

Building Thriving and Loving Relationships

By John Bullough, PhD, MBACP (co-editor of 'EFT & Beyond')

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Given the necessary attraction and shared values, the partners in a relationship are drawn together by a strong biological drive for intimacy, connection and attachment. However, we humans also have an equally strong drive to be individual and autonomous; to be able to chart our own destiny.

These two biological drives clash head to head in emotionally committed relationships, leading to the potential both for conflict and for huge personal growth. Successfully coping with and benefitting from this 'clash' is what separates a healthy relationship from a struggling one. In fact viewed from this perspective, healthy relationships can be seen to be 'people growing machines'.

Here is my route map for robust relationship health:

Point 1. *Practise trusting in the underlying humanity in everyone*

Point 2. *Practise knowing, accepting and loving yourself as you are now, 'warts' and all*

Point 3. *Practice accepting and loving your partner as he or she is now, 'warts' and all*

These points fit together in a coherent whole. And the word 'practise' is important here. This is an ongoing journey which may present great challenge, particularly in times of stress and conflict.

1. Practise trusting in the underlying humanity in everyone

- Start by noticing any negative beliefs and feelings you may have about yourself (let your emotions be your guide) and tap to become a better 'watcher' of your own inner experience. Make a list of your negative beliefs about yourself. One way to do this could be to imagine yourself in a difficult situation and then describe how you see yourself (e.g. "I'm not good enough" "I'm weak" "I'm unimportant" "I'm unlovable" "I'm inadequate"):

I am: _____

I am not: _____

For tapping suggestions, see **Appendix 2**. Adapt the wording to whatever feels right for you.

- Notice any negative feelings/emotions you may have regarding others (especially your partner) and tap to tune into and trust their underlying humanity. Trust is vital for intimacy.
- Develop a habit of focusing on what you've always loved about your partner. Make a list of

what first attracted you (e.g. her energy/warmth/intelligence; his humour/smile/love):

S/he is: _____

I love: _____

- Make plenty of time for warmth, fun, laughter and spontaneity in your relationship, and to love life for its own sake. Tap to have the courage to do whatever makes your heart sing.

2. Practise knowing, accepting and loving yourself as you are now, 'warts' and all

- Discover your values and talents and what really matters to you. Make a list of both your 'seek' and 'avoid' values: (e.g. I seek: love, friendship, fun, intimacy, autonomy etc; I avoid: humiliation, embarrassment, failure etc) then put them in order by asking yourself questions such as: *"Which is more important, love or friendship?"* and *"Which is more important, love or fun?"* When you've found your top value, move on to find your second one, and so on. Be honest with yourself, and write what you really feel rather than what you 'should' feel:

My seek values: _____

My avoid values: _____

- Tap to develop the courage to be honest with yourself and your partner
- Start to notice things you are doing to avoid intimacy or things you do to make up for what's missing in your relationship (such as staying long hours at the office, going out a lot with the boys/girls, drinking a lot of alcohol, watching a lot of television, having affairs). Make a list:

Experiment by doing less of these things and tap for any anger or anxiety that comes up. As you do this, ask yourself: *“What am I trying to avoid in my relationship?”* and *“What am I missing?”* Tap to develop the courage to be open about these things with your partner.

- Become aware of the things that people (especially your partner) do or don't do to trigger you, and tap to find more peaceful ways of coping. Our own reactions are always about us; they're always an 'inside job'. Make a list; if you're not sure what to write, ask your partner!

I react strongly when: _____

For tapping suggestions, see **Appendix 2**. Adapt the wording to whatever feels right for you.

- Take nothing personally. Tap to accept that nothing others do is because of you, and that what they say and do is always a projection of their own reality; their own dream.
- Tap to soothe your own anxiety rather than relying on your partner to do it for you. This is the most loving thing you can do for your partner because it sets your partner free.
- Tap to accept that given your genetic inheritance and life experience, by definition you are always doing the best you can. And this applies to all of us; no exceptions.

3. Practice accepting and loving your partner exactly as he or she is now, 'warts' and all

- Tap to develop the courage to be true to yourself and your values (as above) while you're being intimate with your partner. This is essential in order that the relationship can be an engine for your personal growth. Tap to preserve your autonomy without sacrificing intimacy when your partner tries to get you to conform to his or her wishes. Tap to accept 100% responsibility for your own life choices rather than succumbing to being a victim.
- Don't make assumptions about what your partner may be thinking and feeling. Tap to develop the courage to ask.
- Learn to listen and to communicate your needs and wishes clearly to your partner. Practise the 'Couples Dialogue' (mirroring, validating and empathising, as defined by Harville Hendrix in 'Getting the Love You Want'). Tap to develop the courage to do this.
- Learn to inhibit any strongly negative reactions to your partner, perhaps making use of humour if this comes naturally to you. Make a list of what you dislike about your partner's behaviour and tap to move towards acceptance of the differences between you:

My partner should: _____

My partner should not: _____

For tapping suggestions, see **Appendix 2**. Adapt the wording to suit your own situation.

