

EFT Step 7

Blamer Softening: *Fear Ye Not*

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My Plight

Key Session of Reprimand:

- **Harshest Blamer I'd ever had said sadly while looking down:**
 - “If I only knew what to do with my fear...
It's just so big...”
 - (Glances quickly at his wife)
 - “My fear is just so big...”

A Common Plight

- No softening = poorer results (Johnson & Greenberg, 1988).
- The crucial elements of EFT are embedded in softening events
 - Theoretical
 - Secure Attachment Unfolds
 - Emotional Restructuring Crystallizes
 - Application
 - Doggedly heightening attachment-related affect
 - Intrapsychic and Interpsychic powerfully merge

Softening Defined

- A previously hostile/critical partner asks, from a position of vulnerability and within a *high level of emotional experiencing*, for reassurance, comfort, or for an attachment need to be met (Bradley & Furrow, 2004; Johnson & Greenberg, 1988; 1995).
- In turn, the other partner accepts the new and emerging relationship position of the softened blamer.
- The softening event typically leads to more secure bonding interactions, and is described as an “antidote” to a couple’s negative interactional cycle.

Softening Process

Most intense step for couple and therapist.

- Ex. More attacking partner in Step 5 summarized as:

“I am afraid that if I let you in more you might end up leaving. And if I really let you in, and you somehow leave, it would kill me. I don't know if I could handle that kind of pain. No one has ever really cared enough about me to stay – I mean **really** cared, **really** listened, **really** ‘enjoyed’ me.

Softening Process

- **Crystallizes in Step 7 as:**

“I am so afraid that you might get enough of me and decide to leave. I am exhausted from worrying, from battling myself to somehow risk loving you, and yet keeping you far enough away to be able to handle the possibility of us not working out. I just want to feel special to you. (cries) I need you to hold me and reassure me that I can count on you, and that you will stay in this when the going gets rough. I realize I am battling demons from my past, but I’d like for you to help me with this. And I really want to let you all the way in. Please be patient with me.”

Enter Task Analysis

(Greenberg, 1984; Bradley & Johnson, 2005)

- **Collected tapes from OCFI**
- **10 therapist-reported softenings**
- **Upon Further Review: Only four met defined softening criteria.**
- **Those four were sue's**
 - My own experience validated

Softenings Gone Astray: Top 4 Reasons

1. Attachment-related affect distant

- Talking “about” rather than from “within” emotional states.
- Lack of **Evocative Responding** and **Heightening** Interventions.

Softenings Gone Astray: Top 4 Reasons

2. Attachment-Related Fear Allergy

- Bowlby: Fear **blocks** attempts (or bids in Gottman language) for attachment.
- It makes total sense we would see this fear at this step in the EFT process.
- “Fear” remained unrecognized or unprocessed.

Softenings Gone Astray: Top 4 Reasons

3. **View of Other & Self Deficiency**

- Clients would talk about fear of the other partner being there, but some would then shift into fears of personally being unlovable or deficient.
 - **Therapists rarely reflected this shift.**
 - **In fact, only Sue did, and even then coding team noted that she “missed” the client for three or four talk turns before catching the shift.**

Shift to View of Self:

Clinical Example

- **Sue: Can you risk with him now? He's here.**
- **I know he will be there, I just don't think I am worth it.**
- **Sue: Do you see him here - he's saying, "You can trust me."**
- **I see him, and I do trust him.**
- **Sue: His arms are open, and he's saying, "Risk with me."**

Shift to View of Self

- And I believe him... But I drive people away because I have so many problems. I am just f_____d up.
- **Sue: So you know he's there, right? But what we're talking about now is you, right?**
– *Bingo!*
- **Absolutely.**
- **You see him there, and he's safe, but you run to a place that says, "Don't go to him. There is something wrong with me... something unlovable." (Neg. view of self)**

Softenings Gone Astray: Top 4 Reasons

4. Interpersonal Enactment Failure

- No “softening reach” initiated
 - Several times there was sufficient heightening, but therapist would fail to have the softening partner then REACH to the other for comfort and attachment wants/needs to be met.
 - EFT softening MUST include the interpersonal.

