



CO 713 Topics in Couple and Family Therapy:
An Emotionally Focused Approach to Couples Therapy
Spring 2026

Professor: Tony Schnare, M.A., R.M.F.T.S., C.C.S., C.P.C.S.

Email: tschnare@briercrest.ca

Phone: (778) 212 - 3486

Course Dates: June 8–12, 2026

Course Delivery Method: In-Person Modular course

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on advanced family systems theories and interventions. Students will have the opportunity to gain substantive understanding of specific systems theories and the specialized applied practices related to these theories.

Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) is a short-term approach to the treatment of distressed couples based on a clear conceptualization of relationship distress and adult attachment. The course presents both theory and practice through lecture, video viewing, and practical exercises. It will help students understand relationship distress in an attachment context, the assessment process and specific interventions, how to create change events in therapy, and how to address common impasses and difficult issues.

Prerequisite: CO 603 Foundations of Systemic Therapy or permission of the professor.

COURSE INTEGRATION

This course seeks to fulfill Briercrest Seminary-wide Outcome (SO) # 2 by prompting students to think about their vocation of counselling as embodiment of their faith. This course invites students to consider the vocation of counselling as participating in God's work of bringing hope and healing and helping bring peace and connection in intimate relationships (SO #3).

This counselling skills course seeks to fulfill the Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy (MAMFT) Program Outcome (PO) #1 and Master of Arts in Couple and Family Therapy (MACFT) by building counselling skills and practices that arise from the theories of marriage and family therapy to which students have already been introduced from CO 603 Foundations of Marriage and Family Therapy. This course equips students to consider ethical issues in working with couples (MAMFT PO#2 and MACFT PO #3). This course equips students with skills to improve relationships between couples, including viewing the relationship as the client, rather than the individuals; awareness of relational cycles; developmental considerations; managing therapist anxiety in the intensity of couple therapy; and valuing interpersonal relationships (MACFT PO #4 and #5). This course also seeks to meet the CCPA requirement of training in counselling/communication skills and/or CACFT requirement of therapeutic skills (MAMFT PO #3 and MACFT PO #3).

COURSE TEXTS

Johnson, S. (2013). *Love sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships*. Little Brown and Company, New York.

Johnson, S. (2019). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection* (3rd. ed.). Routledge, New York.

Johnson, S. (2019). *Attachment theory in practice: Emotionally focused therapy (EFT) with individuals, couples, and families*. Guildford: New York.

RECOMMENDED READING

Brubacher, L. (2024). *Stepping into emotionally focused couple therapy: Key ingredients of change*. (2nd Ed.), Routledge, New York.

Brubacher, L. (2024). *Workouts for stepping into emotionally focused couple therapy: Exercises to strengthen your practice*. Routledge, New York.

Johnson, S. (2008). *Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love*. Little Brown and Company, New York.

Johnson, S., & Sanderfer, K. (2016) *Created for connection: The "hold me tight" guide for Christian couples*. Little Brown and Company, New York.

MacIntosh, H. (2019). *Developmental couple therapy for complex trauma: A manual for therapists*. Routledge: New York.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/seminary-life/documents>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/seminary-life/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

SEMINARY-WIDE OUTCOMES

Students will graduate:

1. Describing and demonstrating evangelical faith and values.
2. Preparing to serve God's kingdom in its diversity. Describe God, God's kingdom, and your calling (vocational sensitivity) within it, including the types of contexts and people you feel best prepared to serve.
3. Participating in the action of our Triune God through formation of the soul (i.e., virtue and spiritual integrity), mind (academic rigour), and strength (vocation).

COURSE OUTCOMES

1. Thinking
 - a. To provide a clear theoretical orientation of adult intimate relationships and the phenomenon of relationship distress within an attachment context.

