



## **THE CORRECTIVE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE (CEE) IN COUPLES THERAPY The Fundamental Task of Helping Couples Attach (Aka The Dan Wile Intervention)**

**Purpose:** To facilitate attachment by helping couples heal past wounds.

**Rationale:** In order for couples therapy to be effective there needs to be a significant amount of *healing intensity* which allows for couples to move beyond their resentment and contempt. Only through this experience can they realize they are a team. *The common factor in all CEE's is the act of looking into each other's eyes and realizing:*

- You really understand my point of view (Empathy);
- You really care about my point of view (Love); and
- In the case of a betrayal – you are deeply committed to never doing the same thing again (Commitment & Trust).

**The Dan Wile Intervention is the most powerful way of producing a Corrective Emotional Experience. It consists of 3 stages:**

**Stage 1 – Understand and strongly validate each partner's point of view and infuse hope (Individual).**

In order for this intervention to work:

- Each partner must feel like you really get their perspective. You need to overvalidate. The goal is to have them feel like their perspective makes absolute sense. "You get me."
- Empathize and validate.
- Instill Hope – "this can be different and you can do this." Many times people feel like they have gone through this process and done everything. Make sure to set them straight that the way you do it is different.

**Stage 2 – Help each partner know their core task in repairing.** You can do this by modeling what you want them to say to their partner (individual). :

- **Each partner must be internally coming from a place of softness and care. Their internal state is more important than anything else. Modeling the affect and what you want them to say is the best way of facilitating this.**
- **For the Hurt Party (HP) – the core tasks of Stage 2 are:**
  - **Lay down your weapon** "You can keep expressing anger at him, but that's not going to get you what you want. What I want him to do is really care about your point of view and then never hurt you like that again."
  - **Express the attachment fear and pain to your partner** (this is the soft underside) "When you cheated on me my heart broke, because I thought I was the only one for you. I thought we were going to be together for the rest of our lives and I felt so special to you. And now I'm terrified I'm going to lose my family."  
(SOFTLY)

- **For the Offending Party (OP) – the core tasks of Stage 2 are:**
  - **Lay down your weapon.** *Move beyond the defensiveness.* “I get why you are so defensive, and sometimes it sounds like you’re thinking this whole thing makes you a bad guy. That’s not the case. You didn’t do anything wrong. You’re not the bad guy. Your partner got hurt, that happens in relationships. I really want your partner to move beyond this and if you continue defending yourself the way you are – she’s never going to let this go.”
  - **Understand and care about their partner.** “The only way your partner is going to be able to move beyond this is if they feel like you A) Understand where they are coming from, B) really care about it, and C) really believe you aren’t going to do it again.”
    - Work on getting them to the spot of caring by saying things like “she’s the woman you love. You didn’t do anything wrong, you’re not a bad person, but she really needed you and you were there. She needs to know that you’re going to be there next time. You love her – you want to be there. You can do this.
    - If your client struggles with moving into caring, concretely help them move into caring by having them think about a loved one and experience the caring. Practice this in session.
  - **Apologize for your part and reassure your partner about your commitment.** “I’m really sorry I hurt you. I guess I didn’t understand how much pain my actions caused. “I’m here.” “I’m not going anywhere.” “You’re the one I want to be with.” “You are my world, I promise to be there for you.” “I promise to do everything I can to make sure that it doesn’t happen again. Here’s the steps I’m thinking will help...”

**Stage 3 – Create the Corrective Emotional Experience through having each party use the core tasks noted above.** Have the Hurt Party (HP) softly explain their injury to the Offending Party while the Offending Party (OP) listens, understands, and cares for the HP. Use Daniel Wile if necessary (Conjoint)

- *Introduce the structure* by saying something like “In just a second I’m going to have Sarah talk with Mark about the issue we’ve discussed. It’s really important to me this conversation goes well because I really care about both of you. So, to insure it goes well, would it be ok if there’s a point I want to make, that I’ll crouch down by you and speak to your partner – as if I were you?”
- *Have the HP explain the injury from a soft place.* If the HP goes off track do Dan Wile. **Remember that you are going for emotion. Take your language to the next level and use attachment terms (e.g. heartbroken, terrified)**
- *Have the OP validate and express care.* If the OP goes off track do Dan Wile.
- **Ideally – the HP will break down and the OP will just hold them for as long as need be.**