



# RELATIONAL DEPTH IN COUNSELLING

Relational depth in counselling is a term used to explain the deep connection between counsellor and client that can be present within a therapeutic relationship. Working at relational depth can really help clients to move forward within the process of change and growth.

## ***Within this article you will:***

- Define relational depth in counselling.
- Explore the value of working with relational depth in counselling and psychotherapy
- Discuss how relational depth can be achieved
- Explore personal development with regard to relational depth

## What is relational depth in counselling?

Relational depth in counselling developed through the work of Mearns and Cooper. Mearns first wrote about the intense moments of contact between clients and therapists in 1996 and used the term 'relational depth' to describe these.

A useful definition can be found here:

<https://mick-cooper.squarespace.com/new-blog/2017/10/10/relational-depth-some-frequently-asked-questions>

## The value of working with relational depth in counselling and psychotherapy

Relational depth can be found in [Rogers' key ideas and theories](#) where he discusses the relationship between counsellor and client being of key importance within the therapeutic alliance.

Mearns and Cooper discuss relational depth in counselling as a profound connectedness that can enable clients to enter into edge of awareness discoveries, with the therapist being involved in clients' innermost thoughts and feelings.

Relational depth can invite clients to access their [existential selves](#), without the 'masks/armour' that they may present to the rest of the world.

### How can working with relational depth in counselling help us?

Relational depth in counselling and psychotherapy involves such a deep connection, where the client can feel able to access every part of themselves in a safe, nurturing environment. This aligns with [Rogers' six necessary and sufficient conditions](#). Clients can feel wholly and completely accepted by 'another', paving the way for them to be able to accept themselves.

### What has research into relational depth shown?

Research undertaken, notably by Cooper, Knox, McMillan, Mcleod and Wiggins indicates that relational depth in counselling has enabled clients to feel a more authentic connection to themselves and to others around them.

Clients often describe 'pivotal moments' within the therapeutic relationship occurring as a result of relational depth, which empowers and enables therapeutic growth and change.

### When does relational depth occur?

Relational depth cannot be 'planned out' and is not a 'strategy', rather, something that occurs between individuals as an organic experience. It occurs moment to moment, within the here and now.

Relational depth is likely to be experienced in moments/enduring moments, rather than full sessions spent working in this way.

## How can relational depth be achieved?

Personal development for counsellors is essential in order for relational depth to occur.

Counsellors must be comfortable and accepting of all parts of themselves, in order to be accepting of all parts of another. The importance of personal development (indeed in all areas of counselling) cannot be underestimated here

## Key aspects of relational depth in counselling and psychotherapy

*Evidence has shown that relational depth has been achieved and experienced by clients when therapists are:*

- Warm
- Personal
- Genuine
- Human

*Relational depth may not be reached when therapists are:*

- Asserting control over clients.
- Meeting their own needs within the process.
- Have pre-existing hopes for the client.
- Attempts to 'fix' the client.
- Focuses on theory and skills rather than present moment experiencing.
- Spends time attempting to formulate responses/suggestions to problems.

## References

Sanders et al (2012) *The Tribes of the Person-Centred Nation*. Ross-On-Wye, PCCS Books.