

# Hold Me Tight

## SEVEN CONVERSATIONS for a LIFETIME of LOVE

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### Introduction

The message EFT is simple: Forget about learning how to argue better, analyzing your early childhood, making grand romantic gestures, or experimenting with new sexual positions. Instead, recognize and admit that you are emotionally attached to and dependent on your partner in much the same way that a child is on a parent for nurturing, soothing, and protection.

EFT focuses on creating and strengthening this emotional bond between partners by identifying and transforming the key moments that foster an adult loving relationship: being open, attuned, and responsive to each other.

We all live out of the drama of connection and disconnection.

### PART ONE – A New Light on Love

Inevitably, we now ask our lovers for the emotional connection and sense of belonging that my grandmother could get from a whole village.

What couples and therapist too often do not see is that most fights are really *protests* over emotional disconnection. Underneath all the distress, partners are asking each other: *Can I count on you, depend on you? Are you there for me? Will you respond to me when I need you, when I call? Do I matter to you? Am I valued and accepted by you? Do you need me, rely on me?* The anger, the criticism, the demands, are really cries to their lovers, calls to stir their hearts, to draw their mates back in emotionally and reestablish a sense of safe connection.

When marriages fail, it is not increasing conflict that is the cause. It is decreasing affection and emotional responsiveness, according to a landmark study by Ted Huston of the University of Texas.

This emotional responsiveness has three main components:

- Accessibility: Can I reach you?
- Responsiveness: Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?
- Engagement: Do I know you will value me and stay close?

### PART TWO – Seven Transforming Conversations

#### **Conversation 1: Recognizing the Demon Dialogues**

For all of us, the person we love the most, the one who can send us soaring joyfully into space, is also the person who can send us crashing back to earth. All it takes is a slight turning away of the head or a flip, careless remark. There is no closeness without the sensitivity. If our connection with our mate is safe and strong, we can deal with these moments of sensitivity. Indeed, we can use them to bring our partner even closer. But when we don't feel safe and connected, these moments are like a spark in a tinder forest. They set fire to the whole relationship.

#### **DEMON DIALOGUE 1—FIND THE BAD GUY**

The purpose of Find the Bad Guy is self-protection, but the main move is mutual attack, accusation, or blame.

The more you attack, the more dangerous you appear to me, the more I watch for your attack, the harder I hit back. And round and round we go. This negative pattern has to be shut down before a couple can build the true trust and safety. The secret to stopping the dance is to recognize that no one has to be the bad guy. The accuse/accuse pattern itself is the villain here and the partners are the victims.

### **DEMON DIALOGUE 2—THE PROTEST POLKA**

Unlike the obvious attack-attack pattern of Find the Bad Guy, the Protest Polka is more subtle. One partner is demanding, actively protesting the disconnection; the other is withdrawing, quietly protesting the implied criticism. Dissatisfied partners, missing each other's signal often complain of a fuzzy "communication problems" or "constant tension."

If I appeal to you for emotional connection and you respond intellectually to a problem, rather than directly to me, on an attachment level I will experience that as "no response."

### **DEMON DIALOGUE 3—FREEZE AND FLEE** **PLAY AND PRACTICE**

Remember that the facts of a fight (whether it's a fight about the kids' schedules, your sex life, your careers) aren't the real issue. The real concern is always the strength and security of the emotional bond you have with your partner. It's about accessibility, responsiveness, and emotional engagement.

#### **Conversation 2: Finding the Raw Spots**

We all are vulnerable in love; it goes with the territory. We are more emotionally naked with those we love and so sometimes, inevitably, we hurt each other with careless words or actions.

pain is often superficial and fleeting. But almost all of us have at least one additional exquisite sensitivity—a raw spot in our emotional skin—that is tender to the touch, easily rubbed, and deeply painful. When this raw spot gets abraded, it can bleed all over our relationship. We lose our emotional balance and plunge into Demon Dialogues.

### **RECOGNIZING WHEN A RAW SPOT IS RUBBED**

There are two signs that tell you when your raw spot or your partner's has been hit. First, there is a sudden radical shift in the emotional tone of the conversation.

Second, the reaction to a perceived offense often seems way out of proportion.

Generally in love, sharing even negative emotions, provided they don't get out of hand, is more useful than emotional absence. Lack of response just fires up the primal panic of the other partner.

