



# **Emotional Intelligence in Couples Therapy: Advances from Neurobiology and the Science of Intimate Relationships (Norton Professional Books)**

*Brent J. Atkinson*

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**Over the past thirty years, groundbreaking studies on the relationships of couples have identified precisely what intimate partners must do in order to have successful partnerships.**

Yet even when they know what would work, partners often find that they are unable to do these things. Why is this?

Provocative new neurological research suggests that old habits die hard for a reason?they may be woven into the fabric of brain states. We are wired for specific kinds of neural activations very early in life and these habitual responses are automatically activated in daily living, often without conscious awareness. Once they are set, these activation patterns (also known as response states) are likely to continue throughout a person's life.

For the most part, we don't volunteer for these response states; we simply find ourselves under their influence. When any one of them is activated, we may lose the capacity to choose freely our thoughts and actions. It's as if, at that moment, someone else is in charge. For these reasons and others, people in relationships may find it extremely difficult if not impossible to change how they respond to their partners. No matter how much partners want to change, their wired response states oppose their intentions.


Part 1 of this book is a tour of the revolutionary discoveries emerging from neurobiology and the science of intimate relationships. Atkinson shows readers the implications of these discoveries for those who seek to change interpersonal habits and improve intimate relationships. These neural operating programs may also help explain why psychotherapies often fail to promote lasting change.

In Part 2 readers will find a remedy for this problem. Atkinson introduces Pragmatic/Experiential Therapy for Couples (PET-C), a step-by-step approach to working with couples that facilitates relationship change by promoting increased levels of neural integration in each partner. In PET-C, partners learn to identify mood states which perpetuate outmoded thoughts, attitudes, and habits of interaction. Once identified, clients are then assisted in the process of "re-wiring" these states for more flexibility and then activating alternate states which support new avenues for thought and action.

Extensive case examples and ample illustrations of therapeutic dialogue demonstrate for readers the ins and outs of implementing PET-C with their clients. This book is supplemented by a companion CD-ROM titled *Developing Habits for Relationship Success*. The CD-ROM has two workbooks?for clients with male partners and clients with female partners?that can be personalized with the client's name and printed out on demand. The workbooks contain dozens of take-home exercises designed to help clients identify troublesome response states and then develop new emotional habits.

The discovery and understanding of the brain's neural operating systems is of huge importance for anyone

who seeks to make sense of troubled relationships and understand why partners often persist in self-defeating interactions. *Emotional Intelligence in Couples Therapy* is essential reading for anyone working with couples and seeking a new way to approach and understand human interactions.

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