the existential dilemmas of life" (Johnson, 2019, p. 75). To do this, therapists follow the five basic EFT Tango moves of:

- 1) reflecting and tracking present process and patterns of engagement;
- 2) creating more coherence by assembling and deepening the emotional process internally and interpersonally;
- 3) shaping dyadic encounters with the therapist, an imagined other or between two aspects of self;
- 4) processing these new expressions and interactions of the encounter as they happen; and
- 5) integrating and celebrating new ways of engaging with emotional experience and expressing the emerging clarity in an encounter.

What matters most in shaping EFIT encounters (Move 3 of *the EFT Tango*) is that the therapist follows the client's process with the basic moves of *the EFT Tango* and allows encounters to emerge organically as emotion is assembled. Dyads will emerge organically while mirroring present process (Tango Move 1) and assembling and deepening emotion (Tango Move 2). The central guideline for *how* to do encounters in EFIT and *with whom* and *when* is embedded in fully attuning to and following the client's emotion. Attuning to present moment emotional experiencing is always in the foreground. In the background (as implicit guidelines) consider the

following for choosing *with which dyad* to shape and process an encounter (client/therapist, client/imagined other or two aspects of the client's self):

- 1) In which dyad is emotion most alive?
- 2) In which dyad is emotion most blocked?
- 3) Which attachment figure (imagined other or therapist's presence) may be the best resource in this moment?
- 4) Before shaping an encounter between with two aspects of self, check if emotion is adequately assembled and distilled so that client is emotionally engaged with two coherent aspects of self.
- 5) When an encounter between therapist and client emerges spontaneously, use Move 4 of the Tango to explicitly process that experience.
- 6) When the imagined other is an "offending other," such as in trauma resolution, take extreme care to hold *other* and not *self* as responsible; validate needs for permanent distance from abuser.

Similar to EFCT, a therapist chooses *what element of experience* to shape into an encounter, based on which of the following are most alive in the client's present moment awareness or ownership:

- present position ("I ignore any sense of loss and injustice, and instead focus on saving stray animals and helping others.")
- newly accessed and distilled emotion ("Under this weight of shame, I am indeed angry that I was attacked and ridiculed.")
- new position ("I am ready to accept your support.")

Case Example of an Organic Flow between Encounters

Signposts for *with whom* and *when* to shape encounters in EFIT shift and flow throughout a session, perhaps multiple times, as the therapist follows and expands emotional experiencing. Alex is a survivor of a random attack several decades earlier. During Stage 1 stabilization we flow between encounters with client and therapist and with an image of the traumatized self being attacked and the present-day self who had consistently avoided directly encountering the brutalized self, despite recurrent flashbacks. During Stage 2 restructuring, we flow between encounters with these two dyads – therapist and client and between two aspects of self – opening him to a new experience of compassion for the self under attack. As we follow his emotions from anger to hatred and then to vengefulness, he discovers a new awareness that avoiding his emotional depths is actually a dangerous thing to be doing and he gradually accesses the deep loss and sadness associated with his trauma that is underlying his anger and hatred. Lingering in his sense of sadness and loss, opens him to another pivotal moment of loss that also forever changed his life – the death of his father.

This becomes a significant choice point for the therapist who had been considering inviting him to speak to an image of his attackers. However, implicitly guided by the third principle mentioned above (Which attachment figure may be the best resource in the moment?), the therapist decides to invite him to imagine bringing his father into the scene of his attack.

Shaping and processing this third encounter with his beloved, deceased father, creates a very alive, corrective emotional experience. He is no longer alone in the trauma scene. In this transformative moment, his shame and guilt are lifted by the presence of his father and we integrate two disconnected aspects of self. The injured, negatively viewed self, who had been suppressing his hatred and shame steps forward into the loving presence of his father and is integrated with the proud, loving, resilient self.

Conclusion

In support of Johnson's practice and writing on EFIT, I encourage therapists to trust the power of staying with, following, and ordering the emotional process without asking clients to change chairs. When you read case examples in my earlier [publications](#) or observe video demonstrations where I have shaped some movement between chairs, consider how the emotional reprocessing could just as easily have been done without the physical movement. Consider what will best facilitate following and ordering the emotional process for your particular client and what will lead you to shape and process corrective emotional experiences through the EFT Tango.

Let's stand together as we expand our comfort and our capacities to practice EFIT. Individuals who have no significant attachment partners to join with them in therapy, and who are suffering from depression, anxiety, post trauma reactions or relationship difficulties can indeed benefit greatly from attachment-oriented EFIT.

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Author's Note: Watch for more brief examples of following emotion and these implicit guidelines to decide *with whom* and *when* to shape encounters in EFIT in future newsletters. A video of this case example is available at <https://steppingintoeft.com/>

Brubacher Publications on EFIT:

Brubacher, L. L. (2018). Extending attachment-based EFT to individual therapy. In *Stepping into emotionally focused couple therapy: Key ingredients of change* (pp. 263 – 286). London: Routledge.

Brubacher, L. (2017). Emotionally focused individual therapy: An attachment-based experiential/systemic perspective. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*. doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2017.1297250