

**NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY
ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET**

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Judah.S.DMFT8307V2 - 11

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The Couple Life cycle

Dr. Speights

Week 11

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The tool kit that follows is designed to provide materials and information to enhance intimate relationships. The tool kit utilizes attachment theory, emotion-focused therapy (EFT), the Gottman research, and couple's resiliency interventions in order to provide a comprehensive and user-friendly tool set to strengthen marriage relationships.

According to Taylor (2001) our earliest experiences with primary care givers provided a template for our attachment system. Attachment styles are developed as a result of early attachment systems formed in response to experiences related to security, reliability, and consistency of the primary caregivers (Simpson, 2007). An attachment system is in place to protect individuals from vulnerability and potential threat, regulating negative affect (Daghighi, 2015). However, two attachment styles can be detrimental to the formation of a secure and balanced attachment style, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991; Rosmalen et al., 2016).

In the distressed couple, the anxious and avoidant attachment styles are activated as a result of a perceived threat to one's security, feeling overwhelmed, or vulnerable which overrides rationale thought. Partners may activate each other's attachment systems creating a reciprocal looping of threats and withdrawals (Johnson, 2004). For example, in the distressed couple, anxiety is triggered in the anxious partner leading to feelings of abandonment. When an anxiously attached partner perceives a threat, they may become self-focused and anxious in an attempt to protect themselves from feelings of abandonment, compensating for their partner's perceived unavailability (Daghighi et al., 2015). When an avoidantly attached partner is triggered, they are not always conscious of their feelings, and may attempt to avoid feelings by disconnecting from their partner in order to protect themselves from feelings of engulfment (Johnson, 2004). By attempting

to control their emotions, the avoidant partner distances themselves from their partner. The work toward secure attachment involves the anxiously attached partner achieving a felt sense of security and the avoidantly attached partner working to maintain interpersonal autonomy and control (Daggleish et al., 2015; Simpson, et al., 2007).

Research shows (Johnson, 2004) that our most tumultuous emotional experiences are a result of attachment system activations. Bowlby (1991) believed that premature disconnections from primary attachment figures may lead to life-long misguided attachment activations (Taylor, 2000). In order to balance and strengthen intimate relationships and attachment activation systems, couples must learn the skills needed to maintain healthy interactions during attachment activations, defined as the ‘relationship dance’ (Johnson, 2004). Maintaining a healthy relationship dance requires a ‘repair’ following a disruption in the attachment bond (Johnson, 2004; Daggleish et al., 2014).

One goal of couples’ therapy is to help partners form a secure attachment style to improve the quality and stability of their relationship. Working toward a secure attachment style requires the ability to feel confident that one’s partner will be attentive to their needs and available, if needed. This leads to an increased ability to focus on problems solving and reducing feelings of abandonment or engulfment (Johnson, 2004).

Emotion focused therapy (EFT) helps couples learn skills to enhance and regulate emotions by focusing on the underlying emotions triggering the attachment system, enabling couples to find a balance between feelings of engulfment and abandonment. EFT (Johnson, 2004) provides the tools to enhance a couples ability to express attachment and adaptive needs in a way that their partner is able to respond to, leading to feelings of security, self-esteem, and intimacy. Once attachment activation is understood,

clients are able to recognize that feelings of abandonment and engulfment are related to their early traumatic histories. The interventions found below provide couples with the tools to heal and move past childhood wounds; improving relationships and leading to a happy marriage. Couples therapy provides couples with tools to build a sense of joy and feelings of safety rather than feelings of engulfment and anxiety. EFT interventions help couples to expand, reformulate, and restructure key emotional experiences, allowing the formulation of healthier ways of interacting, leading to secure attachment, self-regulation, health, and wholeness in marriage (Johnson, 2004; Simpson, et al., 2007).

