

# Complete Transcript

**VICTOR YALOM:** Welcome to the second volume of our series, *Emotionally Focused Therapy Step by Step*. We're joined again by our guide, Dr. Rebecca Jorgensen. Good to have you here again.

**REBECCA JORGENSEN:** Glad to be here, Victor.

**YALOM:** In the first volume, *Core Concepts of EFT*, we presented underlying theory, an overview of the steps and stages, as well as the key therapeutic techniques. In this volume, we will focus on Stage One of EFT and follow six different couples through the various steps of Stage One. How would you describe the objective of Stage One of EFT?

**JORGENSEN:** Stage One has the ultimate objective to reach de-escalation. It's this place where the couple becomes united. They become a "we" against the negative cycle of interaction and they begin to have safe emotional engagement. We help them achieve this by developing a new understanding of how and why they constantly elicit disconnection, distance, and despair, and what they really need from each other.

**YALOM:** So Stage One has four steps, as we briefly went through in Volume One, but we're going to cover it in a lot more detail here. And these steps guide us through the process towards the goal of de-escalation.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. Stage One has the goal of them joining together to fight the cycle, that they will understand their relationship through an attachment perspective. They'll be able to access their primary emotion that drives the negative pattern and reframe that. So we're working first with the alliance and assessment. We're going to build our alliance as we do the assessment. Identify the negative cycle, which is Step Two. Access primary emotions underlying the cycle. That's Step Three. And then reaching de-escalation.

**YALOM:** Step One, which is building an alliance and making a preliminary assessment, that doesn't really differ from any other form of couples therapy, does it?

**JORGENSEN:** Well, the assessment is focused on addressing the nature of the strengths and the problems in the relationship, understanding their attachment history, and beginning to form a hypothesis of their relationship problems through the attachment lens. We're looking to understand how each partner constructs his reality of the relationship, and how they process their experience with each other. Like, what emotions block feeling safe and close

and connected?

**YALOM:** All right, so it's similar to any couples therapy but the way you're doing an assessment, which is informed by attachment theory-- that differs, of course, in terms of how you conceptualize the case. And my understanding is to do that, you pay attention, of course, to the emotion, to the affect, but also to significant events and history in each partner's life, particularly in terms of their relationship history.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. Such personal landmarks open the door into our experience of the client's relationship. And we also pay attention to their interactional landmarks, the interaction between the couple that may suggest availability for support, for being able to be accessible to each other. Really, how power or dominant positions start to interact in the relationship.

**YALOM:** So these landmarks are significant events that have happened in their lives and in their relationship.

**JORGENSEN:** Especially in terms of their attachment figures and what we know as universal attachment needs, how those have been met or not met through their relationships from childhood to their present relationship.

**YALOM:** So you also try to understand the goals and agenda for each partner and create a therapeutic agreement between couple and therapist. What does that look like?

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Part of the assessment and alliance building is we are hearing from them what they think the problem is and we're starting to put that into the attachment frame. And, of course, getting an informed consent from them to work towards rebuilding emotional close and trust between them so that they can turn to each other for comfort and connection.

**YALOM:** Seems to me from my experience-- I have some experience working with couples, but I'm not a trained EFT therapist-- is that intake is particularly challenging. Because the couple comes to you in such a state of distress often, and often there's one partner may be dragging the other partner in.

And it's a complicated, complex process, the intake, because you're trying to gather a lot of information. You're trying to get each person's perspective. You're trying to learn about the relationship. And you've got to, at the same time, as in all therapies, engage them so they want to come back. If they don't come back, no matter how great an approach it is, you're not going to be able to help them. So what are your thoughts? What is intake like from an EFT perspective?

**JORGENSEN:** Well, there certainly is so much going on with distressed couples. The level of formal intake really varies based on what situation and what system the therapist is operating within.

**YALOM:** So, like, what type of setting you mean?

**JORGENSEN:** What type of setting, yeah. What system that they are in, and what's required from that setting. We will recommend an initial session with the couple and then a separate session with each partner. And in the case of our couples that we're seeing on our Step by Step, there was a formal intake session with each couple prior to beginning filming and we had ruled out any contraindications during that process. Therefore, our assessment at the beginning of therapy was primarily focused on understanding their view of the conflict, getting their informed consent on working within an experiential and process model. We were focusing on identifying their negative cycle and moving away from the content that is often associated with the conflict.

**YALOM:** So truth in disclosure, part of that assessment and part of our prior contact with them, is explaining that they were going to get free therapy in exchange for being video recorded. And we really discussed that with them in great length to make sure that that was-- they understood the ramifications of that and they were clear on that.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. So we had good, informed consent around that. And, also, we had an intake worker who went through the assessment process rather than the therapist-- each of the therapists themselves. So at the clinic where we saw them, there's an intake process. That's done by intake workers. And then the cases are assigned. So that happened with us. And many systems don't have that. Like, in a private practice system the therapist may be the one that's doing that initial intake and assessment.

**YALOM:** Right. And your recommendation that you do a session with the couple and then a session with each partner separately, that seems to make a lot of sense. It's prudent. You may find out things. You may find out a hidden agenda from one of the partners, why they're really there. But in day-to-day practice, especially people in private practice, I'm wondering how often that really occurs.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. We don't have statistics on that, but we do recommend that people follow that protocol so that they can see the couple together and get the couple take of their problem, but then see each individual. And that really is an opportunity to build alliance and go deeper into history taking and the attachment history than what we would do during therapy, because

once we start the therapeutic process, we're really present, process, and experientially situated and focused. And so we're not doing a lot of that kind of ongoing assessment or going back to history to pull pieces together after that initial assessment.

**YALOM:** What would be contraindications, reasons that a particular couple is not appropriate for EFT?

**JORGENSEN:** The first thing that we think about in the way of contraindications is that anything that would prevent couples from any form of couple therapy would prevent them from EFT couple therapy. So it's not really different in the way of contraindications. So, like other forms of couple therapy, there just are conditions that make it very difficult to have both people in the room or to be able to slow down or progress in the therapy enough with both partners there.

So we will pay special attention to active addictions or ongoing affairs or high levels of interpersonal partner violence. Of course, the real major issue is whether or not the therapist is able to create and maintain emotional safety in the session.

**YALOM:** Okay. So in this video we're going to follow our six couples. So let's introduce them here. First we have Jon and Nydia.

**JORGENSEN:** They were seen by Scott Woolley. They came in because they were planning to get married and as the date approached they were fighting more and more. Both of them have a history of family abuse.

**SCOTT WOOLLEY:** Tell me about why you're here.

**NYDIA:** Basically we're here because we have difficulty communicating.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay.

**NYDIA:** Especially when there's - it's not the way that we want it to be. Like, not--

**JON:** The way we imagined it to be. I mean, I did see that the conflicts are coming up a little bit more and more, especially as this wedding date-- coming up. And I always toss out, "I'm going to back away" if it doesn't feel right and I'm just starting to see red flags. And I'm starting to lay down-- during the courtship, I just, like, overlooked a lot of things because it was all fun, but now I realize this big vow and commitment. And I'm speaking my piece of mind now, not just saving it until after the wedding.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Right.

**NYDIA:** Does that-- sounds like you're getting cold feet to me. It's like you're

not sure.

**JON:** I just want-- Yeah, you want to be sure--

**WOOLLEY:** Right. And you're not 100% sure-- is it that you're not sure-- I mean, do you love this lady?

**JON:** Yes. Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay. So it's not about that. It's about whether things are going to work out or whether you guys can-- help me understand what the cold feet's about.

**JON:** Am I going to have disrespect?

**WOOLLEY:** Am I going to have-- in other words, am I going to be respected?

**JON:** Deeply.

**WOOLLEY:** Deeply. Is she going to respect me?

**JON:** Is she going to--

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Okay. And that's important to you.

**JON:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay. Yeah. And you get scared that that isn't going to happen?

**JON:** Yes.

**WOOLLEY:** And that's when you start thinking about, gosh, do I really want to do this?

**JON:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Maybe we need to be talking and working on this right now.

**JON:** Right before this I kind of, like-- throw in the towel and just shut down and just wanted to retreat and just, like, what am I doing?

**YALOM:** Then we have Carl and Sandra. And you're the therapist for them.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. And Carl and Sandra came in considering divorce. They're both recovered alcoholics. And they haven't been married very long, a few years, and were considering leaving each other.

When you guys have this tension between the two of you--

**CARL:** Well--

**SANDRA:** Oh, okay. I know what happens.

**JORGENSEN:** What happens?

**SANDRA:** I start-- every little thing I pick on him. Every little last thing. You put the milk on the middle shelf when it's colder at the bottom of the fridge. It belongs on the bottom. I've told you ten times.

**CARL:** And this drives me crazy.

**SANDRA:** Put the milk on the bottom of the shelf.

**CARL:** This just drives--

**SANDRA:** The milk is going to go bad.

**CARL:** I know. Yeah, right. Right. And it's not that she's wrong. The problem is it's the same thing I said at the intake yesterday with the inn. She's not wrong. It just drove me crazy. It was like the little soap had to go in the middle of the little thing that went on the pop up, the other little thing that went at that angle not that angle.

**JORGENSEN:** It's like you have to get it exactly right in some way.

**CARL:** Why in the hell does this make any difference? And I realize that it does, but emotionally from me it was like this is driving me nuts. And yet, I couldn't say-- as with the example of the milk or anything else. It's not that she's wrong. It's not like this is just some insane thing that she invented that, like, we're going to hang the milk outside to heat up just to see what the hell happens. She's right. I mean, I do tend to do those things because they're not really very important to me. But it's-- yeah. That's when we, you know--

**JORGENSEN:** So that's a place that you can--

**CARL:** I do those things--

**YALOM:** Next we have Bill and Shelley. They're being seen by a co-therapy team, Lisa Palmer-Olsen and Mark Kaupp.

**JORGENSEN:** Bill and Shelley had always had kind of a difficult relationship, but it was a financial crisis that ended up bringing them into therapy.

**SHELLEY:** I think that our place is despair where you want so much this person to be there for you.

**MARK KAUPP:** Yeah.

**SHELLEY:** And you can't access it. You just can't. whatever strategy--

**KAUPP:** Whatever strategy, whatever technique--

**SHELLEY:** The dark place for me when I was describing them to Bill, somehow we got in a conversation about what we've been through the last few years. I mean, it could've been a trigger as easy as Bill saying something like,

“well, we’ve been so busy.” And I’m like “but we’ve been married 13 years and everything’s been a crisis.”

**KAUPP:** But this has been a chronic--

**SHELLEY:** Chronic.

**KAUPP:** --kind of repetitive way of people being with you that has given you the message almost like what you’re feeling, what you need, isn’t right. It’s almost like it’s too much.

**SHELLEY:** It’s too much to ask for.

**KAUPP:** It’s too much to ask for. It’s not--

**SHELLEY:** It’s not right.

**KAUPP:** It’s not right. And--

**SHELLEY:** It’s not right. I worry too much. Or there’s something wrong with me.

**KAUPP:** That’s right.

**SHELLEY:** And somehow this escalated into a terribly painful place for me when we had to sell our home, which is where we had bought it and the kids have spent their time and brought all their friends. They loved our home.

**KAUPP:** Yeah.

**SHELLEY:** And the horrible, horrible place during that time for me a year and a half or two years ago was putting it on the market, being Bill’s partner. Okay, I accept it. We got to get rid of that house. We got to unload it. But then I didn’t have a partner. And not only did I not have a partner, I would be sitting at the table with the realtor saying “we’ve got to lower the price. I think the price is too high.” And I would get objection from Bill.

**YALOM:** Then there’s Steven and Cassandra. And, again, you are the therapist for them.

**JORGENSEN:** Steven and Cassandra describe having a really wonderful few years together until the birth of their child. And the baby has really changed the dynamic of their relationship.

Steven had said-- I just want to check this out with you-- something like you really wanting to be heard and validated. That that seemed like important to you. Would those be your words? What would be your words to what you’re really feeling is-- the sore spot or the thing that you really want and need in this relationship that you’re missing?

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah. I felt understood.

**JORGENSEN:** Understood. Like he really holds you in mind and understands you?

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Okay. All right. So let me see if I'm getting more of the whole picture. I'm hearing from you, Steven, that having this peace would be maybe something that you're really looking for is having this peace and calm.

**STEVEN:** Peace and respect.

**YALOM:** Then we have Farrah and Drew. They're being seen by Scott Woolley.

**JORGENSEN:** And Farrah and Drew had had a really disconnected, kind of a parallel life relationship, and had grown farther and farther apart. And it was a bit of a last-ditch effort for them to come into therapy.

**WOOLLEY:** Guessing, Farrah, that you being with other people-- I mean, it can be draining sometimes, but a lot of times it's energetic.

**FARRAH:** Yes.

**WOOLLEY:** Is that right?

**DREW:** And this for me is, you know, I come home and I want to say hi to her, but I don't want all of the engagement I know that's coming with it. All of the-- "here's what we were doing today. Here's what's going on tomorrow. Here's what happened with Dillon today. Here's what happened at school." And here's this and this and this and this.