- Learn to inhibit any tendency to blame or put down your partner (this is the biggest single underminer of any relationship), and tap to accept that s/he is always doing his/her best.
- Tap to allow constructive conflict whenever it becomes necessary or appropriate (this is another important engine of personal growth within the relationship), and tap to develop the courage to be able to do this and to speak up constructively for yourself as required.
- Don't ever try to change your partner! Tap to accept your partner exactly as s/he is.
- Do loving things for your partner, and it will feel good doing them. But don't keep the score!
- Tap to have the courage to allow space in your relationship so that you can each pursue your own individual life journey while at the same time also journeying together.
- Finally, I recommend you make yourself aware of any need to be 'right', and tap to become an excellent listener, making it possible for your partner to feel safe to speak his or her mind.

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John is an Integrative Counsellor/ Psychotherapist, practising at a doctor's surgery and in his own private practice in Essex (UK) and also worldwide via the telephone and Skype.

He specialises in helping people to build thriving and loving relationships with themselves and others, and along the way recover from the effects of life stresses and trauma, particularly conditions such as PTSD, phobia, panic, OCD, addiction, generalised anxiety and depression. Tapping therapy is his preferred approach, into which he integrates cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), hypnotherapy and various other modalities.

In 2009, he co-edited (with Pamela Bruner) a groundbreaking book on tapping techniques and tapping therapy entitled 'EFT & Beyond – Cutting Edge Techniques for Personal Transformation', and in October of that year he gave a plenary presentation to the 2009 EFT Masterclass in UK on the subject of '***What really works in tapping therapy***'. In 2010, he took part in the Tapping World Summit on the subject of '***Building Thriving and Loving Relationships***'.

For more information, go to: www.JohnBullough.com

Appendix 1 - FAQ

What do you mean by the ‘underlying humanity’ in everyone? This is the part of each of us (innocent, unconditionally loving, intuitively understanding, serene) that lies beneath all our painful beliefs about ourselves, others and the world, and beneath the strategies we’ve developed to help us to cope and stay safe (e.g. strategies like being a people pleaser, perfectionist, fixer or healer)

Why so much focus on self? Because you can only love or care for another to the extent that you love or care for yourself. This is a theme that runs through all spiritual teachings (e.g. *“Love thy neighbour as thyself”* Mark 12:31)

Should my partner and I go to see a couple’s therapist? I would always recommend that couples consult a professional if they are not able to resolve their difficulties on their own. These notes are designed to help those who are not yet ready or willing to consult a professional or who do not feel they need to do so.

What if my partner doesn’t want to work on the relationship? In my experience, by doing the above, you will change and your partner will have no choice but to be affected by that. More to the point, you will become much more aware of how important the relationship may be in your life.

What if my partner and I are locked in a power struggle over major issues such as money, children, sex, time management, travel, socialising, commitment, in-laws, distribution of tasks etc?

Shouldn’t we address these specific issues first? In my experience, if the partners put their focus on the three practices above, the power struggle will gradually resolve itself through mutual love and acceptance, and through growing respect for each other’s differences and needs.

You don’t say very much about communication skills. Aren’t they important? In my experience, people automatically become better at communicating clearly when they carry out the steps described above. And there is only limited value in learning to be an eloquent communicator if you or your partner don’t yet have the capacity to ‘stand the message’. Having said that, I see great value in learning to become a better listener, and in practising the Couples Dialogue referred to in the text, and in developing the courage to express your wishes and needs clearly within the relationship.

What if there’s abuse? Aren’t you setting up people who have an abusive partner to put up with that abuse, to the detriment of their health and wellbeing? By following the above practices, the abused partner becomes much more consciously aware of the abuse and is thereby likely to be in a better position to make an informed decision about whether to stay in the relationship.

What about serial failed relationships? (e.g. *“I keep ending up with abusive guys”*) The above three practices are the best way I know of learning to break out of such a pattern.

What if my partner lets me down (e.g. has an affair)? Again, by doing the above, you’ll be in a much stronger position to make an informed decision about whether to stay in the relationship, and whether there is enough in the relationship to be worth preserving.

Where can I find out more about the processes you’ve mentioned here? For more information, please visit: www.JohnBullough.com or www.intuitive-connections.co.uk.

