

## The Evolution of an Emotionally Focused Therapist: A Mixed-Methods Research Study



*Carol Ann Conrad*

### A Brief Summary of Dr. Carol Ann Conrad's Dissertation Findings

Thanks to all of you who participated in the surveys and interviews for my dissertation research last year. I am happy to say that I passed my defense and received my Doctorate of Education degree in counseling psychology from Argosy University in the fall of 2014! While I am in the midst of writing two articles for future publication based on this research, several colleagues have encouraged me to give a brief summary that would be helpful to clinicians without all the "statistical jargon." So the following are some of the most salient findings from the research that may be of particular interest to those in the process of becoming certified in EFT, those who are helping others to learn EFT and/or become certified, or just anyone in the EFT world!

There were 322 surveys completed by individuals who were either about to take their first EFT Externship, had completed an Externship or Core Skills training, or who were certified as an EFT therapist, supervisor or trainer. We lumped certified therapists, supervisors and trainers into one group and all the rest into another group and compared the "certifieds" to the "non-certifieds" on the six different instruments that comprised the surveys.

The findings from the surveys indicate that there is a tangible reason to work toward certification. Not only does the certification process increase

one's skill and competency level, it also appears to significantly impact one's relationships toward greater security.

Specifically, **certification predicts significantly greater self-compassion, emotional processing capacity, behaviors and experiences indicating more secure attachment in primary relationships, and greater knowledge and competency in using the EFT model.** We also found that training was the factor most associated with competence in the EFT model. An overall parallel process in the EFT therapist's life seems to develop: the more secure the therapist feels with the model in the consultation room, an increase in behaviors indicating more security also develops in the therapist's personal life.

In addition to the self-report surveys, 45-60 minute interviews were completed with 20 certified EFT therapists, supervisors, and/or trainers. Findings revealed **six main categorical themes**, suggesting a linear model of developmental phases in becoming certified as an EFT therapist. These phases did not seem to be entirely discrete; they seemed to overlap and be somewhat circular, dependent on the individual experiences of the therapist.

These themes emerged:

**1. Exuberance** and excitement in discovering the EFT model was the first category identified. After an initial externship, trainees began to attach to the model as they discovered the value for themselves and their work with clients. Comments such as "It felt like coming home when I went to the externship," were common.

**2. A disorientation** or dysregulation phase began on discovering the challenges of implementing the model, including internal and external struggles related to the difficulty of change and access to resources. "When I didn't know what to do I would

default back to the other model and my supervisors would say 'Oh, you just left the model when you did that.'"

3. A phase of **demoralization** or deflation often began for the therapist trainee as they struggled to successfully apply the model. Shame and disillusionment about their own skills characterized this period, paralyzing some and preventing others from making progress with their couples. "I was so discouraged, ashamed and anxious to the point where I completely froze in so many of the role plays in Core Skills. It was a horrible experience to go from what I thought was a well trained therapist to a completely frozen deer in the headlights experience when I tried to use EFT in my work."

4. The next phase occurred when the trainees reached out to get more support from colleagues or supervisors. The trainees became **determined** and made a commitment to forge through the difficulties. They set their course toward certification, driven by their belief in the model and encouraged by more training and collegial or supervision support. "I never gave up on mastering EFT. After nine months into the process I just made that commitment."

5. Sometime after becoming determined and committed, **integration** of knowledge and skill demonstration began to be evident. More security in the model began to manifest both professionally and personally. "When I was actually able to move some people through the model and I got my certification, I relaxed a lot."

During the integration phase, most interviewees indicated that they applied for and were accepted by ICEEFT as certified. However, the integration of skills, knowledge, and self-growth continued to solidify, particularly when teaching or supervising others in EFT.

6. **Deepening** levels of understanding, application, and change continued to be reported by the evolving EFT therapists. Both within the domains of their practice with couples and within their personal relationships, a positive and reciprocal cycle was reported. Certified therapists indicated feeling

greater satisfaction and connection as they applied and experienced EFT learning in their relationships at home and at work with clients. "It was really only after I had assisted in three or four Core Skills that I started to get better fast."

In addition to training, supervision and community support were identified as most helpful and even essential to staying in the process toward certification.

The hope in sharing these findings is that therapists struggling to learn the EFT model and working towards certification will take heart in the knowledge that becoming certified and deepening one's work with the model is challenging for all of us. Most everyone struggles. It is also valuable to know that there are many rewards associated with the struggle toward certification and gaining competence in the model, not only professionally but personally.

Again, many thanks to all who participated in this research endeavor to understand more fully the process of evolution that occurs for EFT therapists. It is my hope that these findings will encourage those struggling with learning EFT, those contemplating certification, and those who supervise and train using the EFT model. Most especially, thanks go to Sue Johnson for developing EFT, to Gail Palmer for her inspiring article on becoming an EFT therapist that sparked my further research, and to all those who continue to believe in and practice using EFT with their clients. Also, thanks to Dr. Lillian Buchanan, who wrote some of this narrative and pushed me to get it on paper! May this research inspire hope for the journey and desire to enter and stay in the process of learning and growth in practice of the EFT model.

For anyone interested in reading the full dissertation, please feel free to contact me and request a copy at [dr.carolannconrad@gmail.com](mailto:dr.carolannconrad@gmail.com).

Carol Ann Conrad, EdD, LMHC  
Certified EFT Therapist  
Richland, WA