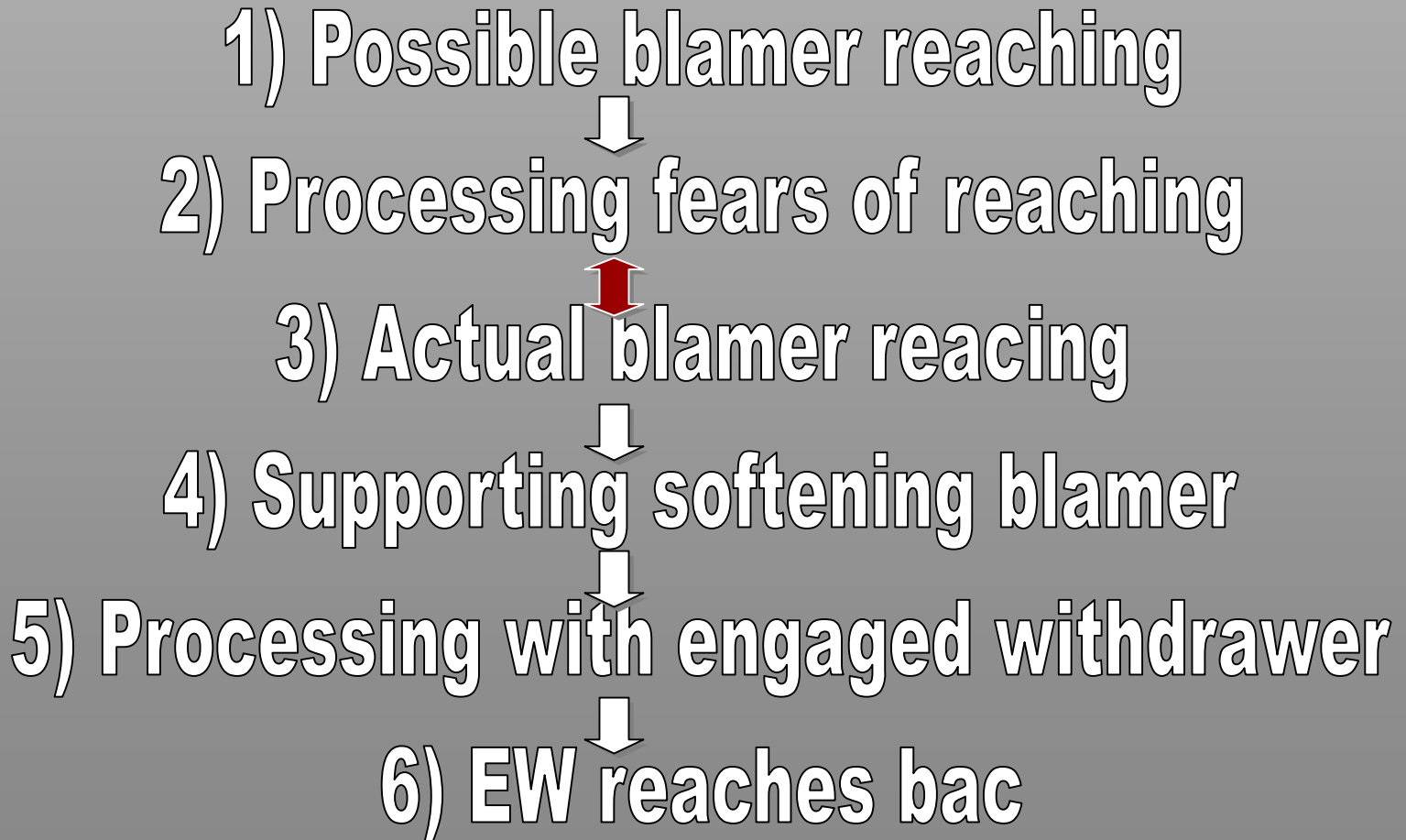
Task Analysis: A Closer Look

- **Investigated repeatedly:**
 - What are sue's content themes throughout softening? (i.e. what does she focus on?)
 - Where does she start?
 - What does she say?
 - What does she do? (i.e. interventions)
 - What does all of this look like?
 - How long does it take her?

Softening Mini-Theory

(Bradley & Furrow, 2004)

Six Expert Therapist Themes



1) Possible Blamer Reaching

- The stage is set when the couple is discussing their cycle, recognizing how the more-blaming spouse has gotten angry, sullen, or sad, shutting down hopes of mutual accessibility and responsiveness.
- Therapist “choreographs” entrance into softening with:
 - “Have you ever gone to Maria when you are feeling down like this? Have you ever gone to him and shared, ‘Hun, I am feeling so lonely right now. So...unsure.’ What would that be like, to let him in then, to share with him then?”
 - Takes a “first-person stance”

1) Possible Blamer Reaching

- A “testing of the waters”
- Imaginative dabble into experiencing a new way of interacting that initiates work in Step 7.