**WOOLLEY:** Somehow that doesn't feel-- does it feel fake or does it just not feel-- is it overwhelming?

**DREW:** It's a little overwhelming, I feel. Yeah.

**FARRAH:** And I'm just trying to catch him up on what's going on in our life.

**DREW:** Right.

**FARRAH:** So I think that's where I've stopped and where I feel-- like you were saying-- into parallel-- or not parallel, but--

**WOOLLEY:** Parallel lives or whatever.

**FARRAH:** Right. Because I kind of stopped engaging in that because he doesn't engage when I do tell him. And it's overwhelming to him. And I didn't really understand it was overwhelming. I just didn't think he cared because I didn't understand all this until recently. And so there was no response or he'd



tell me, “you don’t have to tell me every detail.” And it just shuts me down. I shut down.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**FARRAH:** Because of what’s happening, I’m totally shutting down.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Which is not your nature, but at this point you don’t know how to engage in a way that is going to maybe feel real for you.

**FARRAH:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**FARRAH:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** You’re acting fake.

**FARRAH:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** And real-- I mean-- and it’s going to be satisfying and it isn’t going to--

**FARRAH:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** --end up being hurtful. Because if I’m getting this right, it’s like when you’re trying to engage, the message is “stay away.”

**FARRAH:** Pretty much. Yes. Stay away. Or I just thought he didn’t care and it wasn’t important to him.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**FARRAH:** That’s what I was assuming. I didn’t ask him that, but I don’t know, I just think most people-- maybe not everybody. Like he tells me, I shouldn’t assume how he feels because, I guess, he says I do that a lot. But, yeah. He’d want to know what happened with the kids or maybe even ask me once in a while, “how are you feeling.”

**YALOM:** And, finally, Anjum and Syed. And they’re also seen by Scott.

**JORGENSEN:** And Anjum and Syed were an arranged marriage that never really got off the ground and had been problematic for them for many years.

**ANJUM:** So I was concerned. I was a little apprehensive. I was really fascinated by him, but I was apprehensive because I didn’t know him at all and he didn’t make any attempt to get to know me. And because I was a girl I wasn’t going to make that attempt.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**ANJUM:** He had to make the first move and he didn’t. So I was a little

apprehensive about that too, that is he really interested or just, okay, I have to get married and go through the motions of getting married.

**WOOLLEY:** And were you really interested?

**SYED:** Hm?

**WOOLLEY:** Were you really interested in her?

**SYED:** I don't know what is her opinion. But my opinion is that marriage is arranged and it's not like one has to show a real interest in a particular girl. I mean, a girl, the parents. You know, seeing her family and background and things like that. Choose a suitable mate. And that happened with me. And then we went to her college, me and my sisters. And she didn't know that for what we had come at that time. But we talked for a little while. I mean, there was a conversation. Because--

**ANJUM:** No, I didn't talk to you at that time.

**SYED:** Not to me, but there was a conversation. That's what I'm saying.

**ANJUM:** No, but I didn't even know you were there.

**SYED:** That's what I'm saying, should you know that.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**ANJUM:** You said we talked for a little times--

**SYED:** Then I--

**ANJUM:** Do you understand that--

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. When I hear-- I mean, your sisters and you talked for some time.

**SYED:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. So your sisters were kind of checking her out.

**SYED:** Watching her that, I mean-- and I said she's the girl which I should marry. Seeing her physical bearing and mental.

**WOOLLEY:** So you were watching?

**SYED:** I was watching, yes, because that was mainly for, I mean, is she okay for me or is she not?

**ANJUM:** And he was watching from a distance, so he couldn't hear me. He couldn't hear me talk.

**SYED:** I was hearing you because you were talking with [INAUDIBLE] who was sitting in front. And we were in the car and you were--

**ANJUM:** I never came in the car.

**SYED:** Not in the car, but you were sitting in the car with--

**ANJUM:** You have some memory problems here.

**YALOM:** All right. So now that we've met our six couples-- and, again, these are in fact actual couples in real therapy-- let's focus on the second step of Stage One, which is identifying the cycle. How do you do that and what do you focus on?

**JORGENSEN:** So we begin by looking for our predominant patterns that most typifies the couple's interactions. Their default positions. Partners take these different default positions when they feel threatened by the loss of connection in their relationship.

One of the most common patterns is the pursue-withdraw cycle, where one person withdraws when conflict reaches emotional levels that are too intense for them to manage. The other partner pursues or blames, and they're seeking connection. So we're looking first for the positions in the pattern and then we begin to break out that negative cycle looking for different components within that predominant negative cycle.

**YALOM:** And, as I said, I'm not an EFT expert. I have done a fair amount of couples therapy over the years. And it often seems to be it's one partner, and most typically the wife in a heterosexual couple, that drags the husband into therapy-- although, of course, it's not always that way. And often she's the one pursuing emotional intimacy and complaining their spouse is distant or detached. Would that be an example of the pursuer-withdrawer dynamic?

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. That is a common pattern is the pursue-withdraw pattern. And it's not always the female partner that's the pursuer. And, of course, we see that pattern in same-sex couples as well. So what we're really looking for is to see what they describe as their typical conflicts outside of the session, but we also want to see what happens in the room. What do we experience and see them do. And we will have them describe how their conflicts are played out at home and we're going to track and reflect those patterns.

**YALOM:** Okay. So there's a diagram that can help us with that, and it can help us visualize the various components of the cycle.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. So Scott Woolley has developed this diagram. It's the infinity sign where things just keep going and going and going. And there's really two parts-- what's kind of under the line and what's above the dotted line. So we have the visible and reactive part of the negative cycle that's above

the line, and what's under the line is the more vulnerable emotions and the unmet attachment needs.

When it comes to what's above the line, we're looking for different components. We're looking for their behavior. What actually do they do when they're in a triggered or reactive response? We're also looking for what are their perceptions or their attributions? How do they make sense about their own reactions? What kind of case do they build internally around why they're doing what they're doing or why their partner's doing what they're doing?

**YALOM:** So when a couple first comes to see you, what you see in the room is more the part that's above the line.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. And what they'll describe to us is the part that's above the line, because the reactive behavior, the reactive emotion, and really the perceptions and attributions are often spoken out loud. So-- and people can identify oh, you go away as a behavior. Or you get really tense and you shut down. I can't feel you anymore. Or, I get angry.

So what's above the line is kind of known to both partners initially. So we're going to break that down though and look at those various components-- the behavior, the attributions/perceptions, and then the secondary or the reactive emotion. And then we're also going to identify what's more hidden, what's more invisible and below the surface. And those two components are the primary emotion. So we're looking at the soft and vulnerable feelings that the reactive emotions cover. And then we're also looking at the unmet attachment needs. What are they emotionally needing and what do they really long for in the relationship that isn't met?

**YALOM:** Now let's take a look at the cycle between Steven and Cassandra.

**JORGENSEN:** So in the cycle we're looking at Steven as the withdrawer and Cassandra as the pursuer. So I'm going to work from the cycle diagram. And looking at the diagram while I'm working to identify the negative cycle I take notes. I jot down their words during the session that they're saying and I put those words in the area on the cycle diagram that describe those aspects of their experience. So we can organize it based on the interaction flow, knowing that the primary emotion and the unmet needs drive their triggered, or reactive, responses.

**YALOM:** All right, using that diagram, taking notes, is a way to conceptualize a rather complex phenomenon. Okay. So let's watch the clip now.

**STEVEN:** If I don't process it with her in-- I don't know how to say this articulately. So, again, no disrespect but, "in the right way," then that becomes

that I haven't heard her, I haven't validated her experience, and I haven't validated her pain, which then comes back on me that I didn't do something "right"-- again, these are my perceptions, which then I start getting pissed over. I start getting frustrated over it, which then is poor adaptation, poor coping, and that then triggers her.

**JORGENSEN:** So then she gets triggered and something's happening to you on the inside. Like, oh, I missed it again. I got it wrong again. I'm angry. and I'm not coping well.

**STEVEN:** It's more I did something wrong again. It's another rule I don't know in terms of doing things. I must be stupid because, yeah, she's told me this rule, but I didn't understand that rule this way in this context. I was like-

**JORGENSEN:** I didn't understand it. I must be stupid. I didn't get it.

**STEVEN:** Then that triggers me to try to explain to her the context in why I behaved the way I did, which makes her really mad because then she says that I look defensive. I'm defensive and she just wants me to take responsibility. And then I get pissed because I'm like-- or I get frustrated because I'm like-- in my head I want to explain, "Well, here's what happened. When I checked it, you know, this, this, and this." And then she, from her perspective, just hears me being defensive, being reactive, not validating her, not doing that stuff. So that's where the timing of it, the now kind of takes place for me.

And then, yes, you're right in the sense that, yeah, I feel stupid. I feel dumb. There comes times where my reaction she'll say is not congruent. So my facial expressions aren't in line with the words I'm saying, and that becomes a trigger for her in an argument.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah. Because you'll roll your eyes and then you'll say, "no. I'm not mad. I'm not frustrated." Or you'll say it like, "yeah, I'm really here," but then he's, like, looking at his watch and has to, you know--

**STEVEN:** I don't wear a watch. I haven't worn a watch--

**CASSANDRA:** Or whatever. Your phone.

**STEVEN:** --in 30 years.

**CASSANDRA:** Your phone then. Whatever it is. And then--

**JORGENSEN:** You see some indication he's not really there in some way.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Or that he looks mad. You're picking up cues that he looks mad

and frustrated and he's not saying he is.

**CASSANDRA:** Yes.

**JORGENSEN:** And so that's part of what happens in these tension places between the two of you.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** All right. So something happens between the two of you and you-- it doesn't really matter where we start, because I know it just kind of gets its own life going, right? So you'll feel frustrated like he missed a cue or something, and then you'll try to explain to her why-- like, you're trying. Like, why you didn't understand or why you missed it or what else could've been going on. And you experience that as, his word was defensive. But I guess you guys have talked this over trying to figure this out yourselves before, huh? You would experience him as sort of defensive or not kind of hearing you out in some way. Is that right?

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah. I feel like that story about him has developed over time. Like, I just-- I understand him wanting to talk about context in what happened, but in the past, like, he just-- I'd experience him as defensive a lot in the past.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. And so when he gets defensive that you also get more frustrated. All right. And so you get more frustrated and you want him to take more responsibility. You want him to hear you out, I guess. That's a little bit what he said about you more than what you said about you.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah.

**CASSANDRA:** To understand where I'm coming from.

**JORGENSEN:** To try to understand where you are coming from, because I guess that's what you're trying to figure out yourself is that you need some support in some moment. And--

**CASSANDRA:** Yes. Instead of him just automatically jumping to, this is why this is what happened, you know?

**JORGENSEN:** And then how do you guys get out of it? What happens? How do you get out of it? We--

**STEVEN:** Have to say--

**CASSANDRA:** Usually just-- I feel like we don't really ever-- I mean, there are some times where we kind of resolve it--

**JORGENSEN:** How does this back and forth stop?

**STEVEN:** I just usually have to say--

**CASSANDRA:** We just quiet. Like--

**STEVEN:** "Sorry. Okay. I hear you. Yes, I'll do that. Yes, I will. I hear you."

**JORGENSEN:** Somehow you'll just start to go along with her.

**STEVEN:** I have to just--

**JORGENSEN:** Go along.

**STEVEN:** Yeah. I have to repeat perfectly back the rule that she asked me to do in the original start of it.

**CASSANDRA:** I don't perceive it like that at all. I mean, there are some times where you will do that, and then when--

**JORGENSEN:** So that may be one way you get out of it, that it stops. But you have another way in mind?

**CASSANDRA:** Even so, even when it is like that, it's like, I feel like he's just saying it just to, like, end it.

**JORGENSEN:** You don't really trust it.

**CASSANDRA:** Just to get that peace and calm.

**JORGENSEN:** Right

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** So it's a way that you both kind of call a truce. Like, you don't really buy it, but you'll go along with it too.

**CASSANDRA:** Sometimes, yeah. And then I just, like, well, this--

**JORGENSEN:** You're like, okay, well--

**CASSANDRA:** Whatever. Like, I'm-- I give up.

**JORGENSEN:** I give up.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Right. So you're-- is if he's kind of going along with you and you don't really feel like it's sincere in some sort of way, then that's the end of the discussion because you give up as well.

**CASSANDRA:** Yes. That is how it ends sometimes. Other times it's just-- we're just both quiet and I think we both just kind of distance ourselves and, like, cut off.

**JORGENSEN:** So you guys kind of feel like maybe you're kind of walking a little bit on thin ice? You don't want to spark it up again? Like you're--

**CASSANDRA:** He gets like that. He doesn't want to spark it up again, so he gets on thin ice. But for me it's like I want resolve. It doesn't feel good just to sit with it and not have it resolved.

**JORGENSEN:** Okay.

**CASSANDRA:** But lately I have been doing that. I've been--

**JORGENSEN:** You have been doing that lately.

**CASSANDRA:** Sitting with it. And I feel like the past two or three weeks our relationship feels even worse because we're just not talking. It's like--

**JORGENSEN:** Like you're both kind of avoiding having this spin out of control.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** And that feels worse to you, like, because now we're not even talking about stuff.

**CASSANDRA:** No I feel like we have no relationship.

**JORGENSEN:** At least before we were fighting for something.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Fighting for understanding. Fighting for something.

**CASSANDRA:** Yes. Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** And how's it been for you the last couple of weeks where it's like less tension, less fighting?

