

A Closer Look At Stage 1

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I am sure, as an EFT therapist, you relish those powerful moments of Withdrawer Re-engagement. It's fantastic to help the Withdrawer experience his deepest fear, share his experience with his partner, stand in the face-of-fire (so to speak) and ask his partner for what he needs. We love to share those incredible times when we guide the Blamer to take a huge risk and reach for her partner from a place of vulnerability. When she shares her fear that something is wrong with her for needing connection and then goes ahead and asks for it, we feel honored. These events are magical moments and, as we know, are necessary for lasting change.

However, the longer I practice EFT and supervise others, the more it seems to me that the De-escalation Stage is under appreciated or, perhaps, misunderstood. De-escalation Stage is the first Change Event. Without it, without the couples really seeing and experiencing the cycle they get caught in, there are no other Change Events.

In a nutshell, I've come to think of De-escalation as complete when each person in the couple is able to really get his/her side of the loop and the impact he/she is having (picture Scott Woolley's infinity loop) **AS WELL AS** his/her partner's side of the loop.

De-escalation is when the **Pursuer** begins to experience the aloneness, desperation, and fear of abandonment that drives the anger **AND** begins to view her partner's withdrawal as protection from his feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, and fear of rejection.

And, it is when the **Withdrawer** begins to experience his panic, sheer terror of not being a full person and being such a disappointment to his partner that she might totally reject him (as one Withdrawer I worked with described it) as the driving force to withdrawal **AND** begins to view his partner's anger and criticism not as crazy, about him as a person, or trying to win, but as protests to her aloneness and fear of abandonment.

Having the couple understand the emotional drivers and the attachment reframe is critical to achieving de-escalation. Here are a few recent examples of couples really getting the reframe. The husband (Withdrawer) shared a time during the week when he sensed his wife getting angry: *"I knew she wasn't angry with me. I knew she wanted to connect with me and so I didn't have to put my wall up."* The wife (of the same couple) says: *"I'm trying hard not to get angry. I don't want my husband to end up feeling bad about himself, like he's failing me. I didn't realize that's what was happening for him. I didn't think anything was going on inside there."*

Here's another example: the Withdrawer (husband), after hearing about his wife's experience of feeling alone and afraid, says *"The image that comes to my mind is a camera aperture, where she feels her life keeps getting smaller and smaller. I didn't know that's how she experienced her world. I don't want that for her. I like knowing what is going on for her, but when I'm busy defending myself, I can't be open to hearing what is happening for her."*

As you are meeting with couples, good things happen when doing EFT:

- There's more safety between the partners
- The mood in the room is lighter
- Conflicts are less reactive
- Couples feel closer

I think, though, if you only use the above bullet points to decide that you have reached De-escalation, you could end up moving to Stage 2 too quickly. Couples really need to have, as Rebecca Jorgensen says, "an experiential sense of the cycle," and to really know themselves and their partners in a different way, the EFT way. When they do, as I've heard Susan Johnson describe, couples:

- See the cycle as the enemy, not each other
- Might have their own name / image for the cycle
- Can stop the cycle from running-the-show

Trainers teach in Core Skills that if you move on to Stage 2 without getting De-escalation:

- You won't be able to do Withdrawer Re-engagement or Blamer Softening
- The emotional bond won't deepen
- Couples' reactivity re-escalates as unprocessed emotions surface outside of therapy

So let's give a big Shout Out to the first phase of the EFT model: De-Escalation! Remember to look for signs that the couple is getting the reframe. Watch for those important moments as partners access their own deep emotions and begin to be able hold in their minds simultaneously, the other partner's deep emotional experience. In this way, you can help your couples ease into successful Stage 2 work. How you help couples have an experiential sense of their cycle, well, that's another article.

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