- b. To provide an opportunity for students to learn how attachment processes that constitute adult intimate relationships are involved in negative cycles of marital distress.
 - c. To provide students with the opportunity to think about difficult issues and relational impasses that may arise in working with couples.
- 2. Valuing and Feeling
 - a. To develop a non-blaming stance when working with distressed couples.
 - b. To explore person-of-the-therapist dynamics in developing a more differentiated therapeutic posture in working with couples.
 - c. To gain an appreciation of individual and cultural differences.
- 3. Skill
 - a. To familiarize students with the assessment process and identify specific interventions.
 - b. To provide students with the opportunity to apply what they have learned about adult relationships to current problems facing couples today.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

- 1. Introduction to the Emotionally Focused Therapy
- 2. Attachment/bonding and the role of emotion
- 3. Assumptions of EFT and the therapist's main focus
- 4. The EFT Tango and the detailed nine steps of EFT
- 5. Assessment and interventions
- 6. Working with Traumatized couples
- 7. Integrating EFT and Sex Therapy
- 8. Resolving attachment-related injuries

ASSIGNMENTS

Please submit all written assignments to Canvas.

Pre-Course Assignments:

Read Johnson, S. (2013) *Love sense* prior to the beginning of the course. In five pages discuss how the concepts developed in the text expand and inform awareness of the relational dynamics of a key relationship in your life (marital, dating, friendship, parental, etc.).

Read Johnson, S. (2019) *Attachment theory in practice* prior to the beginning of the course. Write a five page critical review. More than a summary, a critical review engages the material, identifies the main thesis of the text, and evaluates whether the author achieved the stated outcomes. A critical review will address strengths of the author's approach and reflect on those areas where there might be room for further development in the model. The review will also reflect areas where the model integrates well with a biblical perspective as well as those aspects that prove more challenging to incorporate.

Due: Monday morning, June 8, 2026 at 9:00AM.

(20%)

Mid-Course Assignments:

Working in groups of 3-4, students will prepare a 30-minute presentation on some aspect or

intervention related to the EFT model. Insight into the model, creativity, and demonstrated clarity will serve as the assessment rubric. Groups will be assigned prior to the beginning of the course.

A case study will be provided on the first day of class to guide the presentations. Please anticipate some “outside” of class time to prepare during the week.

Presentations will be done on Thursday to allow groups sufficient time during the week to prepare.
(20%)

Post-Course Assignments:

Students will write a 12-15-page paper consisting of four components:

- a. A brief literature review of an issue (e.g., childhood abuse, living with a chronically ill child, depression, conflicting Christian values, life cycle transitions, infidelity, etc.) that interferes with creating and/or maintaining close relationship and that may escalate into marital distress. Please submit your topic for prior approval.
- b. An introduction to the fictitious couple referred or requesting therapy for the problem that you have chosen. The report should include a discussion regarding the level of distress, a description of the negative interactional pattern and underlying primary emotions, information on each partner's family of origin, and goals for therapy.
- c. For the main focus of your paper, develop a transcript with you, as an EFT therapist, working with this couple. The transcript may be an excerpt from anywhere in the assessment or therapy process. You must introduce the excerpt (i.e., state what step in the EFT process you are at and what you did to get there).
- d. A discussion of the interventions used in the transcript and justification for their usage, how you helped the couple shift from a negative interactional pattern to a more accessible and responsive posture toward one another, what your couple looked like at the end of therapy, and some specific challenges therapists may face when working with this particular issue.

The purpose of this paper is to have you think critically and creatively apply the material read and learned through the class interactions. Papers will be graded according to writing style (i.e., presentation, clarity), thoroughness, and how accurately the interventions are implemented.

Due: August 7, 2026

(60%)

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current [Seminary Calendar](#).

Attendance Policy

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

Modular Course Schedules

Modular classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI without instructor authorization violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of

academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately.

Generative AI is an umbrella term for a type of machine learning and a group of algorithms that can create new content, such as text, code, images, videos, music, or a combination of all these formats. Generative AI produces output in response to a query or prompt using generative models such as Large Language Models (LLMs) that rely on large datasets. Generative AI features are also often embedded within tools such as Grammarly, allowing these tools to generate new content, such as the rewriting, paraphrasing, or summarizing of existing text. The generated responses of these tools are probabilistic, which can result in errors and biases in responses.

The use of generative AI to create audio or visual media, to produce outlines, to generate partial or complete drafts of assignments, to answer questions on quizzes or exams, or to edit the grammar of assignment drafts is considered unauthorized unless it is explicitly permitted by the course instructor in writing. All use of generative AI tools must be properly documented.