**STEVEN:** I totally see it completely differently.

**JORGENSEN:** You don't see it that way.

**STEVEN:** I see it completely different from her. Really what the reason why it's been uncomfortable the last couple of weeks is that cycle where, you know-- in my perspective, the arguments go until I compromise what I believe and think and try to adapt to the rule or the expectation that she's trying to communicate to me.

**JORGENSEN:** Right.

**YALOM:** We've just seen in this segment where the two of them describe the cycle they're in. And we've seen the diagram, how you conceptualize their feelings and behaviors in terms of the cycle. I think one point of clarification



that's important is we're not seeing the cycle kind of acted out in vivo, but we're getting their description of their interactions. And you were starting to formulate this all into the cycle. So how do you put it all together?

**JORGENSEN:** Based on what we see in this clip where I'm trying to work with Steven's part of the cycle more, as well as what we've gathered in earlier parts of this session and the intake session, I can review my conceptualization of the cycle.

**YALOM:** All right. So, but before we go into the full cycle summary, tell us what you've learned from Cassandra before this session.

**JORGENSEN:** So I've already learned from Cassandra that she feels really alone in the relationship. That she protests feeling disconnected by getting angry and making rules, kind of becoming more demanding. Her perception is that Steven doesn't really care about her emotional distress and she can't rely on him.

**YALOM:** So she's in a lot of pain about that.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. And she gets more reactive, more emotionally reactive, the more distressed that she feels. So she becomes the one that pursues to get his attention, his time. Make the rules, try to get his responsiveness.

**YALOM:** So in the clip we just saw, what are you doing?

**JORGENSEN:** So in the clip I intentionally start with one partner's reactive or triggered behavior that I use, then, to cross over to interview and understand the other partner. It's a kind of a back-and-forth process.

So, in this case, I started with Cassandra being triggered. And her behavior is to try to get through to Steven. So she shared that earlier, that she instructs, she makes rules, she tries to see if she can get him to respond in some way. And that's what we're, when I say-- so she was triggered. She gets triggered. Then we all understand that that's what she's been doing. That she tries to get through to him so that he understands her needs and he'll respond to her so she can rely on him. So Steven sees her trigger and he hears her and then his desire, or his unmet need, is to be valued and accepted. And that's threatened when he sees her anger and sees her protest.

**YALOM:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** So on the inside that leaves him feeling bad. That's his word for shame. And rejected. And these are really vulnerable feelings. And his longings for acceptance and safety in their relationship, along with these vulnerable feelings, then trigger his reactive response.

And so his secondary emotion is frustration and discouragement, even anger. His perceptions are that he's not getting it right again. And then he either moves into defending himself by explaining his actions, or he placates. He kind of starts to go along with her.

**YALOM:** So it's a great example of how conceptualizing it from this attachment framework you can see what just appears to be a lot of negativity and a lot of-- you could feel very hopeless if you didn't have a sense of what's happening. And she's trying to get her needs met and he's experiencing them negatively and he's reacting negatively. They're both wanting the same thing. They're both wanting to connect and feel important and valued to each other. So that was how Steven perceives her and then how, in turn, how is Cassandra viewing him?

**JORGENSEN:** So Cassandra then sees this reactivity in Steven, that he defends himself or he goes along with her, and then she perceives that her desire to be really understood and connected won't be met. She feels afraid that she can't rely on him. That's her vulnerable feeling, that he's abandoning her. That she's alone. And those vulnerable feelings turn to anger. She thinks things like, "he doesn't really care." "I can't count on him." And then she tries harder to get through. And this gets more specific with her instructions and the way she escalates the argument. So her angry words come back.

And we can cross over from her experience back to Steven then, because her angry affect and her words, her instructions, come back to Steven. And the more angry she gets, the more rejected and defensive or placating he becomes. And the more defensive or placating he becomes, the more alone she is and the more agitated she gets until she finally kind of gives up and thinks things will never get resolved and holds this agitation inside, which leaves her more alert for the next signal that he's not there for her which starts the protest all over again.

**YALOM:** Yeah. So the fact that this diagram is in the infinity sign makes a lot of sense. And this is really how couples usually look when they first come into the office. And if you don't really have this roadmap, know what you're doing, they'll just be happy-- not happy. But they'll come in week after week with the same type of complaints and the same type of dynamic.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Being able to kind of step back, zoom out, and look at the dynamic and the pieces, the components, that keep it alive, that organization really helps the therapist and helps the couple too to begin to make some order and some sense out of what's happening. And that brings some safety into the situation.

**YALOM:** Right. So that sounded like a fairly classic example of a cycle-- complicated, but still typical. But there are also some other different types of cycles that we see, right?

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. So that's kind of the classic pursue-withdraw pattern. And we can also encounter a withdraw-withdraw pattern, which is frequently a result of a pursuer that burns out or gives up reaching out for the partner. We can have an attack-attack cycle, which we can observe in escalations that are a different type of deviation of pursuit-withdraw where the withdrawer also turns and defends in a very angry way and so it goes into attack-attack. So they're both fighting and the withdrawer though will revert to a withdrawn position after the fight.

**YALOM:** All right. And then there are even more complex cycles than that.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. So we have the pursue-withdraw dynamic, withdraw-withdraw, or attack-attack, which are variations of the pursue-withdraw.

**YALOM:** Okay.

**JORGENSEN:** And then these complex cycles that really happen when there's been trauma or with partners who have had childhood trauma. Survivor couples where both high anxiety, so high emotionality, occurs along with high avoidance. So shutting down emotion. Or where there's an injury from within the relationship. So we would look at trauma, either from family origin types of trauma, other relational trauma, or something that's happened right within the relationship.

**YALOM:** And then I've heard there's also a reactive cycle. What's that?

**JORGENSEN:** So you might have a pursue-withdraw cycle where one of the partners burns out of their original position. The pursuer burns out of being the pursuer, and that looks more withdrawn. And so then the withdrawer becomes the pursuer in reaction to that. So their primary way of handling emotion starts to shift, and that becomes a reactive pattern. Because attachment is adaptive and over time if one approach doesn't work, then partners can shift positions.

**YALOM:** So let's take a look at some other examples of cycles. And we'll start with Carl and Sandra. And they display a more complex cycle.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Slightly more complex because Sandra has some trauma in her past. And so the cycle is more complicated because she is a pursuer that sometimes withdraws. And we're going to look at the following clip and see how Sandra fights when she's triggered.

**YALOM:** And, again, from an EFT perspective, her fighting is not just to be

mean or vindictive, but it's her way of trying to connect with Carl.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. She protests if they're not feeling connected. And then the other thing that she does is she recognizes danger in fighting, so she starts to withdraw. She flees. And Carl, who is the withdrawer, also gets angry and fights and then suppresses his anger and leaves or tries to solve the problem. So he'll take a much more classic withdrawer strategy or position.

So when you're triggered, you go into fight. And then you recognize, oh no, I'm triggered. I'm fighting. Danger. Danger. This is awful for me, awful for Carl. And then you go to flee and run for cover. And you've done that a long time, actually. You used to run other places and it would take you to drink or it would go other places. But now you can at least go and pray and meditate and find some way, work your program. But you know if you get too triggered and to stay in that angry, negative space, that you could be driven back to drink. It's dangerous for you.

**SANDRA:** I don't even really think about drinking, but for an alcoholic that's not good. I have to remember that I am an alcoholic.

**JORGENSEN:** You have your program well enough established that just kind of getting away gets you back to an even keel. But when she's triggered, then you automatically can go to anger, get triggered into fight. But you know that's very dangerous for you.

**SANDRA:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** So you try to push down the madness, the anger, and get out of the frustration.

**CARL:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** And you do that either by leaving the situation or trying to solve the problem or trying to get back in contact with her.

**CARL:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** Right.

**CARL:** True. Okay.

**JORGENSEN:** And that's the pattern where you guys get stuck.

**YALOM:** Another even more complex cycle is we can see in the case with Jon and Nydia, who have both suffered significant trauma. Jon was abandoned by an alcoholic father and Nydia was abused by her stepfather. And then when she reported this to her mother, her mother refused to acknowledge that.

**WOOLLEY:** Getting this right in terms of the pattern. By the way, a number

of times I'm going to be just taking guesses and I'm going to be filling in gaps. It speeds things up.

**NYDIA:** Okay.

**WOOLLEY:** And whenever I get it wrong and right, it's important to tell me.

**NYDIA:** Oh.

**WOOLLEY:** I'm getting it, let me know. If I'm getting it wrong, let me know, Okay, and correct me. When you both feel it. Sounds like you'll do that.

**JON:** Yes.

**WOOLLEY:** But I just want you to know you have my permission. In fact, it's not only do you have my permission, it's really, really important.

**NYDIA:** Okay.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay. But if I'm getting this right, one of the things that-- there's a pattern that goes on in your relationship, is that right? And that pattern involves-- at least part of the pattern involves you getting hurt. She does something and that's hurtful. Maybe it's because you don't feel respected somehow.

**JON:** It's like she'd only have to-- does or say something. It could just be saying something. It's like wow. It hurts.

**WOOLLEY:** That hurts. Right. Okay, that hurts. And then when she does or says something that's hurtful, that to you hurts, she may or may not even know that it hurts, right?

**JON:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay.

**JON:** Well, I'll let her know right away. She'll know.

**WOOLLEY:** And how do you let her know?

**JON:** I get angry.

**WOOLLEY:** You get angry, then you show it.

**JON:** And say it.

**WOOLLEY:** And you say it. Okay. Yeah. And so, like, what do you say?

**JON:** Maybe something hurtful back.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay.

**JON:** It doesn't feel like it's going to hurt her, but I guess it is.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Okay. So what happens is you get hurt, then you get angry, and then you say something hurtful back. It's like you're critical or you kind of jab her somehow or something. Is that right? And then what happens for you?

**NYDIA:** Me, I eat it up. I get so upset I don't want to talk to him, because I'm upset and nice words are not going to come out of me. So I rather not at that-- I get, and then I start saying things that are not pleasant. Not pleasant. Because he's saying and I'm retaliating. So as he's escalating, I get more upset. So I guess when we get tired of just talking bad to each other back and forth and then we just choop! Everybody goes their separate ways. He goes to the motor home and I go to my bedroom.

**JON:** And that just confirms to me that, yeah, you don't have deep respect for me.

**WOOLLEY:** The fact that she leaves?

**JON:** No, that she-- remember she says more things. She'll say, yeah, see? I know you don't love me.

**WOOLLEY:** I'm out of here. Right, yeah. You don't feel loved. You feel really hurt and you don't feel loved.

**JON:** Oh, I feel loved, but just not respected.

**WOOLLEY:** Respected. You don't feel respect. But part of you does go to this place. So, see? She doesn't love me.

**JON:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Right?

**JON:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay. So you don't feel respected and you get hurt, you get angry, and you'll be critical or attack or whatever, right? You let her know, but you don't let her know in a direct way. You don't go to her and say, oh, ouch. That really hurt. You don't do that, right? You get angry and then you kind of go at her.

**JON:** Well, I'll try to be mature, because I learned a lot at 50 now. I try to talk a little bit, then when I see it's getting nowhere I just give up. I give it a silent treatment. And I know that's hurtful too. And it's like, you know what? I'm not giving you no more love. I give a lot of love, but I'm just not going to give no more love. I'm going to love myself. Go and read, go and listen to radio, and then just--

**WOOLLEY:** Somehow.

**JON:** I don't go to sleep, I might get depressed. I get real depressed and unmotivated.

**WOOLLEY:** Do you?

**NYDIA:** When that happens.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. So when you go away, your first response is to try and engage, right? But you do it in a way that's kind of harsh or strong, right?

**JON:** I fight back.

**WOOLLEY:** You fight back. Right. You fight back. Right. But then after a while it goes and then generally you're the one that is going to pull away and go away, right? Because it's, like, this isn't doing anything. She's saying hurtful things back, right? And that hurts. And you go away and then you get depressed. You kind of try to calm yourself, right? You read, you do whatever you can, listen to radio or whatever, try to calm yourself. You're by yourself. And then, really, once the anger part passes, then you get depressed. Right?

**JON:** I get real sad. I invested so much in this relationship.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. You get sad.

**JON:** Wasn't what I bargained for.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. And this lady is so important to you, getting hurt like this is not what I wanted. And you know something about getting hurt.

**JORGENSEN:** Here Scott identifies the pattern as Nydia says something that Jon perceives as disrespectful. It hurts his feelings and he gets angry and jabs back. Nydia then is hurt and gets more upset and she retaliates. This confirms to Jon that he's not loved or respected, and so then he either fights back by withdrawing or giving her the silent treatment. They both end up going their separate ways. So this cycle goes something like pursue-defend to attack-attack to withdraw-withdraw.

**YALOM:** As we watch these clients, we can't help but notice that there are also different styles of pursuers and withdrawers. It's not one size fits all.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. There's variations on it, on the strategies. And the strategies are used to different degrees. So with Carl we saw previously that there is a more-- as a more functional or typical withdrawer-- he's aware of his inner world. And while there's some emotions he feels are off-limits initially, he is willing to explore them.

**YALOM:** But Drew, as we'll see in the next vignette, is more shut down,

depressed, and distant.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. We'll notice how still-faced he stays throughout the interaction.

