

Sample Emotion-Focused Therapy Syllabus With Embedded Deliberate Practice Exercises

This appendix provides a sample one-semester, three-unit course dedicated to teaching emotion-focused therapy (EFT). This course is appropriate for graduate students (master's and doctoral) at all levels of training, including first-year students who have not yet worked with clients. We present it as a model that can be adopted to a specific program's contexts and needs. For example, instructors may borrow portions of it to use in other courses, practica, didactic training events at externships and internships, workshops, and continuing education for postgraduate therapists.

Course Title: Emotion-Focused Therapy: Theory and Deliberate Practice

Suggested Course Description

This course teaches theory, principles, and core skills of EFT for individuals. As a course with both didactic and practicum elements, it will review the theory and research on emotion, psychotherapy change processes, and applications of EFT and will foster the use of deliberate practice to enable students to acquire 12 key EFT skills.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will be able to

1. Describe the core theory, research, and skills of EFT
2. Apply the principles of deliberate practice for career-long clinical skill development
3. Demonstrate key EFT skills
4. Evaluate how they can fit EFT skills into their developing therapeutic framework
5. Employ EFT with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds
6. Be emotionally available for their clients as a result of the increased emotional self-awareness and experiential knowledge they gain in the course
7. Describe the ways in which EFT is an evidenced-based practice approach
8. Demonstrate an effective balance of (a) emotional vulnerability/openness and (b) maintaining appropriate personal boundaries

Date	Lecture and Discussion	Skills Lab	Relevant Readings and Videos
Week 1	<p>Introduction to emotion-focused therapy (EFT)</p> <p>Overview of EFT theory</p> <p>History of EFT</p> <p>Theory of EFT practice</p> <p>Principles of deliberate practice</p>	Video demonstration	<p>Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i>, Chapters 1 and 2</p> <p>Goldman (2015)</p> <p>Chapter 1</p> <p>Videos: Intro to EFT: Greenberg (2007a), <i>Emotion-Focused Therapy for Depression</i></p> <p>Intro to deliberate practice: https://www.dpfortherapists.com</p>
Week 2	<p>Empirical support for EFT: process and outcome research</p> <p>Emotion change principles</p> <p>Case formulation in EFT</p> <p>Therapist self-awareness, therapeutic presence, and related research</p>	<p>Video demonstration</p> <p>Exercise 1: Therapist Self-Awareness</p>	<p>Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i>, Chapters 3, 4, and 6</p> <p>Goldman et al. (2006)</p> <p>Ellison et al. (2009)</p> <p>Watson et al. (2003)</p> <p>Goldman and Greenberg (2015), <i>Case Formulation in Emotion-Focused Therapy</i></p> <p>Goldman (2017)</p> <p>Exercise 1</p> <p>Video: Goldman (2013), <i>Case Formulation in Emotion-Focused Therapy</i></p>
Week 3	<p>The therapeutic relationship in EFT</p> <p>Moment-by-moment empathic attunement to affect and related research</p>	Exercise 2: Empathic Understanding	<p>Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i>, Chapters 5 and 6</p> <p>Rogers (1957, 1975)</p> <p>Greenberg (2014)</p> <p>Martin (2015)</p> <p>Exercise 2</p> <p>Video: Geller (2015), <i>Presence in Psychotherapy</i></p>
Week 4	<p>Empathic attunement to affect</p> <p>Why focus on emotions and what to listen for (i.e., primary, secondary; adaptive and maladaptive)</p> <p>Empathic affirmation/validation and related research</p>	Exercise 3: Empathic Affirmation and Validation	<p>Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i>, Chapters 7–9</p> <p>Watson et al. (1997)</p> <p>Rogers (1957, 1975)</p> <p>Martin (2015)</p> <p>Pascual-Leone (2009), Pascual-Leone and Greenberg (2007)</p> <p>Exercise 3</p>
Week 5	Exploratory questions: how and when to use questions in EFT	Exercise 4: Exploratory Questions	<p>Elliott et al. (2004), Chapter 5</p> <p>Exercise 4</p> <p>Video: Watson (2013)</p>
Week 6	<p>"Hot teaching" in EFT: experiential teaching, emotion coaching, and consolidating change with homework</p> <p>Providing treatment rationales</p>	Exercise 5: Providing Treatment Rationale for Emotion-Focused Therapy	<p>Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i>, Chapter 12</p> <p>Greenberg (2015)</p> <p>Exercise 5</p>
Week 7	Using empathic exploration to explore and deepen emotion	Exercise 6: Empathic Explorations	<p>Elliott et al. (2004), Chapter 6</p> <p>Watson et al. (1997)</p> <p>Exercise 6</p>