Interventions

- A. Accessing unacknowledged feelings: The therapist must help the couple identify the emotions triggering the attachment system and acknowledge that partners may be attempting to regulate their attachment system by suppressing negative emotions in an attempt to avoid an argument (Johnson, 2004).
- Actively engaging with emotions in the here and now (Johnson, 2004).
 - An expansion of the emotion by processing and discovering the source of the emotion (Johnson, 2004).
 - An expression and naming of the experience for a better understanding by both partners (Johnson, 2004).
- B. Validation: The therapist validates the client's experience and emotions thereby helping clients to regulate, process, and integrate key emotional responses as they happen (Johnson, 2004).

- C. Evocative reflections and questions: intended to expand each partner's emotions about the relationship. The therapist helps the clients to stay with the process while encouraging a reorganization and processing of emotions and experience (Johnson, 2004).
- D. Tracking and reflecting patterns and cycles of interaction: The therapist identifies each partner's contributions to the issue by painting a broader picture of how the interactions trigger attachment systems (Johnson, 2004).
- E. Reframing the problem: The therapist helps the couple to reframe their interactions in terms of attachment activations rather than perceived assaults. (Dagleish et al., 2015; Johnson, 2004)

Attachment Questionnaire

Siegel, Daniel J., & Hartzell, Mar. (2004). *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*. (pp. 133 – 134). New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.

Name _____ Date _____

Please use additional paper to answer these questions so your responses will not be limited.

1. What was it like growing up? Who was in your family?
2. How did you get along with your parents early in your childhood? How did the relationship evolve throughout your youth and up until the present time?
3. How did your relationship with your mother and father differ and how were they similar? Are there ways in which you try to be like, or try not to be like, each of your parents?
4. Did you ever feel rejected or threatened by your parents? Were there other experiences you had that felt overwhelming or traumatizing in your life, during childhood or beyond? Do any of these experiences still feel very much alive? Do they continue to influence your life?
5. How did your parents discipline you as a child? What impact did they have on your childhood, and how do you feel it affects your role as a parent now?
6. Do you recall your earliest separations from your parents? What was it like? Did you ever have prolonged separations from your parents?
7. Did anyone significant in your life die during your childhood, or later in your life? What was that like for you at the time, and how does that loss affect you now?
8. How did your parents communicate with you when you were happy and excited? Did they join with you in your enthusiasm? When you were distressed or unhappy as a child, what would happen? Did your father and mother respond differently to you during these emotional times? How?
9. Was there anyone else besides your parents in your childhood who took care of you? What was that relationship like for you? What happened to these individuals? What is it like for you when you let others take care of your child now?

Attachment Styles Worksheet

Teacher books.net (2019)

Adapted from Fraley, Waller, and Brennan's (2000) ECR-R Questionnaire

- a. ☐ I often worry that my partner will stop loving me.
- b. ☐ I find it easy to be affectionate with my partner.
- a. ☐ I fear that once someone gets to know the real me, s/he won't like who I am.
- c. ☐ I find that I bounce back quickly after a breakup. It's weird how I can just put someone out of my mind.
- a. ☐ When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and incomplete.
- c. ☐ I find it difficult to emotionally support my partner when s/he is feeling down.
- a. ☐ When my partner is away, I'm afraid that s/he might become interested in someone else.
- b. ☐ I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
- c. ☐ My independence is more important to me than my relationships.
- c. ☐ I prefer not to share my innermost feelings with my partner.
- a. ☐ When I show my partner how I feel, I'm afraid s/he will not feel the same about me.
- b. ☐ I am generally satisfied with my romantic relationships.
- a. ☐ I think about my relationships a lot.
- c. ☐ I find it difficult to depend on romantic partners.
- a. ☐ I tend to get very quickly attached to a romantic partner.
- b. ☐ I have little difficulty expressing my needs and wants to my partner.