**FARRAH:** I feel like it's just not important to him.

**WOOLLEY:** It's just not important.

**FARRAH:** It's not.

**WOOLLEY:** That's the way you make sense out of it.

**FARRAH:** That's how I make sense out of it because there's no response from him. It's like there's never any questions about it, and there's no response really from him. It's like, yeah, we'll take care of it. Or-- it's dead on his end. I have this face, you know?

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Right. But what's interesting about that is that, really, it isn't dead. It looks dead because he's non-responsive.

**FARRAH:** Yes.

**YALOM:** This really looks like a tough couple. Now let's switch to Jon who, on the other hand, has many nonverbal reactions that could be quite distracting. And he's both reactive and also defensive.

**JORGENSEN:** Jon has more emotions than he can suppress, so it comes out as defensive. Most withdrawers will stuff their emotions and then blow up occasionally. But Jon does it very rapidly. He has a lot of difficulty accessing and staying with his feelings. You can look at how the nonverbal cues show his discomfort, as well as how often and how he exits from experiencing his own inner world. He looks up, he looks away. It becomes difficult for him to find his words.

Many withdrawers would look calm and still on the outside. You might see a little bit of fidgeting. But Jon has pretty big gestures, and he's doing a lot of work trying to contain his emotions that it shows how much injury, really, that he has underneath. He's a very defensive withdrawer. This is common when there's a history of trauma or shame proneness.

**LYDIA:** He thinks I'm judging him. But it's just something that I feel. I mean, I can't do anything about it except not address it when it's happening because I feel so upset that I feel that rage. It's going to end up worse than just backing up. But I want him to know. I want him to know how I feel.

**LYDIA:** You should direct the rage to yourself, not me.

**WOOLLEY:** Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.



**LYDIA:** No, I didn't say that--

**WOOLLEY:** Do you feel like she directs the rage to you? Does she get enraged with you on those problems?

**JON:** I just feel that she's jealous. I don't really feel the rage that, like, she--

**LYDIA:** You're not listening, Jon.

**JON:** You're just jealous and I'm like-- I can't. It's unreasonable jealousy.

**LYDIA:** Like right now he's not listening. He's just thinking and he's telling things to himself and he's not rationalizing.

**WOOLLEY:** So let's slow down. Let's slow down. Let's slow down, okay? Because that may be true, maybe it's not. I don't know. But the best way to find out is to slow down and let's ask. Shall we?

**LYDIA:** Okay.

**WOOLLEY:** How about if I do it?

**LYDIA:** All right.

**WOOLLEY:** Do you mind?

**LYDIA:** Okay.

**WOOLLEY:** Do you mind? Okay. What's happening inside?

**JON:** It's like there. It just felt like that's a judgement on my--

**WOOLLEY:** What's happening inside of you, emotionally?

**JON:** Emotionally, I just feel she's unreasonable.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay. So what you're thinking is, okay, she's being unreasonable. And what it feels like, I mean, is this a little scary? Because when I think people are being unreasonable, sometimes they get nervous. What's the emotion?

**JON:** Fear that something stupid like this is going to lead to a breakup. Because if the woman's fat and ugly, I still would try to be nice and talk or say something nice about her. Half of the population is opposite sex. I mean, they're my sisters in a sense.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah

**JON:** And you know what? It's nothing, you know?

**WOOLLEY:** You get afraid that this is going to lead to a breakup. That goes back to-- we talked about this last time. In some ways you've been terrified you're going to lose her.

**JON:** Yeah. Be really sad.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. So you get afraid. You get afraid. What's happening?

**LYDIA:** He's been saying that for a couple of days now.

**WOOLLEY:** That he's afraid?

**LYDIA:** Of losing me. And that I might leave him.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. He does look afraid. And I think you understand that, because you get afraid too, right?

**LYDIA:** He has very much.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Yeah. You get afraid. Jon, can you tell me about the fear? Help me understand this.

**JON:** [MUMBLING]

**I just try to do every day best thing to do to maintain her love for me.**

**YALOM:** And, finally, the last withdrawer we're going to take a look at is Steven.

**JORGENSEN:** Steven is highly intellectualized. He has all the words for emotions. He can talk about his emotions. But he doesn't allow much access to feeling them. So he's very chatty and he stays in his head.

**YALOM:** All right. So let's take a look at him.

**STEVEN:** There's the key difference between us is she has to have-- she needs my perception of her. She needs resolve now.

**JORGENSEN:** Now.

**STEVEN:** Like now. And for me, I'm like, look, we'll get resolve. I mean, I got 80 years left. I'm not going anywhere, you know what I mean? Like, we'll get resolve. How are we going to possibly come to a resolution where one of us isn't severely compromised right now in this moment to get your resolve right now? That's not going to lead to a good resolution. And it turns into these long fights where we actually accomplish creating more harm because we're trying to get resolve right now in the moment than if we just took a step back, look at the big picture. Just kind of sat with it and let it go. Realize that, yeah, it's a big deal. You're upset. But you know what? It's not that big of a deal.

**CASSANDRA:** And, yeah, I--

**STEVEN:** And that's where I think I'm different than her in that time theme plays out in a lot of different areas.

**JORGENSEN:** That now, an urgency.

**STEVEN:** That I got to have it now. I've got to be fulfilled now. I've got to be heard now. I have to be expressive now. I need this now.

**CASSANDRA:** I don't experience it like that.

**YALOM:** So the same way there are different types of withdrawers, there are also different style of pursuers. Would you say Cassandra is a pretty typical pursuer?

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Cassandra is a typical pursuer. And she's not been in the cycle for a long time and, therefore, she's not as rigid as Sandra, for example. But we can notice how her emotional intensity takes over the session, even as I'm working with Steven. When pursuers can't get through, they lose emotional control. It can get flooded. They reach out to other people or escape, since that's the only thing that they can do, hoping that the withdrawer will come and get them. All with the intention to get and achieve emotional connection.

**STEVEN:** And this is where the cycle is playing out.

**JORGENSEN:** But you have all this urgency going on inside. Like, you have to get it all right and you have to track all of these things. And all this extra pressure is coming on to you, as your experience.

**STEVEN:** And I was holding that well in my mind up into the point where I recognized she was already triggered. Because that's when she said she's like, "look, if you really knew me, you would know what else to get me instead. You would be able to find some other dessert, candy."

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah. It was triggering, and I told him that experience was triggering for me. I said it in the moment. Like, this is triggering.

**JORGENSEN:** I'm feeling triggered right now.

**CASSANDRA:** We've been together for three years--

**STEVEN:** You should know this.

**CASSANDRA:** I didn't say it like that. I said, "we've been together for three years and you don't know what I would like." And--

**STEVEN:** We've been married three years January 2nd.

**CASSANDRA:** It was triggering for me.

**STEVEN:** Four years in March.

**CASSANDRA:** Because then it's like I do feel insecure in our relationship.

And I do--

**STEVEN:** So here's the cycle.

**CASSANDRA:** Hold on. Let me talk.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. You're doing great. It's just a really tough place when you both are feeling so raw right now, yeah. You feel all this intensity coming from him right now, yeah?

**CASSANDRA:** Yes.

**JORGENSEN:** Right. And when you feel all that intensity it makes you feel smaller and more helpless, like it's your fault. It's your problem. Yeah.

**CASSANDRA:** (CRYING) It makes me feel so angry. Like, I just--

**JORGENSEN:** All right. So angry. So frustrated. So angry. Like, how can this come back and land on me when I'm trying so hard?

**STEVEN:** I'm sorry. I didn't mean to talk over you.

**CASSANDRA:** This is, like, it, right here. It's like, this is--

**JORGENSEN:** This is how it--

**CASSANDRA:** --where, like, I feel like I just want to either just totally run--

**JORGENSEN:** It kind of reminds me of what you said a moment ago, that you see Steven like-- you experience him as defensive or wanting to withdraw, right? And it's like you can feel that right now. Like, I feel so shaky on the inside. Either makes me want to fight back and be defensive or just get out of here.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Right? You can feel that so deeply, that urge. Like, I'm feeling so bad that I don't know what else to do. But either feel like I've got to protect myself somehow or just get away. Yeah, yeah. Thanks for staying here with that. That's a really hard place to stay. There's this intensity that you're feeling.

**YALOM:** Shelley, on the other hand, also a pursuer, is very blamey. We'll see this in the next clip.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. Notice how quickly she can escalate, and how it takes some time for her to calm down.

**SHELLEY:** As a kind of a confidence, what happened in this to sort of as a contextual or-- not, but conceptual more-- is that Bill has a very optimistic, everything's-going-to-be-fine. And it's all going to work out. And I'm going to do this and that in the future. And my impression is, oh my gosh. This is

more of the impulsivity. This is more of reassurances that have never been successful. It's more of the same that has taken us down financially, that thinking of being--

**LISA PALMER-OLSEN:** Everything's going to be okay.

**SHELLEY:** I would just call it impulsive. And I've even used the-- I've honestly used the word a little delusional, you know? I mean, and then what happens is he comes back to me and says, well, you really are a worrier. I believe you worry unnecessarily too much about things. And I don't want to get caught up in you, because you're pessimistic. And if you were just supportive, I could do this. And then we get in the dance of--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**SHELLEY:** "Have I ever not been supportive, Bill?" And then he goes, "well, no, not really." But then he starts going, "you don't want me to be happy doing this and that."

**KAUPP:** So I want to go back there, Shelley--

**SHELLEY:** And it just spirals--

**KAUPP:** I get it, yeah, yeah.

**SHELLEY:** --into a rage.

**YALOM:** And, finally, we see Farrah, who's a burned-out pursuer.

**JORGENSEN:** Burned-out pursuers stop turning towards their partner as a solution to their distress, so they try to find other strategies to manage their internal conflict and to avoid the pain of feeling alone. They often start walling up or turning away to others or try different self-regulation skills.

**DREW:** And I have a bad habit, she'll tell you, of just-- I just start walking away.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. And then--

**DREW:** That's not the right way.

**WOOLLEY:** --that feeling of being abandoned or he doesn't care, I'm not important, the kids are not important, that just kind of floods you, right?

**FARRAH:** Yes. Absolutely.

**WOOLLEY:** That's very painful.

**FARRAH:** Yes, it is.

**WOOLLEY:** Very, very painful. And that's when you tend to speak faster,

follow him or whatever. And then he leaves and go off, and then it gets really-- it hurts, right? And you're more likely to kind of-- are you more likely in those situations to get mad at him or be critical or just pull away?

**DREW:** She gets frustrated at me.

**FARRAH:** I get mad and frustrated. And I'm just-- now I'm just like, whatever. I'm just--

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah, because you're kind of burned out now, right?

**FARRAH:** Right. And now I think I over probably the last six months I just don't, like, say anything anymore. I just take care of everything myself because it's just easier that way. Then I'm not setting myself up to be hurt. I put my wall up that way. Even though I have never had a wall up before, I have now.

**YALOM:** So once you've identified the cycle dynamic, then you can start the task of accessing primary emotions, which is Step Three.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. From attachment theory and other fields of science, we know that humans, particularly love partners, need a felt sense of connection with each other. Emotion is the target and the agent of change and, as such, it's the focus of the two key therapeutic tasks-- accessing and reprocessing emotion, and using new emotional experience to restructure responses to self and other.

**YALOM:** Okay.

**JORGENSEN:** So what we're talking about here in Step Three is accessing the more soft and vulnerable primary emotion.

**YALOM:** So what are some of the ways to access those primary emotions?

**JORGENSEN:** Well, there's lots of different ways to access primary emotion. When you look at the cycle handout, we can use all aspects of the negative cycle to lead us back to the primary emotion. We can access primary emotion from a person's own reactivity. "You get really mad and frustrated, so that's hard. Can you tell me about the softness or the vulnerability you feel under that anger," for example.

**YALOM:** Okay. So when you see the person's reactivity, then you comment on that and use that as a way to try to get more, to go deeper.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. We'll validate that reactivity, be with that reactivity, and then invite them into deeper experiencing. We can also access it from the person's longing for more connection. So something like, "you really want this to work. You love her. You're trying hard. And when you feel you're not

enough for her, what is that feeling? Is it all right for you to let yourself feel that sensitive feeling for a moment?” From the diagram of the longing, it would be a little step up to that primary emotion.

We can also go from the partner’s reactivity. Like “what happens to you inside when you hear that angry tone in your partner’s voice? Is that when you feel scared inside?” And we can access the person’s primary emotion from their partner’s vulnerable emotion. “As you hear your partner describe sadness and the fear of disappointing you, what do you feel in your heart? Can you feel that sadness?”

**YALOM:** So one thing-- commonality I’m hearing, which, I think, is really key, especially when you’re seeing reactivity in front of you, is for yourself as the therapist not to get triggered or to kind of start challenging them to try to break through that, but to see it as a signal to help you move down to the primary emotion underneath that. Is that correct?

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. We will see that as a defensive strategy, and we don’t want to take people’s defenses away from them. We go with them to their defense until they feel safe enough to set it down.

**YALOM:** Yeah. Okay. So let’s first take a look at the challenges of accessing emotions with withdrawers.

**JORGENSEN:** Well, withdrawers tend to respond to threat by suppressing or repressing emotion. So suppressing emotion takes a lot of energy, a lot of mental energy. So, as a therapist, I want to share the cognitive load with them, so I’m going to join them by using my mental energy, by reflecting and validating, organizing their positional stance. And this joining of them frees up energy for emotions, their emotions, to emerge.