Date	Lecture and Discussion	Skills Lab	Relevant Readings and Videos
Week 8	Using empathic evocations to deepen emotion; related research	Exercise 7: Empathic Evocations	Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i> , Chapter 5 Elliott et al. (2004), Chapter 5 Rice (1974) Martin (2015) Exercise 7
Week 9	Empathic conjectures and related research Distinguishing empathic responses	Exercise 8: Empathic Conjectures	Exercise 8 Elliott et al. (2004), Chapter 5 Refer to Appendix B
Week 10	Therapist self-awareness More on cultivating therapeutic presence and related research Integrating a feminist-multicultural perspective into EFT	Exercise 9: Staying in Contact in the Face of Intense Affect	Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i> , Chapters 6 and 19 Geller and Greenberg (2012) Geller (2017) Exercise 9
Week 11	Self-disclosure in EFT	Exercise 10: Self-Disclosure	Levitt et al. (2016) Elliott et al. (2004), Chapter 5 Exercise 10
Week 12	Marker recognition and chair-work task setup Self-evaluative splits Self-interruptive splits Empty chair for unfinished business	Exercise 11: Marker Recognition and Chair Work Task Setup	Elliott et al. (2004), Chapters 6, 11, and 12 Exercise 11 Video: Greenberg (2007b), <i>Emotion-Focused Therapy Over Time</i>
Week 13	Alliance rupture and repair and related research Therapeutic alliance and outcome Theory and research on alliance ruptures in EFT	Exercise 12: Addressing Ruptures and Facilitating Repair	Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i> , Chapter 5 Exercise 12 Greenberg (2014) Watson and Greenberg (2000)
Week 14	Putting it all together: self-evaluation, skill coaching, and feedback	Exercise 13: Annotated Emotion-Focused Therapy Practice Session Transcript Exercise 14: Mock Emotion-Focused Therapy Sessions	Exercises 13 and 14
Week 15	Additional EFT tasks including experiential focusing, systematic evocative unfolding for problematic reactions, self-soothing, shame and vulnerability Applications of EFT EFT for couples Working with specific disorders: depression, anxiety, trauma, eating disorders Final feedback	Lecture, video demonstration, and discussion ^a	Greenberg and Goldman (2019), <i>Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy</i> , Chapters 10, 13–16, 19, and 20 Videos: Goldman (2018), <i>Emotion-Focused Therapy for Couples</i> Paivio (2014), <i>Emotion-Focused Therapy for Trauma</i> Elliott (2018), <i>Resolving Problematic Reactions in Emotion-Focused Therapy</i> Timulak (2020), <i>Facilitating Self-Soothing</i>

Note. Specific reading or video suggestions are given related to designated topics.

^aGiven the high volume of material in the last class, professors may choose to cover some of this material at any earlier point in the course or build it into an advanced course. The materials listed here cover a complete course of EFT.

Format of Class

Course time is divided between learning EFT theory, observing video demonstrations, and practicing EFT skills:

Skills Labs: Skills labs are for practicing EFT skills using the exercises in this book. The exercises use therapy simulations (role-plays) with the following goals:

1. Build trainees' skill and confidence for using EFT skills with real clients
2. Provide a safe space for experimenting with different therapeutic interventions, without fear of making mistakes
3. Provide plenty of opportunity to explore and "try on" different styles of therapy so that trainees can ultimately discover their own personal, unique therapy style

Practice Sessions: Toward the end of the semester (Week 14), trainees will participate in a skills lab in which they do a practice session using the annotated transcript (Exercise 13) or a mock practice session in which the "client" adopts one of the client profiles listed in Exercise 14 or plays themselves as the client. In contrast to highly structured and repetitive deliberate practice exercises, these are unstructured and improvised role-play therapy sessions. Like a jazz rehearsal, mock sessions let trainees practice the art and science of putting psychotherapy skills together in way that is helpful to clients. Practice sessions let trainees

1. Practice using psychotherapy skills responsively
2. Experiment with clinical decision making in an unscripted context
3. Discover their personal therapeutic style
4. Build endurance for working with real clients

EFT Skill Practice

Each week, students will be assigned reading and skill practice with an assigned practice partner. For the skills practice, trainees will be asked to repeat the exercise they did for that week's skills lab. Because the professor will not be there to evaluate performance, trainees should instead perform a self-evaluation.

Assignments

Students are to write two papers: one due at midterm and one due on the last day of class. Some possible topics for the assignments and papers are as follows:

- Ask students to perform a practice session of 30 to 45 minutes in length outside of class. Students should record the session. Students are instructed to become as present as possible, empathically attune to the client, and freely use as many of the skills as they see fit in responding to the "client." Students may choose to transcribe the session. Students will be asked to review their session, providing an analysis of which EFT theories and skills they applied. Students should specifically identify which EFT deliberate practice skills they used and why. Students may also discuss any difficulties they had in applying the skills or facilitating the process. Professors can decide whether they wish to see the session or have the student transcribe it and turn it in.
- Explore one aspect of EFT theory, research, or technique. A partial transcript of one of the trainees' therapy cases with a real client, with discussion from an EFT perspective as well as an analysis and commentary on the use of EFT deliberate practice skills during the session.
- Write a reflection paper discussing a skill practice session.