- c. ☐ I sometimes feel angry or annoyed with my partner without knowing why.
- a. ☐ I am very sensitive to my partner's moods.
- b. ☐ I believe most people as essentially honest and dependable.
- c. ☐ I prefer casual sex with uncommitted partners to intimate sex with one person.
- b. ☐ I'm comfortable sharing my personal thoughts and feelings with my partner.
- a. ☐ I worry that if my partner leaves me I might never find someone else.
- c. ☐ It makes me nervous when my partner gets too close.
- a. ☐ During a conflict, I tend to impulsively do or say things I later regret, rather than be able to reason about things.
- b. ☐ An argument with my partner doesn't usually cause me to question our entire relationship.
- c. ☐ My partners often want me to be more intimate than I am comfortable being.
- a. ☐ I worry that I'm not attractive enough.
- b. ☐ Sometimes people see me as boring because I create little drama in relationships.
- c. ☐ I miss my partner when we're apart, but then when we're together I feel the need to escape.
- b. ☐ When I disagree with someone, I feel comfortable expressing my opinions.
- c. ☐ I hate feeling that other people depend on me.
- b. ☐ If I notice that someone I'm interested in is checking out other people, I don't let it faze me. I might feel a pang of jealousy, but it's fleeting.
- c. ☐ If I notice that someone I'm interested in is checking out other people, I feel relieved, it means s/he's not looking to make things exclusive.

- a. ☐ If I notice that someone I'm interested in is checking out other people, it makes me feel depressed.
- b. ☐ If someone I've been dating begins to act cold and distant, I may wonder what has happened, but I'll know it's probably not about me.
- c. ☐ If someone I've been dating begins to act cold and distant, I'll probably be indifferent. I might even be relieved.
- a. ☐ If someone I've been dating begins to act cold and distant, I'll worry that I've done something wrong.
- a. ☐ If my partner was to break up with me, I'd try my best to show her/him what s/he is missing (a little jealousy can't hurt).
- b. ☐ If someone I've been dating for several months tells me s/he wants to stop seeing me, I'd feel hurt at first, but I'd get over it.
- c. ☐ Sometimes when I get what I want in a relationship, I'm not sure what I want anymore.
- b. ☐ I won't have much of a problem staying in touch with my ex (strictly platonic) after all, we have a lot in common.

Attachment History

To whom did you go for comfort when you were young?

Could you always count on this person/these people for comfort?

When were you most likely to be comforted by this person/these people?

How did you let this person/these people know that you needed connection and comfort?

Did this person/these people ever betray you or were they unavailable at critical times?

What did you learn about comfort and connection from this person/these people?

If no one was safe, how did you comfort yourself? How did you learn that people were unsafe?

Did you ever turn to alcohol, drugs, sex, or material things for comfort?

Have there been times when you have been able to be vulnerable and find comfort with your partner?

Have there been any particularly traumatic incidents in your previous romantic relationship?

How have you tried to find comfort in romantic relationships?

Relationship Inventory

1. Names of your partner's:
2. What is/was the relationship like? What recurrent patterns can you recall?
3. A situation that triggered activation or deactivation of attachment system?
4. My reaction (thoughts, feelings, actions)
5. Insecure attachment working models and principals:
6. How I lose out by succumbing to these working/models and principals:
7. Identify a secure role model who is relevant to this situation and secure principals to adopt. How is he/she relevant?

Ethical concerns

According to Thagard (2012), the danger of focusing on emotional experiences without the consideration of rational thought could lead to a type of moral decay. He believes that judgments should be based on morality, not just emotions. The second problem with EFT is the detrimental pattern of focusing on emotions rather than solutions to a couple problem. Thagard points out that some emotions are beautifully rational while others are irrational. When we base reason on emotions alone, it puts us into a type of moral dilemma. Since emotions are not always true, deciding based on emotion alone lacks rational judgments and critical thinking.

In regard to using EFT in abusive relationships, the power differentials must be addressed. The discontinuation of hurtful behavior (emotional or physical) is ethically the first treatment priority for couples experiencing domestic violence. Both partners must be willing to take responsibility for their actions. Focusing on underlying emotions and practical problem-solving skills before the behaviors are addressed, may detract from and enable abusive behaviors to continue. Additionally, a victim may feel pressured to disclose more than they feel safe to share during a session, placing the victim at greater risk.