Students are responsible for ensuring they are using their sources and completing their assignments with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#) and the Briercrest Format Guide. In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allan, R., Wiebe, S.A., Johnson, S.M., Piaseckyj, O., & Campbell, T.L. (2021). *Practicing Emotionally Focused Therapy Online: Calling all Relationships*. Journal of Marital & Family Therapy, 47(2), 424-439.
- Bankoski, M. E. (2001). *Pulling on the heart strings: An emotionally focused approach to family life cycle transitions*. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 27 (2), 177-187.
- Binik, Y. & Hall, K. (Eds.). (2007). *Principles and practice of sexual therapy* (5th Ed.). Guilford: New York.

- Brubacher, L. L. (2017). *Emotionally focused individual therapy: An attachment-based experiential/systemic perspective*. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 16(1), 50- 67.
- Furrow, J., Bradley, B., & Johnson, S. M. (Eds.) (2011) *The emotionally focused casebook: New directions in treating couples*. Brunner Routledge: New York.
- Gordon-Walker, J., Manion, I.G. Cloutier, P.F., & Johnson, S. M. (1992). *Measuring marital distress in couples with chronically ill children: The dyadic adjustment scale*. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 17 (3), 345-357.
- Gottman, J. (1994). *Why marriages succeed and fail*. Simon Schuster: New York.
- Johnson, S. M. (2002). *Emotionally focused couple therapy with trauma survivors: Strengthening attachment bonds*. Guilford: New York.
- Johnson, S. M., Bradley, B., Furrow, J., Lee, A., Palmer, G., Tilley, D., & Wooley, S. (2005). *Becoming an emotionally focused couple therapist: The workbook*. Routledge, New York.
- Johnson, S. M. & Makinen, J. A. (2003). Posttraumatic Stress. In D.K. Snyder & M.A. Whisman (Eds.), *Treating difficult couples* (pp. 308-329). New York: Guilford Press.
- Johnson, S. M., Makinen, J. A., & Millikin, J. W. (2001). *Attachment injuries in couple relationships: A new perspective on impasses in couples therapy*. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 27 (2), 145-155.
- Johnson, S. M., & Williams-Keeler (1998). *Creating healing relationships for couples dealing with trauma: The use of emotionally focused marital therapy*. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 24 (1), 25-40.
- Kallos-Lilly, V. & Fitzgerald J. (2014). *An emotionally focused workbook for couples: The two of us*. Routledge, New York.
- Kleinplatz, P. (2012) *New directions in sex therapy: Innovations and alternatives*. Routledge: New York.
- McRae, T. R., Dalgleish, T. L., Johnson, S. M., Burgess-Moser, M., & Killian, K. D. (2014). *Emotion regulation and key change events in emotionally focused couple therapy*. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 13, 1-24.
- Mikulincer, M. & Goodman, G. S. (2006). *Dynamics of romantic love: Attachment, caregiving, and sex*. Guilford: New York.
- Schrarach, D.M. (1991). *The sexual crucible: An integration of sexual and marital therapy*. W.W. Norton: New York.
- Schnarch, D. (1997). *Passionate marriage: Sex, love, and intimacy in emotionally committed relationships*. W.W. Norton: New York.

- Slootmaeckers, J., & Migerode, L. (2020). *EFT and Intimate Partner Violence: A Roadmap to De-escalating Violent Patterns*. *Family Process*, 59(2), 328-345.
- Snyder, D.K, & Whisman, M.A. (Eds.). (2003). *Treating difficult couples: Helping clients with coexisting mental and relationship disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Spring, J.A. (1997). *After the affair: Healing the pain and rebuilding trust when a partner has been unfaithful*. Harper Perennial: New York.
- Thompson-de Benoit, A., & Kramer, U. (2020). *Work with emotions in remote psychotherapy in the time of Covid-19: a clinical experience*. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1080/09515070.2020.1770696.
- Wittenborn, A. K., Liu, T., Ridenour, T. A., Lachmar, E. M., Rouleau, E. and Seedall, R. B. (2019). *Randomized controlled trial of emotionally focused couple therapy compared to treatment as usual for depression: Outcomes and mechanisms of change*. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 45, 395– 409.
- Zeytinoglu Saydam, S., & Nino, A. (2019). *A Tool for Connection: Using Person of the Therapist Model in Emotionally Focused Therapy Supervision*. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 45(2), 233-243.

Extensive bibliographies on EFT scholarship are available at <https://iceeft.com/iceeft-online-library/>