Appendix 2 - Tapping Routines

Explanatory Notes:

1. Please carefully read the Disclaimer in the main section of these notes. Everything in these notes is conditional on the reader's full acceptance of the wording and intent of the Disclaimer.
2. Always work with a trained professional if you feel you may get into deeper emotions with this work. Many tapping professionals are happy to work by telephone as well as face to face.
3. If the words don't resonate with you, change them to suit your own thoughts and feelings. Be as specific as you can. Look out for aspects and tap on them one by one until the emotion subsides.
4. **Setup:** Tap on the karate chop point or rub the sore spot while saying the Setup phrases out loud to yourself (ET = Even though...)
5. **Reminder phrases:** Then say the reminder phrases out loud, one for each point while tapping in sequence on the eyebrow, side of eye, under eye, under nose, chin, collar bone, under arm and top of head points (or whichever sequence you may prefer)
6. If any of the tapping triggers something deeper or more painful, just keep tapping persistently and without words on whichever point(s) feels right until the emotion subsides. I find the 'gamut point' (back of hand in the 'V' between little finger and ring finger) often works well for this.
7. The tapping suggestions below follow a common pattern as follows:
 - a. Run through the negatives in your own words, making sure to cover areas of possible reversal such as safety, identity, deserving, possibility and plain unwillingness to change. You may also wish to explore further by tapping on all possible 'upsides' of keeping the current behaviour (and all possible downsides of letting it go). You can do this for as many rounds as feels necessary.
 - b. Then introduce some doubt in the negatives using expressions like 'what if', and follow up with more tapping on whatever comes up.
 - c. Finish with the Choices Trio (as described by Patricia Carrington in 'EFT & Beyond' and on her website), making sure to finish on a positive.

1. Tap to tune into your own underlying humanity

(Please read 'Explanatory Notes' above first)

Setup

ET it doesn't feel safe to let myself believe in my inner goodness, because (..... fill in the blank – e.g. I'll only let myself down if I do), I accept myself and how I feel anyway

ET I don't deserve to see myself in that light, at least I know how I feel

ET it doesn't feel safe to let go of some of my less helpful ways of coping and just be the person I really am deep down, I'm open to the possibility that it may be ok one day

ET it's hard to imagine and believe in all that love and intuitive understanding inside me, I do at least accept that it may be in there somewhere, very deeply buried (is that true?)

ET I've never seen any evidence of it (is that true?), I deeply and completely accept that I am as I am

ET all I usually see is what's on the surface, and I'm not sure I'd recognise the me that people say is in there underneath, I'm open to the possibility that 'I' may be in there somewhere...

Reminder phrases: I know what I look like in photographs and in the mirror. And I have an idea of how others see me. But it's hard to look deep inside. Hard to get below all the layers. And look right into my heart. I'm not sure I'm ready for that. I'm not sure I'm ready to be seen that clearly. Even by me!

Setup

ET I find it hard to contact the love deep inside me, what if it's really there and I just need to know how to look?

ET I'm more used to recognising my faults than contacting the love inside me, what if I'm trying too hard?

ET trust isn't something that comes easily to me, because (..... fill in the blank – e.g. my parents weren't trusting), what if I've had the ability all along but haven't known how to use it?

ET it feels difficult to let go and just be, what if I just let go now and see what happens?

Reminder phrases: No I can't do that! I need to be in control. It's not safe. But what if I really do have an inner guide? No, that's for other people, good people, better people. But what if it's really there, deep inside me, waiting to be awoken? That would be nice. That would be very nice!

Setup

ET it's been difficult for me to trust in my underlying goodness, I choose to trust in it now

ET I've always been more conscious of what is in my head than what is in my heart, I choose to tune into my heart now

ET I've become very good at focusing on my faults and trying to keep myself safe, from now on I choose the safety of giving love to those dear to me

Reminder phrases -round 1: Out of touch with my humanity. Difficult to trust it. Hard to let go. Much easier to focus on my faults. Not safe to let go. I don't deserve to think this way. it's not me. I wouldn't recognise myself.

Reminder phrases -round 2: I choose to trust myself anyway. I choose to let go and just be. I choose to believe in the goodness inside me. I choose to live by it. I choose to be it. I choose my humanity. I choose peace. I... choose... peace...

Reminder phrases -round 3: Out of touch with myself. And I choose to trust my humanity anyway. Not deserving. And I choose to believe in myself anyway. Not safe to change. And I choose to change anyway. Not safe to give my love. And I choose to give my love anyway!

2. Tap to notice and release your own issues, triggers and limiting beliefs

(Please read 'Explanatory Notes' above first)

Setup

ET I felt terrible when he said that to me just now, I deeply and completely accept myself anyway

ET it felt like a knife in my heart, I accept that that is what it felt like,

ET I really feel like reacting and biting back, and apparently I shouldn't do that, the fact is I did feel like that and that's ok!

