

Book Review

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Johnson, Sue M. (2008). *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. New York: Little & Brown, 300 pp.

Dr. Sue Johnson has finally written the indispensable book for every couple in love. *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, available in text and audio form, brings the lessons of attachment theory and the clinical data of Emotionally Focused Therapy to every relationship, reaching across the bounds of culture, class, and gender. With her engaging and accessible style, Dr. Johnson brings alive the struggles of couple distress and gives insight into creating a stronger emotional connection through academic references, clinical anecdotes, personal stories, and guided conversations. HMT is the book to be on everyone's bedside table as it provides a clear and reachable roadmap to a satisfying and happy love connection.

This book is groundbreaking in the self-help field as it is not only a practical and user-friendly guide to a loving long-term relationship; it is also an introduction to the new science of love and bonding. The path from disconnection and emotional starvation to secure connection outlined in this book is based on over thirty years of research and clinical practice in emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT). In comprehensive studies with a variety of clinical populations, EFT has proven its effectiveness, moving 7 out of 10 couples into recovery from relationship distress. For the first time, the distillation of these findings is now offered by Dr. Johnson to the general consumer. Influenced by the writings of Dr. John Bowlby, Dr. Johnson emphasizes (1) the universal need for a significant attachment from the cradle to the grave and (2) the route to lasting love through emotional accessibility, responsiveness and engagement. It is the profound need for other and the pain of emotional disconnection that then results in automatic reactions of fight, flight or freeze that then shape the negative patterns of relationship distress.

Dr. Johnson introduces the reader to attachment theory in the first three chapters, through a delightful mixture of personal antidotes, scholarly references and case examples. Couples will quickly be able to identify with the stories and will be able to easily make sense of their own personal

struggle with love. Attachment theory validates couples' longing for love and provides compassion for the inevitable negative interactions that evolve between lovers. The second section of the book is divided into seven conversations that guide the couple through a self-help process, stimulating new understanding of their dilemmas and offering exercises to restructure their conversations. The exercises are easily understood and fun to do, inviting the couple on an exciting voyage of discovery. In Conversation 1, Dr. Johnson names three basic patterns that make up the Demon Dialogues of distress and helps the readers to pinpoint the ways they are getting dead-locked with their partners. Conversation 2 helps each partner to begin to explore their raw spots, the vulnerable emotions that fuel the deadly dialogues. Conversation 3 and 4 focus on finding ways out of the painful patterns of disconnection and learning how to reach toward and engage with each other to quell attachment fears and create a safe haven relationship. Conversations 5 and 6 deal with forgiving the injuries that destroy safety and trust and creating the safety for optimal sexual connection, while Conversation 7 helps the couple to develop attachment rituals and a game plan for keeping their love alive. The final section of HMT is devoted to (1) utilizing the teachings of attachment theory to create relationships where partners can heal the wounds of trauma and (2) explaining how attachment and the new science of love applies to the wider context including the family and the community.

This book is a gift to couples everywhere. HMT launches the wisdom of EFT outside the therapy room into the love relationships of people's everyday lives. Marriage and family therapists will find *Hold Me Tight* an essential component of their practice, in that it can prepare a couple and encourage engagement in therapy and is also a comfortable companion and guide for their own clinical work. To date, couples in therapy reading the book have been better able to engage in and respond to the EFT therapeutic experience. HMT could also be utilized as a primer for MFT students as an introduction to Emotionally Focused Therapy and to motivate students toward further training. With humor, warmth, and wisdom, Dr. Johnson stands alongside the reader as she brings clarity and vision to the mystery of love. Her straightforward and down-to-earth style makes the elusive nature of happy committed love relationships both attainable and sustainable. HMT helps partners build strong emotional bonds that provide protection from physical and emotional illness and helps sustain longer, happier lives. Loving partners make loving parents and strong families build a more loving compassionate world. HMT is a universal text with a message that cuts across culture, gender, and class. This is a breakthrough book as it offers an exhilarating look at the possibilities for love relationships in the 21st century.

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