Vulnerability, Privacy, Confidentiality, and Boundaries

This course is aimed at developing therapy skills, self-awareness, and interaction skills in an experiential framework and as relevant to clinical work. Using EFT with clients requires balancing emotional vulnerability and openness and simultaneously maintaining appropriate personal boundaries. We will explore and practice this balance as part of learning EFT together.

This course is not psychotherapy or a substitute for psychotherapy. Students should interact at a level of self-disclosure that is personally comfortable and helpful to their own learning. Although becoming aware of internal emotional and psychological processes is necessary for a therapist's development, it is not necessary to reveal all that information to the trainer. It is important for students to sense their own level of safety and privacy. Students are not evaluated on the level of material that they choose to reveal in the class.

Multicultural Orientation

This course is taught in a multicultural context, defined as "how the cultural world-views, values, and beliefs of the client and therapist interact and influence one another to co-create a relational experience that is in the spirit of healing" (Davis et al., 2018, p. 3). Multicultural competencies are included in accreditation requirements and American Psychological Association's (2017b) *Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality*. These include multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Throughout this course, students are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural identity and improve their ability to attune with their clients' cultural identities (Hook et al., 2017). For further in-depth exploration of integrating feminist-multicultural perspectives in EFT, please see Levitt et al. (2019), Chapter 19, in the *Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy*. This topic will be discussed in Week 11.

Confidentiality

Due to the nature of the material covered in class, there are many occasions when personal life (self, friends, or family) experience may be pertinent for the learning environment. It cannot be required to share personal experiences, but some may be inclined to do so. Additionally, the content of client case material is sensitive and demands our ethical consideration. To create a safe learning environment that is respectful of client and counselor information and diversity, and to foster open and vulnerable conversation in class, class members are required to agree to *strict confidentiality* in the classroom and outside the class as well.

Revealing Information About Self

In accordance with the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2017a), students are **not required to disclose personal information**. It is, however, recommended to disclose personal material, within comfortable limits, to learn the most from the exercises. Because this class is about developing both interpersonal and EFT competence, following are some important points so that students are fully informed as they make choices to self-disclose:

- Professional activities are affected by personal experiences, beliefs, and values, and these things have a bearing on students' professional functioning.
- Behaviors are influenced by personal experiences, beliefs, and values. Students may be asked to reflect on this in the specifically defined context of encouraging the growth of professional competence for the work environment only.

- Students choose how much, when, and what to disclose. Students are not penalized for the choice not to share personal information. This course is not psychotherapy.
- The learning environment is susceptible to group dynamics much like any other group space; therefore, students may be asked to share their observations and experiences of the class environment with the singular goal of fostering a more inclusive and productive learning environment.

Evaluation

Self-Evaluation: At the end of the semester (Week 14), trainees will perform a self-evaluation. This will help trainees track their progress and identify areas for further development. The "Guidance for Trainees" section in Chapter 3 of this book highlights potential areas of focus for self-evaluation.

Grading Criteria

As designed, students would be accountable for the level and quality of their performance in

- Readings and discussion in-class
- Skills lab (exercises and practice sessions)
- Assignments

Instructors who adopt this syllabus have latitude deciding how to assess each of these and the differential weighting to give these.

Required Readings and Videos

- Elliott, R. (2018). *Resolving problematic reactions in emotion-focused therapy* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Elliott, R., Watson, J. C., Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2004). *Learning emotion-focused therapy: The process-experiential approach to change*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10725-000>
- Ellison, J. A., Greenberg, L. S., Goldman, R. N., & Angus, L. (2009). Maintenance of gains following experiential therapies for depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(1), 103–112. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014653>
- Geller, S. M. (2015). *Presence in psychotherapy* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Geller, S. M. (2017). *A practical guide to cultivating therapeutic presence*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000025-000>
- Goldman, R. N. (2013). *Case formulation in emotion-focused therapy: Addressing unfinished business* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Goldman, R. N. (2015). Emotion-focused therapy. In D. J. Cain, K. Keenan, & S. Rubin (Eds.), *Humanistic psychotherapies: Handbook of research and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 319–350). American Psychological Association.
- Goldman, R. N. (2017). Case formulation in emotion-focused therapy. *Person-centered and experiential psychotherapies*, 16(2), 85–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2017.1330705>
- Goldman, R. N. (Guest Expert). (2018). *Emotion-focused couple therapy*. [Film; educational DVD]. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/videos/4310997.aspx>
- Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2015). *Case formulation in emotion-focused therapy: Co-creating clinical maps for change*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14523-000>
- Goldman, R. N., Greenberg, L. S., & Angus, L. (2006). The effects of adding specific emotion-focused interventions to the client-centered relationship conditions in the treatment of depression. *Psychotherapy Research*, 16(5), 537–549. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503300600589456>
- Goldman, R. N., Greenberg, L. S., & Pos, A. E. (2005). Depth of emotional experience and outcome. *Psychotherapy Research*, 15(3), 248–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503300512331385188>

