

Carl Rogers' Conditions of Therapy

Carl Rogers proposed six necessary and sufficient conditions for constructive personality change to occur in therapy. Necessary means that each condition must be present for personality change to occur. Sufficient means that these six conditions alone are enough to produce therapeutic change with no additional techniques or interventions required. These conditions are: psychological contact, client incongruence, therapist congruence, unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding and client reception. Of these six conditions, Rogers emphasised three core conditions of congruence, empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard for healing and growth to occur in therapy.

The Six Conditions

1. Psychological Contact

‘Two persons are in psychological contact.’

Both individuals are aware of and engaged with each other.

There is a meaningful psychological relationship between the therapist and the client.

The therapist discerns the client’s cognitive preferences.¹

The therapist meets each client in their unique way of processing.

2. Client Incongruence

‘The first, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.’

The client is experiencing psychological distress.

There is a mismatch between the client’s self-concept and their actual experiences.

The client distorts and denies their experiences to protect their core beliefs.

3. Therapist Congruence

‘The second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship.’

The therapist is authentic, genuine and transparent within the therapeutic relationship.

They are not hiding behind a professional façade.

The therapist has a higher degree of psychological integration than the client.

The therapist has a lower degree of dissociation than the client.

4. Unconditional Positive Regard

‘The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client.’

The therapist accepts and values the client without judgment or conditions.

This does not mean the therapist condones harmful or negative behaviours.

The therapist acknowledges the client’s intrinsic value and can separate this from their actions.

5. Empathic Understanding

‘The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate this experience to the client.’

The therapist understands the client from within their frame of reference and communicates this understanding to the client.

¹ In Carl Jung’s theory of Psychological Types, people generally have a dominant cognitive preference of thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition.

The therapist doesn't interpret, judge or discern for the client what is meaningful.
The therapist strives to understand the client from the client's perspective and communicate their understanding to the client.

6. Client Reception

'The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved.'

It is not enough for the therapist to be empathic and accepting, the client must experience empathy and acceptance.

The client receives the therapist's empathy and unconditional positive regard.

The client feels received: heard, validated and understood by the therapist.

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