



THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP IN COUNSELLING

The therapeutic relationship in counselling is how counsellors and clients connect with one another and build their relationship together. The importance of therapeutic relationships cannot be overlooked; it forms the basis of the work.

In this article you will:

- Define the therapeutic relationship in counselling.
- Explore therapeutic relationship importance in counselling.
- Highlight client/therapist relationship details.
- Discuss barriers to therapeutic relationships in counselling and psychotherapy.

Defining therapeutic relationship in counselling

The client/therapist relationship has been widely researched. Evidence has shown that it forms the basis of success within counselling and psychotherapy.

[Here is a useful definition of therapeutic relationship.](#)

Therapeutic relationship importance in counselling

The therapeutic relationship in counselling and psychotherapy begins from the moment the counsellor and client meet. Upon first meeting, both people show who and how they are and are able to form an impression of 'the other'.

Forming a solid counsellor/therapist relationship can empower clients to delve deeper into the issues they may be facing and 'open up' emotionally to the counsellor.

Why so important?

For some clients, this may be the first time that they have ever shared their innermost thoughts and experiences with another, outside of their immediate family/friends. Indeed, it may be the first time they have shared anything about themselves at all.

Therapeutic relationships in counselling and psychotherapy are places where individuals can express themselves honestly and openly, without any immediate attachment or fear of judgement/rejection. The client/therapist relationship is often different to any other, based on this.

How to build a client/therapist relationship

Evidence has shown that the therapeutic relationship in counselling is established and maintained through a shared feeling of:

- Trust
- Respect
- Genuine care
- Honesty

These key points can be linked directly to Rogers' core/six necessary and sufficient conditions.

Being a real and genuine person within a therapeutic relationship in counselling can further enable work at relational depth. Without a therapeutic relationship in counselling and psychotherapy, there would be no basis for work to take place. It is vitally important in ensuring needs are met from the onset.

Barriers to therapeutic relationships

Barriers can occur within a therapeutic relationship in counselling. These may include:

- Counsellor not offering the core conditions.
- Client not feeling in receipt of the core conditions.

- Counsellor/client relationship having poor/no boundaries (overtly friendly, sexual advances, unprofessional etc).
- Language barriers
- Lack of psychological contact due to substance use etc.
- Previous trauma/attachment issues.

External barriers to therapeutic relationships

Relationships outside of the therapy room, may impact upon the therapeutic relationship in counselling. Transference and countertransference can play a significant part here.

Example:

A client forms a relationship with a counsellor who looks/speaks/acts similarly to a teacher they once had at school that caused them much distress.

As a result, they may react within this counselling relationship as if they were once again that pupil at school, interacting with that teacher.

This could impact the therapeutic relationship. It is important for counsellors to recognise transference and work with it openly with clients. A useful place for counsellors to work through issues relating to their own transference is in supervision.

The therapeutic relationship in counselling and psychotherapy is fundamentally important to the holistic process. It can enable confidence, reassurance, openness and honesty, paving the way for clients to accept themselves for who they are. It also ensures ethical, legal and professional processes are being adhered to.

References

Barrett-Lennard, G. (1998) Carl Rogers' Helping System Journey and Substance. London: SAGE publications.

Feltham et al (2017) The SAGE Handbook of Counselling and Psychotherapy (4th Ed). London: SAGE publications.