One common fear that withdrawers have is that sharing their emotions will make things worse. So they try to protect themselves and their partners from their distressed feelings. So, first, I want to be with them in their head and then invite them into their emotional experience, into their feelings, not to put them on the spot or to pursue them for an emotional response. I want to join with them, organize it, make it safe, so I reflect and validate.

There’s an acronym that I developed for a sequence that promotes safety for the withdrawer. It’s RAVE, R-A-V-E, which means to Reflect, Accept, Validate, and then Explore the emotions. So you’ll see later with Jon who opens up more with Scott when he reflects more.

**YALOM:** So that provides some useful insight because oftentimes we don’t know what’s happening with withdrawers and we see the pursuer get

increasingly agitated and demanding, and sometimes it's easy, I think, for therapists to identify with the pursuers like, "just say something!"

**JORGENSEN:** What is going on inside there, right?

**YALOM:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** And in that way a therapist, we need to really be careful there, because we could kind of join the negative cycle as a pursuer of the withdrawer.

**YALOM:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** So we want to kind of sit in our seat in this way where we're curious about what's happening inside of them, but really we're going to join them first by reflecting and validating what's happening, what they're doing, how they experience it, and being accepting of that, which is kind of warm and open to them, providing that validation. Like, we understand. It makes sense that they would be trying to figure things out or go into their head or problem solving. And then exploring their emotion first.

**YALOM:** Okay. So now let's look at some examples of Step Three with withdrawers.

**JORGENSEN:** The first one shows Scott. He's working with the withdrawer's own reactivity. In this case, it's Drew. Scott uses his perceptions and he organizes the context of Drew's emotional reality. And once he aligns with Drew, Drew is able to access his emotions.

**WOOLLEY:** Because you love this lady.

**DREW:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Is that right?

**DREW:** I feel like I'm the part of the equation that doesn't fit. That's how she makes me feel with the family. I'm the odd one out.

**WOOLLEY:** You're the odd one out. Yeah.

**DREW:** I think I've always been the odd one out. So I'm the square trying to fit in the circle peg hole.

**WOOLLEY:** Ouch. Ouch. And that's painful. That is painful. And when you say I've always been the odd one out, does that-- like, even in childhood or--

**DREW:** Absolutely. Always. I've always had to make my own grounds. I think, I mean, it's the way my dad was, and part of it. I mean--

**WOOLLEY:** It's okay. What's happening?



**DREW:** Just wasn't easy.

**WOOLLEY:** Wasn't easy at all. It was painful, because my guess is there were some pretty maybe lonely or difficult or confusing times growing up, right? Maybe with other kids, maybe with your dad, your family. And you kind of assumed, "I'm the square peg trying to go into a round hole and I got to fix myself or I got to change or something." Is that right?

**DREW:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** And then you married this lady who you love, who's wonderful, right? It's okay. It's okay. And it gets really scary because you're trying to change because you need her love, right? And acceptance. Right?

**DREW:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Because you've had-- my guess is that you had kind of a lonely childhood in some ways. Is that right?

**DREW:** Yeah. I'd say that's fair.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. What's happening inside?

**DREW:** I feel I'm going back to that place.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Where you were as a child. You're going back to that place.

**DREW:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. And it's tough. And you don't want to lose her.

**YALOM:** The next example is of the second type, working from the client's longing.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Syed wants peace, harmony, love. Scott amplifies this longing that he has by adding the idea of him wanting to be understood and valued and important. And then he expands the attachment frame in this way, emphasizing the importance of his wife to his happiness. Scott validates him and communicates acceptance through his warmth and his belief in Syed's experience. So this helps Syed connect his story to his relational longings and helps him clarify what his feelings are.

**SYED:** Of course I want peace, harmony, love and somebody to understand me and somebody to trying to please me, somebody make me feel important.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. You want to be understood and valued, right? And be important. Right?

**SYED:** Yes. And especially in this relationship.

**WOOLLEY:** Especially here.

**SYED:** In this relationship.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. How come?

**SYED:** Huh?

**WOOLLEY:** How come?

**SYED:** What--

**WOOLLEY:** Why especially in this relationship, with this woman? I believe it, totally. It makes perfect sense to me. But why?

**SYED:** I mean, there so I can get happiness. If--

**WOOLLEY:** My guess is, this lady's probably more important than just about anybody.

**SYED:** For my happiness, yes.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. She's more important than anybody.

**SYED:** Actually, she's the only one. Because with children, I mean, they are full-grown today. I mean, Ramice has uttered those words which I've told you but still I love him. And still I make food for him. And still I do everything what I have been doing before also.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Right. Right. But it's different.

**SYED:** Could I take now-- I need tissue paper.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. It's painful to talk about, isn't it?

**SYED:** Yeah. I never wanted to.

**WOOLLEY:** You never wanted to talk about it? Yeah. It takes a lot of courage because a lot of times we are not talking--

**SYED:** Actually, it's not correct, I mean, you are digging it so that's the reason it has come up.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**SYED:** Otherwise I'm in--

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. But, still, you're doing it. I'm digging, that's true, and I'm leading you.

**SYED:** She knows it.

**WOOLLEY:** And she does know it, sure, that I'm leading it. But this is new, right?

**ANJUM:** Mm hm.

**WOOLLEY:** And you're telling me the truth. This isn't an act.

**ANJUM:** I hope so.

**WOOLLEY:** Well, we'll look at it--

**SYED:** If it is an act, it's very good. It's very natural.

**WOOLLEY:** It's not an act, right? I mean, it may be hard to believe, but look at his face. Can you see it?

**ANJUM:** Yeah. I think he's more upset about the fact the Ramice called him that name. That's what brought the tears on, when he said that.

**WOOLLEY:** Hold on a second here. He did say that and he said it in the context of you're the only one. You're the most important. With Ranice-- Ramice? He makes food for him, he still loves him, okay? But it's a different kind of relationship, right, than your relationship with her.

**SYED:** Yeah. That is different.

**WOOLLEY:** Wanting to be understood--

**SYED:** Let me tell you one more thing. When she was diagnosed with cancer, everybody knew it that she has cancer except for my sister and my mother, because she said don't tell them and I didn't tell them.

**WOOLLEY:** Out of your loyalty to her?

**SYED:** Of course. Of course. And then my mother, she wanted me to visit her before her death. And she kept on requesting me to visit her, to visit her, and I used to say she is not well and after the last time I spoke with her, I said I'll be visiting you in two months. And she said two months? And I could clearly feel the hopelessness in her--

**ANJUM:** Voice. In her voice.

**SYED:** Hm?

**ANJUM:** Hopelessness in her voice.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**SYED:** Yeah. Hopelessness that I won't be able to visit her. She was-- and then she passed away.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**SYED:** And then I told to my sister and she was very upset. I mean, she said, had you told me that I would have prayed. My mother would have prayed for her.

**WOOLLEY:** But I think what... yeah.

**SYED:** It's a--

**WOOLLEY:** But the point is--

**SYED:** The point is that she told me not to tell them and I didn't tell them, even--

**WOOLLEY:** And that is because you love her, you're loyal to her, you care about her. Why?

**SYED:** Of course. Loyalty.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Loyalty.

**SYED:** Yes.

**WOOLLEY:** And the tears. Are the tears just about your son or are the tears about your desire, your longing, really, to be understood, to be valued, to be important to this lady? What are the tears about?

**SYED:** Don't get you.

**WOOLLEY:** It's okay. What are the tears about? Are the tears-- your tears-- are they about wanting to be understood and loved and desired, important to this lady?

**SYED:** Yeah. And my hopelessness.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. And your hopelessness. Yeah. Because you've been trying to change it and you don't know how to, right? Right. Does that surprise you?

**YALOM:** Sometimes, and in particular if you have a difficult client, it's necessary to try to get at the primary emotions through different angles.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. With Steven we'll see this in the next clip. I start by inviting him to share and affirm his positive intentions. He talked about his fear, but he didn't access it, so I switched to other strategies. And one is a evocative sandwich.

**YALOM:** All right. EFT has a lot of terms, like any system. So what's an evocative sandwich?

**JORGENSEN:** Well, evocative sandwich-- this one that I start with is, "where do you feel it in your body?" And so the question is the bread of the sandwich, the outside-- where do you feel it in your body? And then I add in the feeling, which is heightening his vulnerable feelings. Like, "I'm not enough." "It's hard for me."

And then we end with another evocative question. Where is that fear in

your body? The outside breads are very similar, if not the same question, with this filling in the middle that points to his primary emotion or his longing to heighten his experience. That's one of the most effective ways to access emotion, because if all you do is reflect, it can take a very long time and it gives them time to reflect while you are heightening their emotional experience and by repeating the question.

**YALOM:** So the filling is you're actually doing an empathic conjecture. Is that what we talked about earlier?

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah, a conjecture, a heightening in some sort of a way--

**YALOM:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** --their emotional experience.

**YALOM:** And still we see how hard Steven works at suppressing his emotions.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. So I try to keep the focus on the present process to help him regulate by sharing the cognitive load.

**YALOM:** You've used that before. What does that mean, sharing the cognitive load?

**JORGENSEN:** It's a term that comes from Jim Cohen and some of his research and this idea that we're co-regulating emotion. But in this sense, we're co-regulating the suppression of emotion by being with his cognitive understanding.

And as I share that cognitive-- it takes a lot of work to suppress emotion, so if I'm organizing and reflecting and validating what he does in his own head, then that joining frees up that energy for emotion to come over. So I'm really co-regulating that kind of brain-to-brain, as Alan Shore talks about, his cognitive load. So I'm really sharing his thinking, and that allows his energy to go more to what he's feeling. So I communicate acceptance and I validate.

And then you'll also notice in EFT we use a lot of proxy voice to try to really be close to his experience. So you'll notice I talk a lot in order to be with him and to help him feel safe enough to access his feelings. And as he starts to feel, he becomes more quiet.

But what was happening for you is you were trying to kind of lay that context again of why you might be afraid. Why what you offered her might not be enough, right? You were trying to lay that context for your fear. So maybe you can tell her just about that part. Like, "I just spontaneously want to turn and tell you I love you. That's why I'm waiting. I hope that you'll"-- it's almost like, underscore, "I hope you'll know when I'm frozen and waiting it's because

I love you. That's why I'm here waiting, right?"

**STEVEN:** Yeah. You know I--

**JORGENSEN:** "And I do get afraid that what I have to offer isn't going to be enough, isn't going to really please you or be enough," yeah? Could you help her with that part?

**STEVEN:** Yeah. I mean, I'm so afraid that you won't believe me I'm using this opportunity to have an expert here to say, look, you know, I do love you. And I wouldn't be here and wouldn't be opening our lives up and ourselves up unless I didn't. And it's scary to me that I can't communicate that to you or I don't feel like I communicate to you other times. And so I'm taking every opportunity I could to tell you and hope that you'll hear it. And so that's why I did it is because you're here to hear it. And maybe that will add enough weight on the statement so that you can actually believe it.

**JORGENSEN:** So, Steven--

**STEVEN:** Because I get scared you won't believe it when I say it on its own, and you won't hear it on its own or you won't see it on its own.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. So can you describe that fear feeling. Where do you feel that in your body? The what I have to give you isn't convincing enough? If I just offer it, me, I'm not an authority enough, right? I'm not enough in some way for you to see that I really love you. My feelings or my expression are somehow-- it's not going to be enough. Where does that fear hit you in your body?

**STEVEN:** Well, I think I've described it before. I mean, the way I feel it now is like-- it's like the wind knocked out of me. Like in the gut punch, right in the diaphragm area. So that's kind of the typical feeling for me. So it's--

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. And that happens again now, that gut punch. And you did describe that last week.

**STEVEN:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. So it's kind of this after effect of, "I'm going to put something out there. I want to put it out there."

**STEVEN:** Well, it was more in advance.

**JORGENSEN:** Sure.

**STEVEN:** Because I'm like, oh, here. I'm going to use this situation here and use this opportunity and take advantage of it for my own needs. And, like, well, how's that going to respond? What's that going to turn into?

**JORGENSEN:** So you were already feeling that even before as you turned to say, “I love you, that’s why I’m waiting.”

**STEVEN:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Right. Right. So if we backed up to that spot, then what was happening was, “Cassie, I want you to know so much that I love you and it’s so scary for me to put that out there.”

**STEVEN:** Mm hm.

**JORGENSEN:** “It’s so scary for me to put it out there. It takes my breath away to think that you don’t believe how much I love you. So I do all these things and all these positive things, anything I can think of, to try to set it up so you can see, so I have some weight with you, that you can believe how much I love you and want to be with you.” When you feel that, that takes your breath away. Yeah. Right. What’s that been like for you to hold onto that for so long, Steven, having the air-knocked-out-of-you experience? It’s been going on for a long time.

**STEVEN:** Mm hm.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. And no way to really share it or express it or feel like it would matter because it wasn’t ever enough. Yeah.

**YALOM:** So now let’s take a look at Jon, who’s our reactive and defensive withdrawer.

**JORGENSEN:** He is able to express some vulnerability, although you will see how difficult it is for him to stay with the feeling. He touches it and then he goes away from it. With Scott’s help, he can tolerate it a bit more.