1) Possible Blamer Reaching

Example:

- Marcus states that he never really considers sharing or letting Fresca in when times get intense. “It’s not safe enough for me to let her in during those situations,” he reports, shaking his head demonstratively.
- *“When I am that overwhelmed and low, she could REALLY hurt me if I let her in on how I am actually feeling” he says. “I can’t see doing that. The stakes are just too high.”*
- This signals the therapist to move into processing *fears of reaching* - fears that serve to block and shut down attachment longings for support, comfort, and reassurance.

Good, Competent, Bad, or Ugly?

Possible Blamer Reaching Exercises

- a. “I don’t know, help me out here, but it sounds like you are dealing with this all alone.” (Marcus nods yes)
- b. “Have there been times when you have been able to let her in? What was different about those times?”
- c. (slower) “It’s like one part of you says, ‘Well that would be pretty scary to do because suppose I did it wrong; or suppose I got aggressive like I have in the past; or suppose I just lost it and looked like a real “loser.”’ Right? That goes through you?”
- d. “Okay, I don’t think you should let her in. Neither of you can handle it. It’s just too much. I want each of you to promise me that you will not talk about what is really happening for either of you when these kinds of situations arise.”

2) Processing Fears of Reaching

Fears are often embedded in internal views of *self* and *other*.

- **Negative views of other**
 - fear of partner showing contempt, criticizing, shaming, or abandoning them.
- **Negative views of self**
 - inherent sense of deficiency, worthlessness, feeling unlovable, and self-shame.

2) Processing Fears of Reaching

Possible EFT response:

- “So when you feel the this shame about yourself, like you’re just not cutting it, feeling worthless, **(Heightening)** rather than reaching to her and sharing with her that you are hurting and doubting, you show her your anger **(Reflecting secondary and primary emotion within cycle)**. Help me out here, but it’s like, it’s just too scary to show her that side of you that hurts so much. A part of you says, “she will see you as worthless, weak, a big baby.” **(Heightening)** So you hide that from her, it’s safer that way. You stay alone in your pain?” **(Evocative Responding)**

2) Processing Fears of Reaching Heightening Views of Self and Other

- **Typical client statements:**
 - “Why would he be there for me if I opened up this much to him? How can I trust you? No one has ever really been there for me.” **(view of other)**.
 - “I know he is there. He is always there. It’s just... It’s just how could someone really love me? I mean, just look at me?” **(view of self)**.

2) Processing Fears of Reaching

Heightening Views of Self and Other

Practice: Which is which – self or other?

- “You see him standing there, arms open. He’s saying, ‘Risk it honey. I’ll be here for you. You can count on me.’ But a part of you is saying, ‘No, you can’t risk it. He won’t be there. No one has ever truly been there. It’s **too scary, too risky**, it could hurt **too much.**’ Is that close?”

2) Processing Fears of Reaching Heightening Views of Self and Other

Practice: Which is which – self or other?

- “It’s so hard for you to risk turning to her. The stakes are so high. If you let her in and show her the real you, with all of your deficits and shortcomings... A part of you is afraid that if she sees the real you, she will probably run away... She could really hurt you. And this part is saying, ‘Don’t! Don’t! Don’t!’”

2) Processing Fears of Reaching

Heightening Views of Self and Other

- **Therapist then briefly summarizes fears of reaching to set up a possible “softening reach” enactment.**
 - “So, to even consider turning to Fresca and saying, ‘Honey, I am just so scared right now. I am overwhelmed, I need a hug, a little reassurance. I am really doubting myself.’ That is really scary for you. This fear sort of paralyzes you, it keeps you alone in your doubts and fears, yeah?”

2) Processing Fears of Reaching

Heightening Views of Self and Other

- “You never show him this part of you, this part that says, ‘Don’t you dare open up to him again. You’ll get stabbed in the heart. It just hurts too much too risk.’ You never let him in when this part raises its head. You never say, ‘I am really scared right now that you can’t be trusted. Could you please reassure me now?’ You never say that, right? Because that is just too scary too...precise...too...on the money?”

2) Processing Fears of Reaching



Exercise

Good, Competent, Bad, Ugly

- “If we’re going to be truthful here, you have to be honest with her. The fact is you don’t trust her. You’re not convinced that she has changed. You are being just selfish enough to not give her the chance to hurt you again, is that it?”
- **“She has asked for your forgiveness many, many times. She has done as much as she can to prove to you that she is trustworthy. And yet, you stay here, unflinching. Unforgiving. What will it take from her for you to honestly forgive her? I can’t make you do it, and neither can she. You have to take the risk.”**
- “So this is very dangerous territory for you, yeah? You see that she is here, right now, wanting you to come out and be with her. A part of you sees that and for the most part believes that. But there is this other part that really protects you, and it is screaming, ‘No one has ever loved you. No one ever will. The only safe game in town is to hide, whether in anger or silence.’ Right? So this indeed is dangerous territory.”

