


  
**CCEFT**
  
Chicago Center for Emotionally Focused Therapy

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## Hold Me Tight

An Educational – *Experiential* Program for  
 Couples  
 by Dr. Sue Johnson  
Presented by  
**Jeff Hickey LCSW**  
Director, Chicago Center for Emotionally Focused Therapy  
chicagoeft.com

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### Reduce conflict & Strengthen your bond

1. Learn your *negative conflict cycle*
2. Recognize your *response under pressure*
3. Share your *raw spots*




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## Attachment

**A safe haven:**

- Secure connection with a loved one
- Where we go in times of need or uncertainty
- A buffer against stress


**A secure base:**

- A platform of security to engage challenges
- Builds bonds through accessibility & responsiveness
- Provides security in times of fear or uncertainty

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### This is your Brain on Attachment

- *Mirror Neurons* light up when we see – and share what are partners are experiencing.
- *Oxytocin*, a hormone released when we are in deep connection with our attachment figures – gives you an extra boost.




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### Key questions

- Key conflicts are about emotional disconnection
- We often deal with our insecurity in a ways that upset our partner
- This perpetuates disconnection
- A stuck dance of protest and distance results




*The key questions in love relationships:*

- “Are you there for me?”
- “Do I matter to you?”
- “Can I reach you?”
- “Will you respond when I call?”

*Emotional presence* – “tuning in” is the key – not perfect performance

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### Dealing with threat

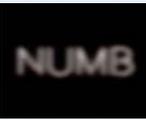
Two main ways to deal with attachment threats:

- Engage with it, stay balanced
- Become overwhelmed and then we either



**PUSH** - turn up the emotional intensity

- Push, pull, poke
- Criticize, demand
- Mobilize



**NUMB OUT** - turn down the intensity

- Deny, dismiss
- Avoid, retreat
- Suck it up, shut down

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## Emotions are fast!



They often move us in a nanosecond! We have to *slow down* to recognize the deeper, softer feelings.



It's hard to tune into raw spot emotions: so easy to pick up the *secondary*, coping responses.

*The goal:*

Pinpoint & share attachment vulnerabilities – the deeper attachment feelings that trigger the Demon Dialogues.

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## The Demon Dialogues

Moments of disconnection...



*are inevitable*

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## The Demon Dialogues

*2 Basic Patterns:*

1. **Find the Bad Guy:** *Attack/Attack*
2. **The Protest Polka:** *Pursue/Withdraw*
  - One criticizes, controls & complains
  - Other defends, dismisses & detaches

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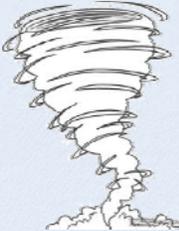
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**Find the Bad Guy in Action**



**The Spiral:**

The more you criticize and attack, the more I react with anger and strike back at you...

The more I strike back at you, the more you renew and intensify your attack...

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**protest polka:** pursue/withdraw



- The most common pattern
- Both partners are protesting disconnection
- Endless loop - driven by basic survival need of attachment.

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**Protest polka in Action**



**The Spiral:**

The more disconnected I feel, the more I complain, criticize and get angry and appear threatening to you...

The more you see me as a threat, the more you defend, retreat and shut me out...

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## The Demon Dialogues

When you feel disconnected, what is your *default move*?

Do you tend to:

- Raise your volume to get a response?
- Criticize/blame?
- Express your frustration angrily?
- Define your partner as being *the problem*?
- Disengage to limit conflict?
- Placate to keep the peace?

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## Snapshot of the Cycle

Jen is sitting at the kitchen table after getting back from a follow-up appt. with her oncologist when Roger comes in and, deep in his own thought, walks by her with just a grunt (*cue*). She immediately thinks, 'he doesn't even care enough to ask how it went! (*perception*). She immediately feels hurt (*primary emotion*), but skips over this and angrily (*secondary emotion*) accuses him (*behavior*) of being so self-absorbed he can't even ask about her biopsy result.

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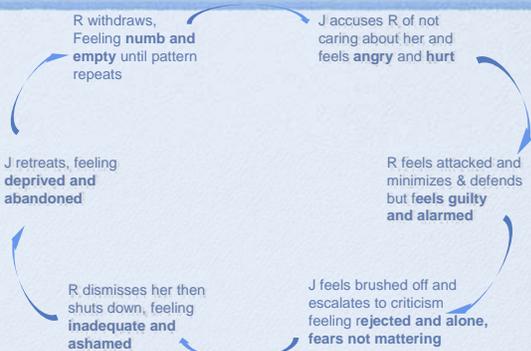
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## Pursue/Withdraw Cycle




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## Finding and Sharing Raw Spots

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**Understanding raw spots**

- We all have them.
- Vulnerability is a part of love.
- *Secure Bonds*: as we share and soothe sore places - trust deepens.
- *Insecure Bonds*: emotions turn up or off, we hit partner's raw spots then enter into the demon dialogues.

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**Sharing Raw Spots**

Most of us are naturally reluctant to share our vulnerabilities

- Our culture tells us we're supposed to be strong.
- It could make us less attractive to our partner.
- We might be putting a powerful tool in the hands of our partner.
- When we see our partner's distress we don't know what to do.

But...  
We'll never create a secure connection if we don't allow our lovers to know us fully

This requires **COURAGE & TRUST**

START SLOW.....There's no need to bare your soul... take it step by step

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## Key steps

1. See your cycle/dance.
2. Each claim your moves.
3. Claim your own "raw spot" emotions.
4. Own how you shape your partner's feelings: "I turn away and you get scared".
5. Supportively share your softer emotions.
6. Find an exit from the cycle - comfort each other.
7. Recreate a secure base.




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## Open up



Reaching for our partner may feel more or less risky depending on your:

- Family of origin attachments
- Previous partner relationships
- Personal style
- Current situation




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## A.R.E

Accessible



Responsive



Engaged



*Helps create:*

- Effective dependence
- A safe haven & secure base
- Ability to deal with stress and uncertainty
- Mutual resonance re. each other's experience & intentions

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## Move forward together

- **Recognize** your Danger Point Detours.
- **Celebrate** the positive moments - big & small turning points
- **Plan daily rituals** around moments of separation & reunion.
- **Connect first** – *then* address problem-solving (Safety First).
- **Talk** about the places where you hurt
- **Write** a resilient relationship story: struggles overcome and wounds healed.
- **Create** a future love story – dreams.



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## Keep your love alive

- *In love, we don't have to fix everything – we just have to be there!*
- Bonds are a dance... we have to practice!
- We all need LOVING & SECURE CONNECTION



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## Suggested reading

*Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships*  
Dr. Sue Johnson (2013) Little, Brown and Co.

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