ET it takes two to fight and only one to stop the fight, I don't want to be the one to stop it yet!

Reminder phrases: How could he have said that? It's appalling! He shouldn't have! But he did! It must mean he doesn't love me. It feels so bad. I feel terrible. I feel all alone.

Setup

ET I have this terrible pain in my heart, what if it's a trigger from long ago?

ET it feels as if he caused it by saying what he did, what if it's nothing to do with him?

ET I'm drawing all sorts of conclusions from what he said, what if this is an old, old response dating back to my early childhood?

ET it feels as if he triggered me, what if I triggered him too, and neither of us is actually involved in this, just one trigger talking to another!

Reminder phrases: No, it was him! But what if it wasn't? No, he caused it! But what if it's just one of my old triggers? It certainly feels familiar. It's not the first time I've felt this way. What if it is an old wound? That would mean it's nothing to do with him at all!

Setup

ET it feels terrible to feel this pain, and it certainly feels as if he did cause it, I choose to remember that it's an old feeling I've felt before; an old pattern I've slipped into many times before

ET it feels like a knife in my heart, I choose to recognise it as an echo of an old trauma from long, long ago; so long ago I can't even remember what it was!

ET it's very hard to bear, I choose to recognise that it's actually nothing to do with him at all!

Reminder phrases -round 1: A knife in my heart; an old. An old feeling. So painful. And something I've felt many times before. An old wound. Dating from when I was too young to defend myself. When I had no choice but to put up with it. But I do have a choice now!

Reminder phrases -round 2: I choose to see it simply as a trigger. I choose to see it as an old wound. I choose to start the process of healing now. I choose to start letting it go. I choose freedom from the past. I choose peace. I choose my true self. I choose peace.

Reminder phrases -round 3: A knife in my heart. And I choose peace. It feels as if he caused it. And I choose to know that it is nothing whatever to do with him. It feels so painful. And I choose to allow it to fade into the past, along with the memory. It's an old, old pain. And I choose to let it go now.

3. Tap to accept and validate partner differences (e.g. concerning money, time management, children, in-laws etc)

(Please read 'Explanatory Notes' above first)

Setup

ET I'd so much love..... (name) to see things my way, the fact is, he doesn't!

ET he's wrong and I'm right! I deeply and completely accept myself and that fact anyway

ET I feel so disappointed in him and so let down, I deeply and completely love and accept myself anyway

ET I'm so angry with him for being so different (and wrong!), he is what he is

ET he never listens to my point of view, at least that's the way it seems to me, I love and accept myself whether I'm listened to or not!

ET he's..... (add relevant description), I deeply and completely love and accept myself anyway

Reminder Phrases: He's wrong! He's completely wrong! He should agree with me. How can he be so dumb? This feeling of disappointment. I feel so angry with him. And so let down. He's just not the same as me at all!

Setup

ET it seems as though he's changed, maybe it's just that I can see it now?

ET he's not the same as me, in a sense that was one of the things that attracted me to him in the first place

ET I'd much prefer him not to be like this, I suppose he has a right to be how he is (even though it's wrong!!!)

ET it very much feels as if I want him to see things my way, what if I'd actually like him less if he did?

ET it's irritating that we are so different on this issue, it's also one of the charms of how we are together

ET it feels as if I'm right and he's wrong, what if we're both right from our own individual perspectives?

Reminder Phrases: So irritating. So different. So wrong! And yet so 'him' at the same time. It's the way he is. I wish he weren't. But he is. And I love him anyway, in spite of it!

Setup

ET I wish we weren't so different on this issue, I choose to know that I'm right and he's wrong, and that's ok!

ET we disagree strongly on this issue, I choose to see it as part of the charm of our relationship

ET I get all boiled up about our difference on this issue, I choose to accept that that's just the way it is, and when I do, I feel distinctly better!

Reminder Phrases – round 1: All boiled up. We're so different. And that's ok. No it's not! Yes it is! Just because we're different, it doesn't make either of us wrong. It's part of our charm. It's how we are.

Reminder Phrases – round 2: I choose to accept that we're just different. After all, I chose him in the first place! I choose to see that we're both right. I choose to see that I'm right in my Universe, and he's right in his! I choose to accept him as he is. It doesn't mean I agree. It just means I accept that he has a right to his way of being. And I love him anyway, no matter what.

Reminder Phrases – round 3: He's so wrong! And I choose to accept him anyway. We see things so differently. And I choose to see that as part of the strength of our relationship. He's so different from me. And I choose to see that we're both right in our own way. We are different. And I choose to love it!