Resources for Couples

Books

The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage, by Michele Weiner Davis. Simon & Schuster, 2001.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, by John M. Gottman & Nan Silver. Three Rivers Press, 2000.

Can My Marriage Be Saved? True Stories of Saved Marriages, by Mae Chambers & Erika Chambers. Pass It On Publications, 2008.
Fighting For Your Marriage, by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, & Susan Blumburg. Jossey-Bass, 2010.

The Power of Commitment: A Guide to Active, Lifelong Love, by Dr. Scott M. Stanley. Jossey-Bass, 2005.

The Great Marriage Tune-Up Book: A Proven Program for Evaluating and Renewing Your Relationship, by Dr. Jeffry H. Larson. Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Take Back Your Marriage, by Dr. William J. Doherty. Guilford, 2001.

Websites

www.prepare-enrich.com: This website contains an online, selfguided relationship questionnaire for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in your relationship, called "Couple Checkup." The program is done in your home with computer-generated feedback. It was developed by one of the world's leading relationship educators.

www.couplecare.info: This website introduces you to an inexpensive, self-guided program to work on improving your communication and other relationship skills.

www.twoofus.org/marriage-advice/index.aspx: This website, developed by the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, has valuable resources for strengthening your marriage.

www.divorcebusting.com: This website has resources to connect you with a divorce-busting "coach."

Gottman Institute: <https://www.gottman.com>

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/couples-therapy-worksheets-activities/#exercises>




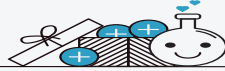
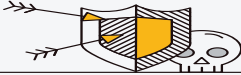



Films on Demand:

http://fod.infobase.com.proxy1.ncu.edu/p_ViewVideo.aspx?xtid=35019

Psychoeducational Handout

THE FOUR HORSEMEN

AND HOW TO STOP THEM WITH THEIR ANTIDOTES

<p>CRITICISM Verbally attacking personality or character.</p> 	<p>GENTLE START UP Talk about your feelings using "I" statements and express a positive need.</p> 
<p>CONTEMPT Attacking sense of self with an intent to insult or abuse.</p> 	<p>BUILD CULTURE OF APPRECIATION Remind yourself of your partner's positive qualities and find gratitude for positive actions.</p> 
<p>DEFENSIVENESS Victimizing yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame.</p> 	<p>TAKE RESPONSIBILITY Accept your partner's perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.</p> 
<p>STONEWALLING Withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance, and separation.</p> 	<p>PHYSIOLOGICAL SELF-SOOTHING Take a break and spend that time doing something soothing and distracting.</p> 

The Gottman Institute

[https://youtu.be/1o30Ps- 8is](https://youtu.be/1o30Ps-8is)

The next time you find yourself in a conflict with your partner, try to avoid Gottman's four horsemen of the apocalypse. These styles of fighting predict that a couple will break up, rather than stay together. Lute (2015) found that using mindfulness during an escalation by focusing one's attention on the present moment, in a nonjudgmental way enables individuals to bypass feelings of overwhelmed due to their partner's attachment activation. Gottman (1999) offers alternatives to the four fighting styles listed above. Instead, a gentle startup, expressing a culture of appreciation, and taking responsibility

for one's behavior are suggested to enhance a couple's experience and establish a secure attachment style. Psychological self-soothing is a way for partners to reduce the impact of potentially damaging interactions. When partners are able to self soothe and soothe each other, a successful repair following a relationship rupture stabilizes the relationship.



Davis-Laack (2014).

Couples who have resilience are able to successfully overcome adversity. Couples show resilience by support each other every day. Resilient couples turn hardships into learning experiences by remaining adaptable during times of change, are actively involved in creative projects together, display patience and humility, and take care of each other. Improving communication is the first step on the road to couple resiliency. In addition, couples who share a spiritual commitment, appreciate each other's independence, show insight into their contributions to the relationship, and utilize

teamwork when faced with hardship are the most successful. Resilient couples' value and encourage their differences and extend themselves outside their primary partnership (Venter, 2009).

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