

Empathy
unconditional positive
regard and
congruence



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(genuineness) are known as the core conditions in counselling. According to Roger's theory (1959), these conditions help both the client and the therapist. Empathy helps the counsellor to understand the client's feelings. Unconditional positive regard makes the client feel comfortable. When congruence applies to this 'relationship', the client feels that the counsellor is transparent and present. These conditions bring about the psychotherapeutic change in the client and at the same time help the therapist to understand his client in more depth. This constructive personality change leads to an alteration in the personality structure of the client at surface and deeper levels thus leading the latter to cope with situations in a more mature way. The three key conditions are further discussed.

Empathy is defined as the ability to perceive the client's world from the client's point of view (Sutton & Stewart, 2009). This means that the counsellor is able to understand the emotions and experiences of the client and the latter is able to convey this understanding to the client. Empathy is considered to be one of the highest qualities a counsellor can demonstrate. According to Rogers et al. (1967), a counsellor who shows accurate empathy not only indicates a high level of sensitive understanding of the client's feelings but by his way of communicating, the counsellor clarifies and expands the client's awareness of these feelings or experiences. The empathic understanding makes it possible for an individual to get close to himself, to become aware of his most inward feelings and to maintain contact with his inner self-experiences. There are three components in empathy: the cognitive part, which is an intellectual understanding of the

feeling of another, the affective part which involves the sharing of the emotion with the other person and the behavioural part which consists of imagining another person's role. Empathy is also expressed through non-verbal behaviours such as maintaining eye contact and personal space, nodding and proper facial expressions (Sutton & Stewart, 2009).

A client's internal frame of reference refers to his subjective viewpoint. It includes the perceptions, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values, beliefs, assumptions, memories, evaluations and behavioural tendencies of that person. In order for a person to understand another person's frame of reference, the first person should build a bridge of empathy in order to help the other person to communicate, to understand meanings and share understandings. This cannot happen if self-awareness is absent. There must be a constant self-awareness increase in order to become an effective counsellor. Burnard (1997, as cited in Sutton & Stewart, 2009) defines self-awareness as "... the continuous and evolving processes of getting to know who you are." A lack of self-knowledge shows that there are things that are still unknown about one. Increase in self-knowledge enhances the ability to be genuine and empathic.

Empathy helps the counsellor better understand the situation which the client is facing. It allows the therapist to understand the patient's feelings properly thus preventing the counsellor to doubt what the patient means. Therefore the counsellor's remarks fit accordingly to the patient's mood and content. The therapist's voice tone also encourages the client to share his ideas. This condition contributes to make this two way relationship a success. This means that if the client is comfortable to talk, he is able to <https://assignbuster.com/empathy-unconditional-positive-regard-and-congruence/>

convey the important messages. Therefore, it is easier for the counsellor to help the latter to solve his problem as this is the real purpose of counselling.

The urge of positive regard is present in all human being from infancy onwards. Everyone needs love, acceptance, respect and warmth from others, but unfortunately these attitudes and feelings are often given on conditions. When an individual behaves according to the norms of his society, he is respected and accepted in his environment. If you take the case of a notorious thief residing in particular vicinity, the latter is kind of rejected by the persons living in his neighbourhood. The relation between the client and the therapist is different. This relationship provides the client with positive regard without any imposed conditions.

Rogers believed that therapists should express unconditional positive regard (warmth) towards their clients. (Rogers, 1996) This infers that the counsellor must express himself to his client in a deep and natural caring way. It means caring for the client as a separate person, with permission to have his own feelings and experiences. The therapist must accept, instead of evaluating or criticising the client's thoughts, feelings, behaviour and experience. It involves feeling of acceptance for the client's expression of painful, hostile, defensive, or abnormal feelings. Rather than being judgemental, the therapist must put himself in his client's shoes, this will help him think that the client's behaviour is somewhat justified. In order to achieve this, the counsellor must separate his own views to that of the client. This acceptance leads to a relationship which makes the engagement easier. The client thus feels free and shows willingness to share his thoughts and feelings without hesitating.

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Genuineness is felt in everyday life. Each individual can name a person who always seems to be operating behind the facade, who are enacting a role and who tends to express feelings and concerns that they do not feel. These people are here showing incongruence. We tend not to show ourselves too deeply to such people. On the other hand, everyone knows people whom we trust. We feel that they are being what they are in a transparent way. This means that we are dealing with the person himself not with a polite professional facade. This is what being congruent means.

The third quality that Roger believes that counsellor should possess is congruence. This quality makes this relationship a sincere, authentic and an honest one. In relation to therapy, congruence means that the therapist is himself during this meeting. In order to be congruent with clients, the counsellor must try not to appear as if he is acting. He must openly show his feelings and attitudes which at that moment is flowing in him. While being honest and congruent, the counsellor is acting like a model to the client. This encourages the latter to be transparent and honest. Another point that helps the client when referring to congruence is that the clients are prompted by real concern for them which helps to strengthen this relationship.

Empathy can barely exist without a considerable amount of unconditional positive regard. Neither empathy nor unconditional positive regard can exist if it is not genuine (congruence). The order in which the three therapeutic conditions are described has some significance as they are logically intertwined. To sum up, we can say that the core conditions are important to make the client and counsellor relationship strong. Every condition is required to provide a better understanding of each other. The therapist's <https://assignbuster.com/empathy-unconditional-positive-regard-and-congruence/>

congruence in the relationship, processes movement in the client, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding help the client's engagement in the process therapy. All these conditions lead to a constructive personality change in the client over therapy.