

STAGE 2 KEY CHANGE EVENTS

Withdraw-Reengagement & Pursuer-Softening Clinical Roadmap



North Carolina Community for
Emotionally Focused Therapy (NCCEFT)

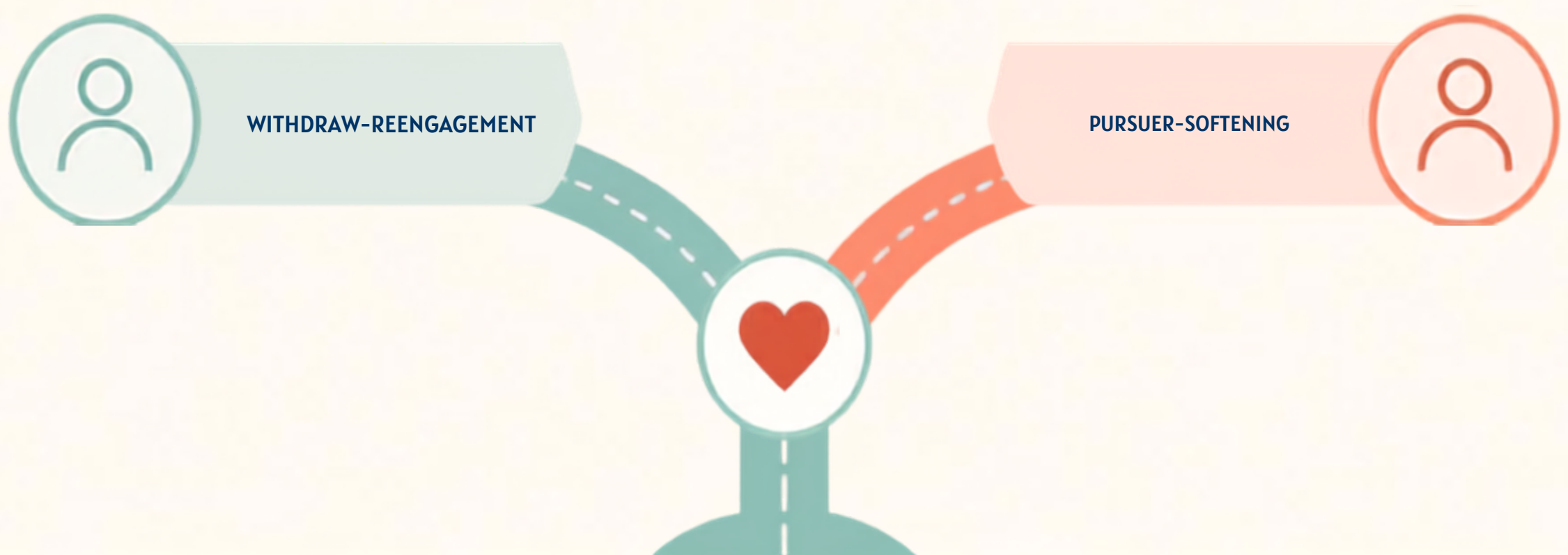


Based on the Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFCT) model
developed by Dr. Sue Johnson



CLINICAL OVERVIEW

Stage 2 of EFCT represents the heart of structural bonding change. Once the negative cycle is de-escalated (Stage I), the therapist guides the couple through two pivotal change events: Withdraw Reengagement and Pursuer-Softening. These shifts rewrite working models of self and other, establishing accessible, responsive, and engaged attachment bonding.





1ST CHANGE EVENT WITHDRAWER-REENGAGEMENT



Primary Goal: The traditionally protective, avoiding, or withdrawing partner steps out of hiding, accesses deep feelings of inadequacy or fear, and actively re-engages with their partner from a vulnerable stance.



The 6 Step Clinical Sequence



Accessing Soft Emotion: Therapist helps the withdrawer touch core primary feelings (shame, failure, fear of rejection) that previously triggered shutdown.



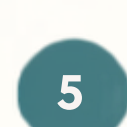
Owning the Defensive Stance: The withdrawer recognizes and takes responsibility for how their withdrawal impacted their partner 'I pulled away and left you alone').



Structuring the Enactment: The withdrawer expresses their primary fear and emerging attachment need directly to the pursuer 'I want to be close, but I get so afraid I'll fail you').



Processing the Impact: The pursuer hears and processes this new, engaged stance—often experiencing initial shock or hesitation.



Holding the Position: The withdrawer stays present and engaged even if the pursuer tests or doubts the change.



Establishing the New Baseline: The withdrawer claims a present, active place in the relationship.

Withdrawer Reengagement Prompts



"Can you look at her right now and say: 'I've been hiding because I felt like a failure, but I don't want to hide from you anymore?'"



"Tell him: 'I am here. I want to stand with you, even when it feels scary.'"



Prerequisite Note: Pursuer-Softening can only occur after the withdrawing partner has successfully re-engaged and demonstrated the capacity to remain accessible and responsive.



2ND CHANGE EVENT PURSUER-SOFTENING



Goal: The traditionally anxious, critical, or pursuing partner reaches a place of emotional safety where they can drop their protective armor, own their core attachment fears, and risk asking for their needs to be met from a soft, non-critical stance.



1 Dismantling Secondary Armor: The pursuer acknowledges how their anger, hyper vigilance, or criticism functioned as a shield against abandonment.



2 Touching Core Vulnerability: The pursuer accesses deep attachment fears (grief, helplessness, fear of unworthiness).



3 Expressing Vulnerable Need: The pursuer turns to the newly re-engaged partner and makes a direct, soft request for connection ('I need to know I matter to you and that you won't leave me alone in the dark').



4 The Bonding Response: The re-engaged partner receives the vulnerability with warmth, validation, and comfort.



5 Physical & Emotional Attunement: Both partners experience a felt sense of mutual accessibility and responsiveness (the bonding event).



6 Anchoring the Event: The therapist anchors the emotional shift, marking the creation of a new secure base.

Pursuer-Softening Phrasing Prompts



Can you put down the prosecutor's briefcase for just a moment, look into his eyes, and tell him: 'I'm not angry right now... I'm just scared of losing you?'



Share that quiet place with her: 'I need you to hold me when I feel this small.'



CLINICAL COMPARISON: STAGE 2 CHANGE EVENTS

Clinical Aspect	Withdraw-Reengagement	Pursuer-Softening
Primary Focus	Shift from stonewalling/avoidance to active engagement.	Shift from anger/protest to soft vulnerability.
Underlying Emotion	Inadequacy, shame, paralysis, fear of rejection.	Loneliness, abandonment, fear of unworthiness, grief.
Core Enactment Need	"I want to be seen, accepted, and stand close to you."	"I need to know I am cherished and that you will comfort me."
Common Clinical Block	Slipping back into intellectualizing or rationalizing.	Escalating into old grievances when feeling vulnerable.

TROUBLESHOOTING STAGE 2 BLOCKS



When the Pursuer Rejects the Withdrawer's Re-engagement:

Intervention: Validate the pursuer's self-protection ('It makes sense that your system hesitates—you've been waiting for this for so long, it feels scary to trust it'). Return to Move 1 of the Tango and process the pursuer's hesitation as an attachment block.



When Secondary Anger INTERRUPTS Softening:

Intervention: Catch the spike early. 'Pause right there. Notice how quickly that old spike of anger came in to protect you just as you started to say you felt lonely. Let's stay right on the edge of that loneliness.'