**JON:** I need you too, just as much.

**WOOLLEY:** Do you?

**JON:** Yeah. I need your deep respect and your trust.

**WOOLLEY:** And you get afraid too? Do you get afraid too, Jon?

**JON:** Yeah, I guess I-- you know, I’m not the most handsome man in the world or the greatest guy. She can leave me too, in a heartbeat.

**WOOLLEY:** Could you up and counter? Did you know that?

**JON:** Yeah. [MUMBLING]

**WOOLLEY:** You get scared. You get scared too. She could leave me.

**JON:** Mm hm. That’d hurt.

**WOOLLEY:** Hm?

**JON:** That'd hurt.

**WOOLLEY:** That would hurt. Just even thinking about it hurts, right? Right? Do you feel it inside?

**JON:** Mm hm.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**LYDIA:** Oh, mi amor.

**WOOLLEY:** All right. Can you tell her about that? Tell her more about it.

**JON:** When I feared, you know, because I like your lips a lot and kissing. When you're smoking and get mouth cancer, then I can't kiss you.

**WOOLLEY:** He has lots of fears, doesn't he?

**JON:** I don't have a lot.

**WOOLLEY:** But did you hear him just say-- "I don't think I'm very handsome and I have my issues"--

**LYDIA:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** "I'm now afraid you're going to leave me. Yeah, and then I'm also afraid you're going to get cancer. Those lips are so beautiful and so wonderful for me to kiss that I get scared." It's like, when you kiss her sometimes do you get scared that those lips are going to get cancer and you're going to lose them?

**JON:** Yeah. Yeah. They're not always going to be as pretty because mouth and throat cancer's really bad. Terrible.

**WOOLLEY:** Did you know that was going through him?

**LYDIA:** No. I didn't know that.

**JON:** I read about it.

**LYDIA:** He reads a lot.

**JON:** Yep.

**YALOM:** We can see how challenging it can be for withdrawers to access their emotions. We talked earlier about using RAVE as a technique to facilitate creating a safe experience for withdrawers.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Pay attention here to the amount of reflecting Scott does, which helps withdrawers access emotions better rather than just evocative responding or saying, "how are you feeling?" He also has Jon check into his



body to access his feelings.

Part of the avoidance strategy of withdrawers is that they are overwhelmed by emotions and, therefore, they suppress them. So asking them how they're feeling is like asking for something you're not good at doing. And this can be more triggering for them and harder, then, to access. So reflecting and communicating acceptance and validating instead of asking helps regulate Jon so he can think and feel at the same time, rather than trying to push his feelings away.

**WOOLLEY:** You heard, "that was a dumb idea." And how did that feel?

**JON:** That felt like the worst. I felt like I didn't want to be around her.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. That felt like the worst.

**JON:** It's like, yeah, it shot me down.

**WOOLLEY:** It hurt.

**JON:** And she was even trying to be nice on the way home and walking to the car, apologising. I just couldn't.

**WOOLLEY:** You couldn't take it in. You were so hurt.

**JON:** Uh huh. I felt like you just--

**LYDIA:** I said wait a minute. Where you going? Wait. Explain. I don't understand. Please.

**WOOLLEY:** So--

**LYDIA:** Because I didn't understand where he flipped.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Because my guess is that it flips pretty bad. I mean, and part of this has to do with the fact that you guys have been through so much, okay? And it's like the failed relationships of the past or the divorces of the past, they were pretty painful for both of you, right?

**LYDIA:** Mm hm.

**WOOLLEY:** And that's like the ghosts of those, metaphorically. The ghosts of those are kind of always there with the two of you, right?

**LYDIA:** Mm hm.

**WOOLLEY:** So all of a sudden, man, she's not treating me with respect. She's--

**JON:** Over little issues. That's my idea. I just said something about flowers --

**WOOLLEY:** "She's saying that my idea is dumb." And basically did it feel like

she was saying you were dumb?

**JON:** Or “that’s childish”

**WOOLLEY:** Or you were being childish?

**JON:** Yeah. And then something just--

**WOOLLEY:** It felt personal, right?

**JON:** Yeah. Very.

**WOOLLEY:** Personal. And when you felt the hurt in your body, where did you feel it?

**JON:** From the top down.

**WOOLLEY:** All over. Right. Did you know that was happening for him?

**LYDIA:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. It’s like, woah. And it was really, that felt like she was saying somehow your idea was childish or you were childish or that you were stupid or dumb or something.

**JON:** Like, “this is never going to happen. I’m never going to respect you.”

**WOOLLEY:** I’m never going to respect-- ow.

**JON:** Even if you flashed a flower.

**LYDIA:** Wow.

**JON:** Even if it’s your turn to use the flower.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Oh. What happened since you hear that?

**LYDIA:** I feel very moved. Deeply moved by all the hurt that I caused him.

**YALOM:** As you mentioned previously, people-- I think, beginning therapists, even some more experienced therapists-- try to access feelings by asking the same question over and over again, “how do you feel?” But that alone-- sometimes that works, but often that’s not enough.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Students often have a hard time with withdrawers responding with, “I don’t know.” It’s a very common response. If you say, “how do you feel?” they’ll say, “I don’t know.” Note how in the following example I stay with “I don’t know” as a process, not as the content. And I reflect Carl’s experience and what he does with the feeling. How he becomes more careful.

And while you may not express it very often, Carl, what it feels like for you until it gets hopeless. That it’s--

**CARL:** Okay.

**JORGENSEN:** You do have an experience of it pushes you back somehow. Like-- right?

**CARL:** Yes, it does.

**JORGENSEN:** And when I think of a blast coming at me on the wall, it's like taking a hit. Yeah?

**CARL:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Pushes you back some way.

**CARL:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** How does that sensation land on you?

**CARL:** I don't know how to describe that. It's just that inside sort of-- inside sort of curl up. And it's--

**JORGENSEN:** Mm.

**CARL:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Right.

**CARL:** And I'm sorry if I'm exaggerating. I mean, I'm not-- it's not intended to be that.

**JORGENSEN:** All right. You're not trying to exaggerate. You're really trying to put some images in your words to your experiences that you don't talk about very often.

**CARL:** No.

**JORGENSEN:** It's quite hard for you. You're not even sure you quite know how to talk about it.

**CARL:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** But it hits you in your gut.

**CARL:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** And it kind of sends you back and curls you up.

**CARL:** Right. That would be good. Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. And then that's experience you want to get away from.

**CARL:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** Then you would ignore it or avoid it or try to be more careful, like, because you don't know-- like, an image that comes to mind is

something like walking in a landmine or something. You don't know when it's going to spark up again.

**CARL:** Right. Right.

**JORGENSEN:** So you're more careful.

**CARL:** Right.

**YALOM:** Okay. So let's move on to pursuers. So accessing primary emotion with pursuers presents a whole different set of challenges, doesn't it?

**JORGENSEN:** Pursuers' emotions are near the surface. They respond to threat by having more emotion. Their emotion expands. Pursuers know their inner world and they don't like being alone with all of their emotion, so it's helpful to empathically be with them. Then after making contact with their primary emotion, we can organize it.

I developed an acronym to help remember the therapeutic stance that we take with the pursuer, and it's HEAR, H-E-A-R. So HEAR-- Hold them emotionally first. Then E, Explore the emotion using emotional accessing and processing interventions. Then A for Accept. Accept their difficult emotion with [what] Sue calls relentless empathy. And finally then to R, Reflect the cycle. They're part of it. After sharing the emotional load, we can go to the more cognitive reflection of the organizing the cycle.

**YALOM:** I like what you're saying. Just as when we talk about withdrawers trying to really understand what's behind the withdrawal or what's underneath it, the same with pursuers. And rather than immediately just take at face value their emotion, which is easy to do. Like, they're trying to make something happen. They're trying. It looks like they're just trying to communicate with the withdrawer. But really trying to understand more what's underneath those demands and those desires really helps the therapist. Again, take an empathic stand that's connecting with both partners which is so important.

**JORGENSEN:** And that's one of the difficult things about couple therapy is that the therapist has to switch the stance based on which partner they're really working with. And so being more reflective and slow with the withdrawer before accessing and going straight to the emotion, and then being more reflective about it with the more pursuing partner. And that takes some shifting on the therapist's part.

**YALOM:** Sure. Yeah. That's one of the real skills. Okay. So let's first take a look at Sandra.

**JORGENSEN:** In this excerpt with Sandra, I use longing-- Sandra's positive

intentions. She wants sharing. She doesn't want to hurt him or to bring upset to him. I use that to access her vulnerability, along with her kind of fear of doing it wrong. And it brings up her sadness. You can see how she exits from the enactment. She says, "I don't know how." And he already knows this. These are really common, automatic responses to the risk of sharing. It's a move away.

**YALOM:** Yes. And we can see how you've got to be-- as the therapist, when you set up an enactment, you've got to kind of be confident. And even if they're reluctant to do it, just kind of--

**JORGENSEN:** Stay with that as a process.

**YALOM:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** One interesting aspect of Sandra is that she's able to articulate how the danger alarm goes off.

**YALOM:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** If I'm vulnerable, he will hurt me. And this is the trauma dilemma for her and in trauma in general. The other part of it being that the solution to aloneness is closeness. If I open up, he'll hurt me. That's the danger. But if I don't, I'm alone and missing that closeness. And that's dangerous too, in its own way. Once I accurately attune to her dilemma, her sadness and her longing to be close emerges again.

If we go back to that little place, I want to see if you can help Carl understand a little bit about that awful feeling you get inside. Like, "oh no. There you did it again. There you brought this negative energy in that you didn't want to."

And so you automatically withdraw. You automatically move away so that it doesn't get worse. Because you don't want to hurt him and you don't want to do hurtful things that would trigger him, I guess, right? That would evoke feelings in him that you don't mean to poke on, places that you poke on. And you don't want to behave in ways that you don't like behaving either. That you know that you don't want to start hurling things, yeah? Right.

**SANDRA:** Right.

**JORGENSEN:** Could you help him understand a little bit about that? About how that becomes so automatic for you to get away when you've noticed you already brought something negative into the space between the two of you?

**SANDRA:** I don't know how to explain it.

**JORGENSEN:** You wouldn't know how to explain that to him?

**SANDRA:** No. I think he already knows all that.

**JORGENSEN:** You think he knows that.

**SANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. But it would be very hard for you to talk to him about it. What happens inside when you think about talking to him about that right now, Sandra? So he already knows about it.

**SANDRA:** You know how sometimes you have this automatic response? It isn't a fact.

**JORGENSEN:** Right.

**SANDRA:** It's a feeling.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes.

**SANDRA:** So the feel-- now, this is not a fact.

**JORGENSEN:** Okay.

**SANDRA:** But the feeling says, "uh oh. Then I'll be real vulnerable and he's going to hurt me." But that's an old feeling from way back. Same feeling we discussed earlier.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. It comes to you again. Like, "uh oh. That would be me taking a brick out of the wall and he could hurt me if I let him know this little bit more about me." Yeah. And so it feels-- it's a old feeling that says danger, danger.

**SANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Danger. Don't let him in on that. Yeah. And that makes you sad to be aware of that right now, Sandra?

**SANDRA:** I wouldn't have gotten married if I didn't want to be-- have a nice relationship with somebody sharing stuff and all that.

**JORGENSEN:** All right. You got married because you want to share with Carl. You want to have this space together. You want to be yourself and be able to open up to him. So when that old feeling, that old trigger comes up, that's very, very sad for you because what you do want is his closeness with him. You want to share with him. Yeah. Right.

**YALOM:** Another example with Sandra that shows that even though her emotions are way more intense compared to a withdrawer, when she gets vulnerable it's just as hard for her to share her emotions.

**JORGENSEN:** Therapists often mistakenly focus on withdrawer's feelings

and assume that because feelings are more readily available to pursuers that there's no need to spend a lot of time exploring them. But they may mistake that expressiveness for vulnerability. Pursuers need just as much work to share their primary emotions.

**YALOM:** And we see at the beginning how Sandra avoids the enactment, fearing that Carl will only see her anger.

**JORGENSEN:** It's so risky for her to share her vulnerability that I slice it thinner.

**YALOM:** You've used that term before. What does that mean? Slice it thinner?

**JORGENSEN:** Meaning the risk is big for her, so I want to reduce the risk. I do this by trying to understand and validate the fear. And then I try to find a smaller piece of her vulnerable experience that she might be willing to share. If this doesn't work, then even slicing it thinner, to invite her to share the fear of sharing would be the final move.

**YALOM:** Yeah. So, but even then, as we'll see, she's still not willing to do the enactment. But, nonetheless, it serves the purpose of elucidating her fear and helping Carl to understand her vulnerability better.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Him seeing her struggle to share that vulnerability helps both of them. You might also notice that I reframe her vulnerability as her being big enough to share the vulnerability.

Think Carl has any idea when you say there you didn't go to the doctor there. You didn't put on your cream. Why not that? That under that tension, under that urgency is this tendency--

**SANDRA:** No. He just sees a nagging wife.

**JORGENSEN:** He doesn't. He doesn't see it as a part.

**SANDRA:** He does. He just says, "oh, she's at me again" and he retreats. So I think, "oh, shit. Why should I even remind him about the hat? It's not worth it."

**JORGENSEN:** It gets about the hat, but it's not about the hat, is it, Sandra? It's not about the hat. It's about these feelings that come up and say, "oh, no. I've had so much tragedy. I've had to take care of so many people." Yeah. And it's overwhelming. It overwhelms. Yeah, it's overwhelming. Do you think you could help Carl understand that what's under there, is that's that? No.