#### **Conversation 3: Revisiting a Rocky Moment**

But it does mean that they know how to stop a rift before it widens into an unbridgeable abyss. They are aware of two crucial elements of de-escalation: first, that how a partner responds at a key moment of conflict in disconnection can be deeply painful and threatening to the other; and second, that a partner's negative reactions can be desperate attempts to deal with attachment fears.

#### **Conversation 4: Hold Me Tight—Engaging and Connecting**

To build and sustain a secure bond, we need to be able to tune in to our loved one as strongly as we did before. How do we do this? By deliberately creating moments of engagement and connection.

Conversation 4 has two parts. The first—What Am I Most Afraid Of?—requires further exploring and elaborating on the deeper feelings you tapped into in the previous conversations. In those dialogues, you were

taking the elevator down into your emotions. To discover your attachment priorities, you must now go all the way to the ground floor.

The second part—What Do I Need Most from You? —is crucial, the tipping point encounter in EFT. It involves being able to openly and coherently speak your needs in a way that invites your partner into a new dialogue marked by accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement, an A.R.E. conversation.

### **WHAT AM I MOST AFRAID OF?**

This is a new, more accessible Charlie. How Kyoko responds at this point is critical. Too often in unhappy relationships, when one person takes a risk and opens up, the other partner doesn't see or is afraid to trust the revelation. I've heard partners dismiss their lover's new steps towards them with everything from "That's ridiculous" to some version of "So let's see you prove it." Then they spin back into their Demon Dialogue.

The truth is no one takes the risk of being rebuffed by disclosing, like Charlie has, unless the other person really matters. And sometimes disclosing partners have to be willing to hang in there and keep repeating their messages until their loved one gets used to seeing them in a new way.

### **Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries**

#### **SMALL EVENTS, BIG FALLOUT**

I have seen this sort of abrupt disconnect occur before. Couples are making steady progress, tender feelings are flowing, and then... wham! One partner brings up an event, sometimes an apparently minor one, and it's as if all the oxygen has been sucked from the room. All at once, warm hope is exchanged for chill despair.

How can one small incident have this kind of overwhelming power? Well, clearly it's not a minor incident period to one partner at least, it is a grievous event.

## **PART THREE – The Power of Hold Me Tight**

### **Ultimate Connection—Love as the Final Frontier**

#### **HOW DOES LOVE WORK**

In my office, more emotionally distant partners sometimes tell me, "I do all kinds of things to show I care. I mow the lawn, bring in a good salary, solve problems, and I don't play around. Why is it that, in the end, these things don't seem to matter, and all that counts with my wife is that we don't 'talk about emotional stuff and cuddle'? I tell them, "Because that's just the way we are made. We need someone to pay attention, to hold us tight, to come very close sometimes and respond to us in an emotional way that moves us, connects with us. Nothing compares with that. You need that, too. Have you forgotten?"

If I had to summarize the lessons I've learned from all these couples, they would look like this:

- Our need for others to come close when we call—to offer a safe haven—is absolute.
- Emotional starvation is a reality. Feeling emotionally deserted, rejected, or abandoned sparks physical and emotional pain and panic.
- There are very few ways to cope with our pain when our primary needs for connection are not met.
- Emotional balance, calm, and vibrant joy are the rewards of love. Sentimental infatuation is the booby prize.
- There is no perfect performance in love or sex. Obsession with performance is a dead end. It is emotional presence that matters.
- In relationships there is no simple cause and effect, no straight lines, only circles that partners create together. We pull each other into loops and spirals of connection and disconnection.
- Emotion tells us exactly what we need, if we can listen to it and use it as a guide.
- We all hit the panic button at times. We lose our balance and slip into anxious controlling or numbing and avoiding modes. The secret is to not to stay in these positions. It's too hard for your lover to meet you there.

- Key moments of bonding, when one person reaches for another and the other responds, take courage but they are magical and transforming.
- Forgiving injuries is essential and only happens when partners can make sense of their own hurt and know that their lover connects and feels that hurt with them.
- Lasting passion is entirely possible in love. The erratic heat of infatuation is just the prelude; an attuned loving bond is the symphony.
- Neglect will kill love. Love needs attention. Knowing your attachment needs and responding to those of your lover can make a bond last until “death us do part.”
- All the clichés about love—when people feel loved they are freer, more alive, and more powerful—are truer than we ever imagined.