- Greenberg, L. S. (2007a). *Emotion-focused therapy for depression* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2007b). *Emotion-focused therapy over time* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Greenberg, L. (2014). The therapeutic relationship in emotion-focused therapy. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, & Practice*, 51(3), 350–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037336>
- Greenberg, L. S. (2015). *Emotion-focused therapy: Coaching clients to work through their feelings*. American Psychological Association.
- Greenberg, L. S., & Goldman, R. N. (2019). *Clinical handbook of emotion-focused therapy*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000112-000>
- Levitt, H., Minami, T., Greenspan, S. B., Puckett, J. A., Henretty, J. R., Reich, C. M., & Berman, J. S. (2016). How therapist self-disclosure relates to alliance and outcomes: A naturalistic study. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 29(1), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2015.1090396>
- Levitt, H. M., Whelton, W. J., & Iwakabe, S. (2019). Integrating feminist-multicultural perspectives into emotion-focused therapy. In L. S. Greenberg & R. N. Goldman (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of emotion-focused therapy* (pp. 425–444). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000112-019>
- Martin, D. (2015). *Counseling skills and therapy* (2nd ed.). Brooks/Cole.
- Paivio, S. C. (2014). *Emotion-focused therapy for trauma* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Pascual-Leone, A. (2009). Dynamic emotional processing in experiential therapy: Why the only way out is through. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77(1), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014488>
- Pascual-Leone, A., & Greenberg, L. S. (2007). Emotional processing in experiential therapy: Why "the only way out is through." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75(6), 875–887. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.75.6.875>
- Rice, L. N. (1974). The evocative function of the therapist. In L. N. Rice & D. A. Wexler (Eds.), *Innovations in client-centered therapy* (pp. 289–311). John Wiley & Sons.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95–103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357>
- Rogers, C. R. (1975). Empathic: An unappreciated way of being. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 5(2), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001100007500500202>
- Timulak, L. (2020). *Generating self-compassion in emotion-focused therapy* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Watson, J. C. (2013). *Emotion-focused therapy in practice: Working with grief and abandonment* [Video]. American Psychological Association.
- Watson, J. C., Goldman, R. N., & Vanaerschot, G. (1997). Empathic: A post-modern way of being. In L. S. Greenberg, J. C. Watson, & G. Lietaer (Eds.), *Handbook of experiential psychotherapy*. Guilford Press.
- Watson, J. C., Gordon, L. B., Stermac, L., Kalogerakos, F., & Steckley, P. (2003). Comparing the effectiveness of process-experiential with cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy in the treatment of depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71(4), 773–781. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.71.4.773>
- Watson, J. C., & Greenberg, L. S. (2000). Alliance ruptures and repairs in experiential therapy. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(2), 175–186. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-4679\(200002\)56:2<175::AID-JCLP4>3.0.CO;2-5](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(200002)56:2<175::AID-JCLP4>3.0.CO;2-5)

Optional Reading

- Greenberg, L. S. (2015). *Emotion-focused therapy: Coaching clients to work through their feelings*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14692-000>
- Greenberg, L. S., & Goldman, R. N. (2008). *Emotion-focused couples therapy: The dynamics of emotion, love, and power*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11750-000>
- Greenberg, L. S., & Paivio, S. (1997). *Working with the emotions*. Guilford Press.

- Greenberg, L. S., & Tomescu, L. (2017). *Supervision essentials for emotion-focused therapy*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/15966-000>
- Greenberg, L. S., & Watson, J. C. (2006). *Emotion-focused therapy for depression*. Guilford Press. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11286-000>
- Greenberg, L. S., Watson, J. C., & Lietaer, G. (Eds.). (1998). *Handbook of experiential psychotherapy*. Guilford Press.
- Paivio, S. C., & Pascual-Leone, A. (2010). *Emotion-focused therapy for complex trauma*. American Psychological Association.
- Timulak, L., & McElvaney, J. (2018). *Transforming generalized anxiety: An emotion-focused approach*. Routledge.
- Watson, J. C., Goldman, R. N., & Greenberg, L. S. (2007). *Case studies in emotion-focused treatment of depression*. American Psychological Association.
- Watson, J. C., & Greenberg, L. S. (2017). *Emotion-focused therapy for generalized anxiety disorder*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000018-000>