**SANDRA:** No. All he sees is me getting angry at him when he doesn't do what he's supposed to do. If I stay in this, I'm not going to mention anything anymore.

**JORGENSEN:** He doesn't see what's under you mentioning something is this fear and this overwhelm about being flooded with all of this "oh, no." Right? You're not sure. He doesn't know about that part, Sandra.

**SANDRA:** Yeah, he knows about all those dying people.

**JORGENSEN:** He doesn't know it's quite linked the way that you've just explained it though, right? He sees you as this nagging wife. But what you're saying is, "what's under the nag, Carl, what's under there is all these feelings I have of overwhelm. And it's me alone taking care of somebody. And it's been tragic. And I don't know how. I don't know how to do it again." Yeah? "I don't know how to do it with you if I was losing you that way." Yeah?

**SANDRA:** Well, it would be easy if I believed in nursing homes. You just pop the person in the nursing home and you walk away, but I didn't. I didn't put my mother in a nursing home. I didn't put any of them--

**JORGENSEN:** From someone that you love, right? Right. Right. Could you tell Carl that that's what's under that? You don't mean to be a nag. But what's under there is this sense where you couldn't tell him about that. It'd be too hard to tell him about it?

**SANDRA:** I don't know how to-- I don't know what to say.

**JORGENSEN:** You don't know how to say it.

**SANDRA:** I don't know anything.

**JORGENSEN:** You don't know how to say it. It leaves you feeling not knowing anything at all. Right. Could you tell Carl?

**SANDRA:** Because he could care less. He's the one that sees himself as the fixer.

**JORGENSEN:** It would be hard. You'd be afraid he may not even care about this tenderness underneath hurting. That'd be hard to-- could you tell him? "It's just so hard to tell you about it. When we've been caught in this pattern, it's so hard to let you in on what's under my-- 'put on the lotion,' right? My little nagging spot." Could you tell him it's too hard to talk to you. That there's something much more sensitive under there. Could you tell him about that? It's just too hard to say it?

**SANDRA:** What good will it do to tell him, tell him that? He knows it. I already told him before, "I'm not the big, strong person you think I am." I've already told him that before. I put on up a good front.

**JORGENSEN:** When you come out strong it's when you're feeling overwhelmed, right? Yeah. You're not sure that he would like this part of you



or that he would even care about this part of you.

**SANDRA:** No. I think probably what it is I'd be thinking, "oh, god. Now he's going to treat me like his dead wife and I'm some helpless little-- the little woman, helpless."

**JORGENSEN:** Right. There's this--

**SANDRA:** And I'm not helpless.

**JORGENSEN:** There's a sense like if I show him this vulnerable part of me, what's under when I'm angry or nagging, that he may see it as "oh, you're a little girl and now I have to take care of you." Not that you're being a big girl to share your vulnerability with him. You'd be afraid he might see it as something you need to fix now.

**YALOM:** The following example is Scott working with Nydia to access her primary emotions. Because she's experienced significant childhood trauma, these emotions surface quickly and they can easily overwhelm her.

**JORGENSEN:** Watch how Scott frames her terrified feelings and reflects what she often does with them. Lydia shares her fear and Jon gets reactive. Scott stops Jon and reframes her responses in the negative cycle as the way she manages her terror.

**JON:** But if you really need me, why would you disrespect me? If you really love, why are you doing--

**WOOLLEY:** But this is a good question. What's the answer to that? If she really needs you and she really wants you, why would she disrespect you?

**JON:** I guess what you're bringing out, that she's fearful to expose her true needs.

**WOOLLEY:** Is that right? What's happening?

**LYDIA:** I just feel terrified.

**WOOLLEY:** "I feel terrified." Terrified of losing him? Because he's so precious to you?

**LYDIA:** Yes.

**WOOLLEY:** And you just--

**JON:** I do too.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Good. Yeah. And so what happens is when you feel this kind of fear-- because you're getting in touch with it now, right?

**LYDIA:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** When you feel this fear, what you have been doing before is you don't talk about it. You don't ask him for comfort, right?

**LYDIA:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Right. You just go away by yourself or you get angry or--

**LYDIA:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. And do things that he interprets as disrespectful, which is usually not what you intend.

**JON:** And then I don't want to comfort her in that kind of--

**WOOLLEY:** Well, if she's doing things that you feel are disrespectful. I don't think she always knows it though, right?

**LYDIA:** No. I don't.

**WOOLLEY:** Can you tell him about that fear? The terror inside? Because I think it's important for him to understand it. Can you tell him about it?

**LYDIA:** Right. I'll try.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay.

**LYDIA:** I feel very unsafe when I feel that fear and it scares me. A lot.

**JON:** Unsafe in what way?

**LYDIA:** Well, that you're going to leave me.

**JON:** But you're going to chase me away. I'm going to run away.

**WOOLLEY:** Hold on. Hold on, Jon. Hold on. You're doing fine here, but let's not talk about, you know? She doesn't think she's chasing you away, all right? She doesn't realize she's chasing you away.

**JON:** That's true. Because when I do run away, then I start reflecting on the love she'd been giving me. I'm like--

**WOOLLEY:** She's not trying to chase you away.

**JON:** Right. Right.

**WOOLLEY:** She gets terrified, right? She gets terrified and then she does things and says things or doesn't do things and doesn't say things--

**LYDIA:** To protect myself.

**WOOLLEY:** To protect yourself.

**LYDIA:** To don't hurt anymore.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. Right. Do you hear that?

**JON:** Yeah, but--

**WOOLLEY:** What's happening?

**JON:** Not much--

**WOOLLEY:** What's happening?

**JON:** You know, I-- who knows--

**WOOLLEY:** Jon?

**JON:** She's unhappy, I'm not going to be happy. I want to make you happy. I'm not going to deliberately try to hurt you.

**WOOLLEY:** No. And will you deliberately try to hurt him?

**LYDIA:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** No.

**LYDIA:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** No.

**JON:** Okay. I didn't know that part.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**LYDIA:** You didn't know that?

**JON:** Well, that last big fight with you and Carl, like, were you talking behind my back? Isn't that like collaborating together, making--

**LYDIA:** You just assume things.

**JON:** --he's the bad guy.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**LYDIA:** You assume things.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Right.

**LYDIA:** Because he tries so hard to form a home, a family. And that's understandable. But my children are grown. They don't need a father.

**YALOM:** Now we're going to continue with another example of working with Nydia. We have a clip next that shows what happens when the pursuer gets flooded and how to recover from it.

**JORGENSEN:** Nydia gets flooded as a result of Scott heightening a bit much. So Scott helps her out of the emotional overwhelm by zooming out, working with Jon, accessing his protective feelings. He also validates her history of abandonment and what hurts her in their negative cycle. You can see how Jon

can barely stay in contact with the distress. And he has a lot of body responses while he tries to self-regulate. This is a good example of the pain of the pursuer who not only triggers up into anger away from this deep, vulnerable pain, but can also get flooded by it.

**WOOLLEY:** What does it feel like when he leaves and you're alone?

**LYDIA:** He just leaves me by myself.

**WOOLLEY:** He leaves you by yourself. And how does it feel?

**LYDIA:** Everything just goes down the drain.

**WOOLLEY:** Everything goes down the drain. Right.

**LYDIA:** All the effort, all the caring, all the--

**WOOLLEY:** Does it--

**LYDIA:** --plans.

**WOOLLEY:** Does it feel like, somehow, you're not important?

**LYDIA:** Yes.

**WOOLLEY:** It does? That somehow all the plans and the hopes and the dreams that this one's going to work out.

**LYDIA:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** Because you want a companion as well, right?

**LYDIA:** Correct.

**WOOLLEY:** All that just kind of goes-- it's all dashed, right? This man that you love, he's left.

**LYDIA:** Because like everything in my life just goes away.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah.

**LYDIA:** My friends leave me. My parents leave me. I've been by myself since I was born.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. That's the way it feels.

**LYDIA:** And I've been carrying this forever.

**WOOLLEY:** Uh huh.

**LYDIA:** And then letting him into my life, I thought maybe he really cared and then all of a sudden he leaves me back alone so I have to start all over again and reorganize. Like--

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**LYDIA:** I'm just tired. I don't want to deal with it anymore.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**LYDIA:** I'm so tired, tired, tired.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. You're tired.

**LYDIA:** I'm tired.

**WOOLLEY:** And it's painful. And it's almost like you-- if I'm getting this right-- you kind of go to a hopeless place. It touches something very deep and very painful.

**LYDIA:** I don't want to go there anymore.

**WOOLLEY:** And you don't want to have to go there anymore.

**LYDIA:** I don't want to go there anymore. I don't want to go there.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Right.

**LYDIA:** Oh no.

**WOOLLEY:** It's okay. You're okay. Okay. It is so painful. It's so painful that even right here, right now, right? Why don't you tell me what's happening inside? Where are you going? What's happening? Have you seen this before?

**JON:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** You haven't seen this before? You haven't seen this--

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**JON:** I always look at her as real strong.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. You didn't know she had this tender side inside of her? Right? That it was so painful when you leave?

**JON:** Right. I just thought--

**WOOLLEY:** You didn't know?

**JON:** I just thought she, I don't know--

**WOOLLEY:** Because she's in massive amounts of pain right now, right? You getting that, right?

**JON:** I feel the same way. I say, well, if she loves me, she'll give me deep respect. What's so hard about that? Just give me deep respect.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**JON:** Shit, I'm hurting too.

**WOOLLEY:** Right, right, right. So hold on a second here. What's happening when you connect with your wife right now?

**JON:** I feel more tender. I want to be watch my words more that I can't hurt her, that she can't be hurt.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. Is that right? He can hurt you really, really deep. Is that right? Yeah. All right. Just see you here. It's so painful.

**JON:** Sorry, honey.

**WOOLLEY:** All right. It's like so painful you don't even like to touch this because it's so painful. Is that right? You don't want to--

**LYDIA:** I don't want to--

**WOOLLEY:** It's like you don't want to touch it. It's too painful. You don't want to go here. So what ends up happening is when he tries to pull-- when he gets upset, when he pulls away, that creates massive amounts of pain, right? And you just try and stay away from these feelings. Is that right?

**LYDIA:** I don't want to be hurt anymore.

**WOOLLEY:** You don't want to be hurt anymore.

**LYDIA:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. And that's why you end up getting to the point where you're not sure you want to stay, right? You know? "I just want to be loved." You feel like you've been-- you weren't wanted as a child and your husbands didn't want you. Right?

**LYDIA:** My friends didn't want.

**WOOLLEY:** And your friends didn't want you. Right. You feel rejected. Yeah. Right.

**LYDIA:** All my life.

**WOOLLEY:** All your life. All your life. And here's this man who you felt--

**LYDIA:** I could trust him.

**WOOLLEY:** That you could trust him, that he loved you, that he was tender. And he is tender, right? He can be. Yeah.

**JON:** When I want to be.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah.

**JON:** If I'm being deeply respected.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. But did you know that she cared about you this much?

That you were this important?

**JON:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** You didn't know it?

**JON:** Well, yeah. Yes and no.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**JON:** Not this much. This takes it to another level.

**WOOLLEY:** This takes it to a different level. Yeah. Yeah. That she needs you so bad. Right?

**JON:** Well, it's kind of nice to have a real feminine, sensitive woman because both my other wives were really bossy and strong. So it is kind of nice having a tender woman.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**JON:** But I don't want to do this again.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. You don't want to hurt her again?

**JON:** No. Because she went through a lot already.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Right. Can you hear that?

**YALOM:** So the final step of Stage One is Step Four, which is about accepting the reframe and, ultimately, reaching de-escalation.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. Step Four is not so much about reframing as an intervention. These classic reframes that we've talked about in Volume One of this series, "the cycle is the enemy" and "the pursuer and the withdrawer" reframes, are not that difficult for the couple to have a felt experience of.

**YALOM:** Okay. So then if that's not it, what is Step Four then?

**JORGENSEN:** Step Four is about an incremental process of helping the couple gain a new understanding and experience of how they influence each other and what they need from each other. Now, in Step Four the reframe is an experiential shift. Not just this cognitive understanding of the negative cycle, but an experiential sense of, "oh, you need me close. You really want to be connected to me. And because of our different ways of responding to threat, we pull each other into this negative spiral."

**YALOM:** I think that's pretty universal in most change processes in therapy that we need both some cognitive understanding and-- perhaps even more importantly-- an experiential understanding or an experiential shift.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Those experiential shifts are what starts to really change things. So there are several shifts or kind of markers that therapists can watch out for as clients are moving through, towards accepting the full reframe. And the first thing, the first markers that we're looking to see, that the clients understand that their vulnerable feelings drive their reactivity. This is not so difficult, really, for clients to get. When I feel hurt, I get angry. It's kind of easy to get.

The second marker is that they absorb that their reactivity fuels their partner's reactivity. For example, "when I get angry, my partner leaves."

**YALOM:** Okay. But that's not the end of Step Four yet?

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. Beginning EFT therapists can mistake this for the end of Step Four, but it's not sufficient and often the couple will escalate again.

