



RYSE

Relationship Therapy

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AN EFT ROADMAP FOR COUPLES

STAGE ONE – Identifying and understanding strengths in your relationship and the patterns that have created difficulty and that keep you stuck

Step 1: This is the step where we get to know one another for the first time. We set goals for counseling, complete assessments, and begin to explore what's going on. We look into your relationship history, your cultural identity, and the story that made you into who you are. We start to talk about how all of this affects your current relationship. It's important during this step that you feel heard, understood, and seen by me, as your therapist. In my sessions, I say, "My short term goal is I want you to always leave this therapy room feeling understood by at least one person—me. Later on, my hope is that you leave this room feeling understood by everyone, especially your partner." This step is about building safety and success in feeling understood for maybe the first time ever. This step is also about building hope that you are worth being understood and your partner will understand you one day too. Once we have that hope and understanding, we are ready to move on to the next step.

Step 2: During this step, we begin to uncover and articulate the negative patterns of interaction you and your partner frequently encounter. We track your interactions and identify where and how your communication breaks down. This is where we get into the sticking points of your relationship dynamic. We begin to understand what sets each of you off into your conflict or disconnection. We get clearer pictures of the dilemmas you may face and we start building an understanding of the reasons behind your reactions during conflicts.

Step 3: Emotions play a significant role in your relationship dynamics, particularly when you're caught in negative cycles of interaction. These emotions not only fuel the cycle but also lie at its core. While in the previous phase, we may have primarily recognized emotions like anger, frustration, anxiety, numbness, or withdrawal, and gained insight into their underlying causes, in this phase, we delve deeper. We acknowledge and identify the emotions that underlie these initial reactions, such as hurt, sadness, or fear. This step involves sharing these deeper feelings with your partner, which can sometimes feel challenging. While expressing these emotions can help break the cycle, there are valid reasons why we keep them hidden—they're vulnerable and risky to share. Additionally, our partners may not always be ready to receive them, as it may be their first time hearing such vulnerable expressions from us. So, while they may genuinely want to understand our underlying emotions, they might not grasp them immediately. This phase serves as our initial practice in recognizing and acknowledging each other's more vulnerable emotions.

Step 4: During this step, you and your partner begin to recognize and describe your relationship cycle even outside of therapy sessions. You will understand how your protective moves affect your partner, acknowledging the impact it causes on you, your partner, and your relationship. Couples often return to sessions reporting moments of awareness: “Last week, we caught ourselves in our cycle as it was happening. The more I reached out, the more you withdrew.” Some even find humor in identifying the cycle mid-argument, slowing down conversations to explore underlying emotions. You become adept at recognizing and reframing negative thoughts before reacting impulsively. While you may still struggle to connect deeply and fear relapsing into old patterns, understanding that the cycle is the enemy, not you or your partner, is a huge step in moving closer to one another. Together, you start reclaiming control over the cycle, a significant improvement. Once this is fully realized, we are ready to move to Stage 2.

Please note that this phase demands time and empathy towards your partner and yourself. Because it sets the foundation for Stage Two, it's important we go slow and take our time to be sure we successfully hit the goals of each step within Stage One. It's common to reach Step 4 and then have new protective behaviors emerge, requiring us to revisit Step 2. Before we are ready to move on to Stage Two, we have to move past Step 4, which requires patience, thorough understanding, and compassion.

STAGE TWO – Create a New, Intimate Relationship Bond; Change Your Communication Patterns

Step 5: Both of you are now able to talk about your feelings that get triggered by the negative cycle, including things you might not have been able to say before. With less friction and more compassion between you, there is safety to explore your experience more deeply. We all have doubts about ourselves at times and may also have fears about depending on others. You may struggle with personal fears or insecurities in this relationship. You may have had life experiences that make it difficult to trust others to be there for you. Through therapy and guidance, you and your partner take turns and begin to share these “raw spots” with each other. As you feel safe enough to take these risks, your partner will begin to understand where your experience is coming from. In this way, you can develop greater empathy for each other.

Step 6: This step involves staying engaged and listening to your partner’s disclosures. Your partner may share feelings that take you by surprise. You may feel disoriented or even hurt that you have not heard your partner share so personally like this before. It is normal to experience a mixture of emotions. Start by trying to understand at an emotional level what your partner is saying, without needing to change their experience or take responsibility for it yourself. Stay open to the possibility of experiencing and understanding your partner in a new way. Allow yourself to be moved by your partner’s new disclosures. And remember, I will be there to help you understand what your partner is saying emotionally, without you needing to change their experience or place responsibility for it on yourself.

Step 7: This is the step many people imagine couples therapy to look like from the get-go, but the truth is—it takes time and hard work to arrive here. So, I want to encourage you not to rush or pressure yourself to work towards this step too quickly. During this phase of therapy, we identify your needs, figure out what helps you and your partner feel deeply connected, and share what's most important for you in your relationships. In this stage of therapy I will help you find ways to ask for your needs in the relationship in a way that is both caring and direct. After working through this step, you will be able to lean into and reach for your partner and they will be able to reach back in a loving way. You have found a new way to relate when one of you feels stressed, hurt, or insecure. The bond between you shifts, becoming closer and more intimate. You can check out your perceptions and talk about feelings. You can listen with an open heart, be curious about one another, and offer reassurance when needed. Both of you have a felt sense of “being there” for each other.

STAGE THREE– Use New Communication Patterns to Solve Problems and Maintain Intimacy

Step 8: During this step, to ensure the cycle has reshaped and is fully secure, we will revisit old problems or decisions that have been put on hold (e.g., parenting, finances, sex, family issues, health concerns, etc.). You have successfully passed this step if we can revisit these conversations and you are able to stay emotionally connected. These conversations don't seem as loaded now that you feel heard, valued, close and secure. Focus on staying accessible, responsive, and engaged while talking about practical issues. Together, you can face life's challenges with more ease and connection.

Step 9: Congratulations! You have reshaped your relationship. You have worked hard to get here, so it's important to celebrate that and put safeguards in place to protect your relationship. Now, you and your partner will create rituals together that privilege your connection. Together, you and your partner will find ways of keeping this new way of being together strong and long-lasting. Now you can turn towards your partner confidently, smile, and say just like Elle Woods did in Legally Blonde to the Harvard Class of 2004, “*We did it!!!*”