



Rogers' person-centred counselling

This activity will help you to...

- Understand the rationale and process of Rogers' Client Centred Therapy
- Assess Rogers' contribution to psychology

Read the following extracts and then have a go at active listening, a technique in Rogers' humanistic approach to therapy.

Excerpts from Rogers, C.R. (1946). *Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy*. *American Psychologist*, 1, 415-422
 Article text obtained from: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Rogers/therapy.htm>

[The] experience which releases the growth forces within the individual will come about in most cases if the following elements are present.

- 1. If the counselor operates on the principle that the individual is basically responsible for himself, and is willing for the individual to keep that responsibility.*
- 2. If the counselor operates on the principle that the client has a strong drive to become mature, socially adjusted, independent, productive, and relies on this force, not on his own powers, for therapeutic change.*
- 3. If the counselor creates a warm and permissive atmosphere in which the individual is free to bring out any attitudes and feelings which he may have, no matter how unconventional, absurd, or contradictory these attitudes may be. The client is as free to withhold expression as he is to give expression to his feelings.*
- 4. If the limits which are set are simple limits set on behavior, and not limits set on attitudes. (This applies mostly to children. The child may not be permitted to break a window or leave the room, but he is free to feel like breaking a window, and the feeling is fully accepted. The adult client may not be permitted more than an hour for an interview, but there is full acceptance of his desire to claim more time.)*
- 5. If the therapist uses only those procedures and techniques in the interview which convey his deep understanding of the emotionalized attitudes expressed and his acceptance of them. This understanding is perhaps best conveyed by a sensitive reflection and clarification of the client's attitudes. The counselor's acceptance involves neither approval nor disapproval.*

[...] If these conditions are met, then it may be said with assurance that in the great majority of cases the following results will take place.

- 1. The client will express deep and motivating attitudes.*
- 2. The client will explore his own attitudes and reactions more fully than he has previously done and will come to be aware of aspects of his attitudes which he has previously denied.*
- 3. He will arrive at a clearer conscious realization of his motivating attitudes and will accept himself more completely. This realization and this acceptance will include attitudes previously denied. He may or may not verbalize this clearer conscious understanding of himself and his behavior.*
- 4. In the light of his clearer perception of himself he will choose, on his own initiative and on his own responsibility, new goals which are more satisfying than his maladjusted goals.*
- 5. He will choose to behave in a different fashion in order to reach these goals, and this new behavior will be in the direction of greater psychological growth and maturity.*

[...] A distinctive feature of this type of therapy is the character of the relationship between therapist and client. Unlike other therapies in which the skills of the therapist are to be exercised upon the

client. in this approach the skills of the therapist are focussed upon creating a psychological atmosphere in which the client can work. If the counselor can create a relationship permeated by warmth, understanding, safety from any type of attack, no matter how trivial, and basic acceptance of the person as he is, then the client will drop his natural defensiveness and use the situation. As we have puzzled over the characteristics of a successful therapeutic relationship, we have come to feel that the sense of communication is very important. If the client feels that he is actually communicating his present attitudes, superficial, confused, or conflicted as they may be, and that his communication is understood rather than evaluated in any way, then he is freed to communicate more deeply. A relationship in which the client thus feels that he is communicating is almost certain to be fruitful.

[...] Client-centered counseling, if it is to be effective, cannot be a trick or a tool. It is not a subtle way of guiding the client while pretending to let him guide himself. To be effective, it must be genuine. It is this sensitive and sincere "client-centeredness" in the therapeutic relationship that I regard as the third characteristic of nondirective therapy which sets it distinctively apart from other approaches.

Develop your active listening skills

Rogarian Client Centred Therapy (CCT) is **non-directive**. Unlike most other therapies it does not involve the therapist telling the client what to do or think. As the above extracts suggest, it is more to do with creating a relationship that allows the client to solve their own problems. An important part of this is that the client feels as if they are listened to and understood. **Active listening** is an important skill in CCT.

Work in pairs. Choose one person to be the counsellor and one to be the client. The client should choose a topic to talk about that is important to them. The counsellor should listen to them. This is harder than it sounds – much of the time when we say we are listening we are distracted or attending to other things. We also have a tendency to impose our own interpretations on what others say, something a Rogerian counsellor must avoid at all costs.

The counsellor should...

- Adopt a posture and position that conveys openness (you might want to move your chairs about).
- Maintain a receptive facial expression and use appropriate eye contact.
- Avoid acting in distracting ways – fidgeting, looking at your watch etc.
- Keep your mind on what the client is saying – make sure you really understand what they mean.
- Ask questions that will get the client to elaborate – but not questions that lead them to particular answers.
- Ask open question rather than closed ones.
- Use signals (e.g. nods, saying 'yes' etc.) that encourage the client to say more – but keep it natural.

After five or ten minutes, swap over so that the counsellor becomes the client and vice versa. Then, ask yourselves the following questions and spend a few minutes discussing the answers:

- When you were the client, did you really feel as if the counsellor was listening to you? What made you feel this way? Did the counsellor do anything that detracted from your feeling of being listened to?
- When you were the counsellor, how easy was it to maintain your attention on what the client was saying? What things helped or hindered this process?

To help you assess Rogers' contribution to psychology...

For what sorts of problems has client centred therapy been used? What evidence is there for its effectiveness? Use a textbook or other source to make a few short notes on this issue.