**YALOM:** So what else do they need to get to really complete Step Four?

**JORGENSEN:** Well, the third marker that can be useful to watch for is that-- and this is more difficult for the couple to get-- is seeing how their reactivity brings up their partner's sensitivities. So "my anger triggers my partner's pain or fears of rejection." And then the final marker is the most difficult thing for the couples to grasp. It's the whole attachment reframe. It's about getting all the elements put together into that attachment frame of why these things happen between us.

**YALOM:** And as we'll see, and as therapists say over and over again, it's because-- from an attachment perspective-- the other partner is so important to them.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. That's the piece that says, "oh, that's why you go away. Because you're sensitive to me. I matter that much."

**YALOM:** So what does de-escalation look like then?

**JORGENSEN:** The partners, seeing how they co-create the cycle, feel less alone, and this reduces the hot reactivity of the cycle. So their interactions have a little more space and safety. They aren't lost and confused about what happens between them, so their interactions in-session are slower and calmer.

**YALOM:** And do they report things being different outside of the sessions? At home, for example?

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. They'll report being in less conflict generally. They recognize when they get in the cycle and being able to repair faster. So while all this is happening, the way the interactions are organized have not basically changed. They don't know what to do differently to build trust and closeness,



even though they can stop and interrupt the cycle.

**YALOM:** Okay. So let's watch two examples, which are demonstrations of marker two, which is when couples start to understand how one person's reactivity fuels the other's reactivity.

**JORGENSEN:** In the first one we see Nydia starting to notice the way Jon comes towards her and how she rejects him. She's playing around with the idea that she may be able to respond differently. She's seen the impact that she has on him and how she could have a different influence than the one that she has.

**YALOM:** And in the second example is with Jon, who is a withdrawer.

**JORGENSEN:** Withdrawers have a harder time becoming aware of their intrapsychic process. You'll see him here be able to identify his own reactivity, while earlier in therapy he always blamed Nydia. Nydia sees the impact she has on Jon and feels regret about it.

**WOOLLEY:** But I'm curious. So when he said that it felt like a criticism or an insult--

**LYDIA:** Yeah. Like--

**WOOLLEY:** Like, "this time I want to be treated like a king. I want to be respected. I want to be treated like a king." Purple, which is a royal color.

**LYDIA:** Royal color. And then I should've asked "how is that? How does that work?" Instead of getting all upset or--

**WOOLLEY:** Well, yeah. You heard it that it was about you.

**LYDIA:** It's about me, right.

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**LYDIA:** Not about him.

**WOOLLEY:** Not about him.

**JON:** Because we know it was a big day, but, like, three days ago I blew it. I got angry and went into the negative cycle. I shut down, slept in the motor home that night.

**WOOLLEY:** Oh. Oh.

**JON:** But I--

**WOOLLEY:** Okay. So that was an ouch, huh?

**JON:** Yeah.

**LYDIA:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**JON:** But I learned from it, I guess, again. And next morning she came real nice. And then we was reading a book, found out the reason. But in that book they made a real good-- about demon dialogues. And she says that when you're in that heat of the moment, the anger, it's like free falling from a parachute and then trying to read the manual on how to open up. You know? None of these ideals come to mind.

**WOOLLEY:** That's right.

**JON:** I'm like what do I do? So I just-- I got in a negative cycle, started resenting her, and just thinking of all the negative things and just shut down.

**LYDIA:** Taking things too-- you know.

**WOOLLEY:** You got mad at him and said bad things?

**LYDIA:** And I told him things that I shouldn't have told him. And I feel sad, I mean, because I shouldn't have said some things.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**LYDIA:** I told him I was sorry.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**YALOM:** In the next two clips we're going to see are examples of marker number three, which is about the ability to link one's reactivity to the other's vulnerability.

**JORGENSEN:** In the first one you'll hear Cassandra explain the cycle and linking vulnerability and reactivity. She recognizes each of their vulnerability that hides below the surface of their reactivity.

**YALOM:** And in the second clip with Jon and Nydia, we can see Jon accessing deeper emotions and-- for a longer amount of time-- he doesn't jump out so quickly.

**JORGENSEN:** And he's able to link Nydia's reactivity to his vulnerability. He's getting more aware of where his sensitivity comes from. And he recognizes his feelings from when he was a kid and how Nydia's reactivity brings back similar vulnerability.

And if you look or you ask or you criticize and Steven isn't responsive or you can't count on him in some way, then you start to feel more upset and unimportant.

**CASSANDRA:** Yes. And then I get upset at him. And then he-- well, I perceive him as getting defensive or withdrawing. And then that makes me more upset. And then he feels more criticized and more upset.

**JORGENSEN:** That just goes into the triggered response then?

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Right.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Right.

**CASSANDRA:** Yes. Overall though, I think it's like I perceive him as not, like, engaged or available.

**JORGENSEN:** And what do you understand about what's under his? Like, you're saying what's under for me, you know? The tenderness for me is that fear that he's not loving me or he's not available. I'm not important.

**CASSANDRA:** Yeah. For him, not being wanted also. And being rejected.

**JORGENSEN:** You want to fill in that side, how you're feeling?

**STEVEN:** She's spot on.

**JON:** And I'm not worth listening to. Just be seen, not heard. You're not-- You don't have much value.

**WOOLLEY:** You're not important.

**JON:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** You're not valuable.

**JON:** Unless you're contributing to her expenses or the house.

**WOOLLEY:** Your only value was if you were contributing financially or fixing things? Improving things around the house. Is that right?

**JON:** I did that more for myself.

**WOOLLEY:** Okay.

**JON:** My mom was in a drunken stupor. She was always mentioning the money.

**WOOLLEY:** It was always money?

**JON:** Yeah.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. And so she was drunk a lot?

**JON:** Mm hm.

**WOOLLEY:** All right. And you felt it? You felt like somehow you weren't valued and you weren't important except as you could earn money?

**JON:** Yes. Especially when I came to talk to her about an idea or something I had in my head.

**WOOLLEY:** There was no respect.

**JON:** No time to listen or--

**WOOLLEY:** Right. And no time to listen. And so when you have an idea, purple means respect and royalty, and she dismisses it--

**JON:** Feels the same way again.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Is that right? Did you know that?

**LYDIA:** No.

**WOOLLEY:** No wonder he shuts down and just wants to leave and doesn't want to buy flowers. Right?

**YALOM:** Okay. So let's take a look at the fourth marker, in this case with Carl and Sandra. And they're starting to understand that the reason this happens is because they care about each other so much.

**JORGENSEN:** After a previous session where Carl came forward with how important Sandra is to him and the hope he has for the relationship, Sandra comes more forward with awareness of her impact on Carl's vulnerability. That she can hurt him right in his sensitive spots because she matters to him.

**SANDRA:** When this stuff was going on, the other thing that I have to work on-- and I've been trying to keep it to the fore-- is that I start-- and this is not me. This is not how I am. But I started speaking to Carl sort of almost in a demeaning manner, having kind of a tone in the voice. And that started to make me think, "oh, no. I'm making him less than."

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. You would say that about yourself.

**SANDRA:** This is old stuff. Yeah, I'm doing this old stuff I thought I got over.

**JORGENSEN:** "I don't like this part of me that's coming out."

**SANDRA:** Yeah.

**CARL:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. "I don't like this part of me that's coming out."

**SANDRA:** And it's also hurtful to the other person.

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. "It hurts him and it makes me not like myself so"--

**SANDRA:** You're right. And it feels like you're putting daggers in an already exposed wound. And it's awful. It's not nice either.

**YALOM:** And, finally, let's see what it looks like in the room once couples have accepted the reframe and are deescalated, which, after all, is the kind of ultimate goal of Stage One, right?

**JORGENSEN:** Look how much calmer and closer Jon and Nydia are. They describe how it's different between them now, how much less reactivity there is between them. And Scott reinforces and consolidates the reframe.

**YALOM:** And also with Carl and Sandra we can see how Carl has accepted the reframe.

**JORGENSEN:** Carl does not take her fear and disbelief personally now. He sees her vulnerability and does not want to leave her alone, so he pulls her close. She is still afraid and resistant, but not as critical. The cycle runs the same direction as before, but from this de-escalated position there's more safety and more room for them to respond without high reactivity.

**WOOLLEY:** And you guys, you're not in the motor home all the time now like you used to.

**NYDIA:** It was once or twice a week. Even if we tried to stay together or we talked about it, we would end up discussing, not being in tune again.

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah. Yeah. And, really, I think in a lot of levels, you didn't really understand the cycle you were in and now you got it, right? Generally. There's a few more pieces, but, you know. And I think you're also-- if I'm getting it right-- recognizing how in many ways the other person reacts because you are so important to the other person, right? I mean, he'd go out to the motor home because he was so hurt because you were so incredibly important. But you felt just the opposite.

**NYDIA:** Exactly.

**WOOLLEY:** Right? You would disconnect or fight sometimes.

**NYDIA:** Fight to make a point.

**WOOLLEY:** Fight to make a point because he was so important to you and you wanted him to be able to see you.

**NYDIA:** Right.

**WOOLLEY:** And understand. Even though what he heard is just that you were disrespecting him. He didn't get it.

**NYDIA:** And I didn't get it that I was disrespecting him either. He would,

like, say “deep respect” he would like go like, “what is that?”

**WOOLLEY:** Yeah.

**NYDIA:** What is he talking about?

**WOOLLEY:** Right.

**NYDIA:** I haven’t heard him say deep respect again.

**WOOLLEY:** For a while.

**NYDIA:** For a while. Right, honey?

**WOOLLEY:** So, and you’re staying out of the cycle a lot more now. And even when you get into it, it’s still-- you’re not going so deep. Right? And it’s not going on so long.

**JON:** Yeah. Try to stop it, nip it in the bud. It’s like a little weed. Pull it out while it’s easy.

**WOOLLEY:** Exactly. That’s good. That’s a good one.

**NYDIA:** What an example.

**JON:** There’s just so many weeds growing down in the garden.

**WOOLLEY:** Right. I know. It’s the season right now.

**JORGENSEN:** As soon as you know, you move right in. You really want to be there with her.

**CARL:** Yeah.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. How did that feel right now when he just said, “oh, if you want comfort, I’m sorry and I want to be there with you to comfort you.”

**SANDRA:** Did you mean that?

**CARL:** Yes, I meant it.

**JORGENSEN:** And now he reaches over to reassure you, Sandra.

**SANDRA:** And sometimes I just think you want out of this so bad but the finances are keeping you in it that you can’t figure out how you can get out of this without finances problems.

**JORGENSEN:** So when your fear came up right now and you said, “do you really?” right? And he reached over and said “yes, really,” and grabbed you, and grabbed your hand, Sandra, can you feel him there? He really wants to comfort you. Yeah.

**CARL:** I really do, Sandra. I really do.

**SANDRA:** I think you don't really know, Carl, but that's good that you say that. Thank you.

**CARL:** I'll do more to comfort you. I do want to be there with you.

**JORGENSEN:** And you guys are just learning how to do it with each other.

**CARL:** That much I do know.

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah, you're really solid about that, Carl. You do want that.

**CARL:** Yeah. I--

**SANDRA:** I don't know though, because he's talked about wanting to leave. So now there's like this--

**JORGENSEN:** Well, this dance gets--

**CARL:** And so have you. I mean, we both have.

**JORGENSEN:** This dance gets going, right? And when you both get hopeless, you have an exit strategy, right? You both do that when the cycle gets going really hot.

**SANDRA:** It's so bad that our dog is throwing up all over the RV right now.

**JORGENSEN:** Aw. So much tension.

**SANDRA:** Yeah. He can't even deal.

**JORGENSEN:** So these little moments are so sweet, right? You guys really need that contact with each other.

**YALOM:** So we have the same couples who kind of have the same problems, but you can get a sense from those clips there's a slight softening and I feel a little more hopefulness that the therapist can do some different kind of work now. Is that how you would describe it?

**JORGENSEN:** Yes. When they've deescalated, then there is this softness and more hopefulness in the room because they've taken control of that cycle. They see it differently. They experience it differently. And that allows them more hope and more courage to go forward.

**YALOM:** All right. So we'll look forward to seeing how that happens as we move on in this series. With your guidance and generosity and, I would also add, the courage of both the clients and the therapists, we've now gone through the essential elements of Stage One of EFT. What would you say-- if we step back for a second-- what are the most challenging things for therapists to learn, to master the skills of Stage One?

**JORGENSEN:** Well, really being able to take control of the session and

aligning to both people at the same time.

**YALOM:** Right. We talked about that.

**JORGENSEN:** We talked about that. That's challenging for a therapist to learn. And then also to keep the attachment frame. To constantly keep that view, put the attachment language in to hold the context, can be very difficult.

**YALOM:** Not get too caught up in content.

**JORGENSEN:** Not get caught up in content. And then to not rush through Stage One. There's like a goal to get to Stage Two instead of really just being with the clients in their experience of change.

**YALOM:** One thing you told me off camera, that Stage One often comprises the largest amount of the work. Is that true?

**JORGENSEN:** Yeah. I experience it as the kind of longest, hardest. We don't have research on it, session numbers broken down that way, but I do, and the people that I often train experience Stage One as the longest, hardest stage.

**YALOM:** Right. So although therapists and clients are eager to get into Stage Two, you can't rush through Stage One. In the next volume, we'll be moving ahead to Stage Two, Restructuring the Bond, and Stage Three, Consolidating the Changes. We hope you'll continue with us on this journey, *Emotionally Focused Therapy, Step by Step*.