Processing Fears of Reaching Insights

Heightening Views of Self and Other

(Bradley & Furrow, 2004)

- **Most time spent in this theme**
- **Has to reach a “boiling point”**
- **With insufficient heightening, softening can take a too cognitive emphasis.**
- **To this point softening spouse has mainly only spoken directly to the therapist - not sufficient in EFT.**
- **This only clarifies what needs to be shared and asked for from the other, now-engaged partner.**

3) Actual Blamer Reaching

- The therapist gently directs the now softening blamer to reach directly to her partner for comfort and assurance.
- One of the simplest directives the EFT therapist makes, but one of the most intense.
- Example:
 - **“Marcus, would you please turn now, and share this with Fresca, in your own words,” or “Marcus, could you begin now to tell Fresca how scary it is to even think of turning to her during these times, would you share this with her now please, in your own words.”**
- Short, direct, and to the point.

4) Supporting Softening Blamer

Marcus' "softening reach"

- Marcus gathered himself, turned directly to Fresca and slowly shared:

“This is really hard for me. I really doubt myself and I doubt that you will even want me if I show this weak and scared part of me to you. If there’s any way....I’d just love for you to grab my hand, or hug me sometimes when I am afraid or acting stupid because of all of this junk. I’d love your reassurance. But it’s so scary to ask you for it, to even do this right now is all new territory for me.

4) Supporting Softening Blamer

- The therapist supports new stance of more-blaming spouse, and the risk just taken.
 - (Therapist, softly) “I think that was great Marcus. You really risked. You opened up and shared with Fresca what you need and how scary that is. Borrowing your own words, that was ‘huge.’” (Validation)
- Help softening blamer process and organize emerging meaning.
 - “What was it like for you Marcus, to turn and say that to Fresca? What’s happening inside now?” (Evocative Responding)

5) Processing with Engaged Withdrawer

- Specific focus is the immediate affective response of the engaged partner *to the softening partner's reach*.
- The softening reach *pulls* for comforting responses.
- Therapist helps shape a direct response of accessibility, responsiveness, and safety.
- Therapist “sets the table” by slowly repeating the attachment themes of softening reach.

5) Processing with Engaged Withdrawer

Example: “Fresca,” the therapist slowly says.
“Marcus just shared how afraid he gets, scared that you will see him as weak, or somehow lacking. And how he desperately longs for you to accept and comfort him...to be there for him regardless (**therapist “resets the table” by replaying attachment-related affect**). He really risked sharing this with you just now. What happened inside as he let you in like this?
(Therapist taps hand just above her own heart as she says this. **Evocative Responding**)

5) Processing with Engaged Withdrawer

- *“It was great” Fresca replies. “I don’t see him as weak. In fact, when he shows me his heart like this, I want to be with him. I want to comfort him.”*
- The therapist then reflects Fresca’s response, often with a sense of intrigue, framed such as *“Let me see if I get this. When he opens up and shows you these parts of him that are afraid and uncertain, when he says, ‘I need your acceptance and comfort,’ this actually pulls you toward him?”*

6) Engaged Withdrawer Reaches Back with Support

- *“Yes!” Fresca says adamantly. “It makes me feel close to him. Like I can come be with him. I have something special to offer him.”*
- Therapist: *“Would you please tell him this in your own words right now? How when he risks like this and lets you in, that this makes you want to be with him even more? Would you please turn and directly share that with him now in your own words?”* **(Restructuring Interactions)**
 - Note: Still setting that table!! Keeping them attachment-focused.

Video Example

- **Couple was extremely distressed**
- **Both talking divorce**
- **Married four years**
- **Both exhibit anger problems**
- **Both trauma survivors**
- **I am supervising live w/bug-in-ear**
- **I am very active – seized the moment**
 - Too much for normal supervision.
 - Please hang in there with me.

Final Thoughts

- The number of softening events needed varies among couples.
- Softening events start the bonding event process. At completion of Step 7, both partners are accessible and responsive, able to share and let the other in.
- They ask for comfort, reassurance, for fears to be soothed, and attachment needs to be met – in their own particular words.
- Key Interventions include **Heightening, Evocative Responding, and Restructuring Interactions.**

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