

**University of Wales
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The Therapeutic Process.

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Portfolio (4 pieces)

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Client contract and boundary positioning.

The theoretical approach that this portfolio is going to be referring to for the four sections is the person-centred approach. This approach was developed by an American psychologist Carl Rogers in the 1950s this approach is about the client being the expert, as stated by Rogers "It is the client who knows what hurts and where the pain lies and it is the client who, in the final analysis will discover the way forward" (Mearns et al, 2013). Rogers believed that by putting the client at the centre of the counselling and from the counsellor using the correct conditions they will self-actualisation from this theory however by this occurring the counsellor will have to use the conditions which he believed were the 3 core conditions, these are unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathic understanding. By using this theory and putting the client as they expect rather than the counsellor it gives the client the tools to discover for themselves their feelings, emotions and behaviours, it leads them to self actualise and gain a greater knowledge of their self-awareness.

The techniques used during the person entered approach including the 3 core conditions include active listening this is very important for any counsellor as by actively listening to this allows the counsellor to be in the here and now with the client. Some skills that the counsellor will use to show that they are actively listening to the client is by using minimum encouragers, paraphrasing back to the client as this makes the client feel heard as the counsellor was listening to them as they echoed back what they said, the body language having an open body and eye contact as they show that they are listening and engaged in what the client is saying, the tone of voice also helps and open-ended questions, this gives the client a minute to think about what they said and it also puts the client in the driver seat another skill that is used by the counsellor is to be non- directive as this allows the client to be the expert and decide what way they want the sessions and behaviour to go.

In every counselling approach boundaries and the use of a contract is so important, having boundaries in place ensures that the counsellors and client are both safe, if there were to be no boundaries in the therapeutic relationship then lines could be crossed and as some clients are already quite vulnerable when coming for counselling if they crossed the line this could hinder their

therapeutic development. In person-centred counselling there must be boundaries put in place from the very start of therapy, as with this approach because it is so involved with the client as in using active listening, using open-ended questions, paraphrasing and empathy by using these skills some clients may see this as a friendship instead of a therapeutic relationship. However, in person-centred therapy, the boundaries are less strict the reason for this is stated by Rogers:

“The lack of fixed boundaries in person-centred counselling is seen as realistic and compassionate, demystifying the process of two human beings working together on one person's view of the world and his or her way of being in it” (Rogers, 1958)

Rogers always put the client first and at the centre of therapy, the counsellors accept the client as noted by Owen (1997) person-centred counselling is about accepting the clients and knowing that some clients may have issues with boundaries which may make them struggle with accepting the boundaries put in place for them but for the counsellors this just needs to be known and can be worked through together.

To ensure boundaries are set in place this needs to be done by using a contract, every contract is different in different placements but overall they all say the same thing. In my placement which is The Exchange, in the exchange go through the contract with the client during their first session, this should be gone through together ensuring both understand and if the client would like to add anything to it if it is appropriate then this will be done, it is so important that the client feels safe and has a voice as they will be the expert in the counselling room. using this in the exchange word very well as it ensures that the client feels safe and understands what is expected from them and the counsellor this ensures that no boundaries are crossed.

Overview of the therapeutic relationship

The therapeutic relationship in counselling is quite an important factor to have as without this fundamental relationship the counselling process will struggle to blossom and the client will not get all the benefits they can out of the sessions. Every counselling session is different and that comes under several factors but one factor which can affect the therapeutic relationship is the type of approach that the counsellor uses, in this instance it is going to be looking into by using person-centred counselling how this can affect the therapeutic relationship. With Rogers explaining to use the core conditions in the therapy sessions, by using these it gives the therapy sessions a different feel to it from using any other different humanistic therapeutic approach, as stated by Rogers

“The person-centred role starts with the felt quality of the relationship through empathy--the 'as if' understanding of others. It involves the counsellor seeing through the clients' eyes and reflecting understanding back to them (Rogers, 1957).”

From using this condition in the sessions as seen from Rogers the use of empathy can build on the therapeutic relationship as the client can feel that the counsellor understands them and instead of them feeling sympathetic for them they feel with them and understand how they feel which can build the relationship and trust in the sessions. As well as empathy by the counsellor using the other two conditions which are unconditional positive regard and congruence all these 3 conditions allows the client to feel safe, listened to, honest from both sides and trust which is fundamental in a therapeutic relationship. By having these in place the client will gain so many benefits from counselling.

Another reason why the person-centred approach can change the therapeutic relationship is as the person-centred approach is all about the client being the expert in the therapeutic relationship for some clients this can build the therapeutic relationship as the counsellor is giving the client the power to decide their life changes and resale how they are feeling for themselves instead of someone else telling them how they are feeling, for most of the clients that come for counselling they are in a vulnerable state anyway and by having this power of choice it can empower them and give them that trust in the therapeutic relationship. As said previously the therapeutic relationship in

any counselling setting is important as without this fundamental part the sessions the client would not be getting the help they need, as stated by Mearns

“The person-centred approach emphasises the importance of the therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client and the active use of that relationship to highlight and explore aspects of the client's social and emotional functioning which are manifested in the therapeutic relationship. this makes it crucial for the person-centred counsellor to be able to find ways of using as much of that relationship as possible.” (Mearns, 1994).

By using this approach, there can be changes seen different from using this one compared to another humanistic approach, as in person-centred therapy there is no power imbalance in the relationship as stated by Thorne “That it is important to reject the pursuit of authority or control over others and to seek to share power” (Thorne, 1991), by using this in the sessions the client will feel equal rather than feel that the counsellor has the authority and power. By the client feeling equal it will benefit the relationship as the client will want to open up and trust in the counsellor more than what they would if there was a power imbalance with the counsellor being the one directing the sessions and the client having to power or quality. However, there can be some limitations to this approach regarding the therapeutic relationship, some clients who may be vulnerable and could see the counsellor as being a friend rather than a counsellor which could cause the client to overstep the boundaries which would have an effect on the therapeutic relationship and the trust that the client has may be shattered. As shown so far it has all been about the client and how they feel towards the therapeutic relationship but the counsellor can also have an effect to the relationship if they are not fully present or something is said which they can relate to it can hinder this relationship and affect the process.

Assessment and case formulation

Before every counselling session, an assessment process has to take place before the therapeutic process can begin, assessments are an entail part of any therapeutic process as without this in place then the therapeutic relationship and sessions would not be authentic and not progress would come of them. The reason for there being an assessment process in any counselling setting is to ensure the client is safe and can benefit out of the type of counselling they have opted for, during these assessments, this is where the counsellor will get to know the client's background and information on them, there are different ways that assessments can be done regarding the questions that are asked but overall they tend to be very similar as they are all there to ensure that they plan interventions or make any diagnosis from the answers given. A question that should be paramount in any assessment is ensuring the GP details are given as if anything was to happen during a session where the client seemed at risk to themselves then the counsellor would have the correct information to be able to go and call the doctors as soon as possible without trying to get the information out of the client when they could be in a panic.

The assessment process that takes place is also known as a case formulation of the client, this is explained by Sim et al,

“A case formulation provides a detailed understanding of a client’s problems, most commonly in terms of their nature and impact, their predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors and the relationship between these, and the implications of these data for the establishment and setting of appropriate treatment goals and process.” (Simm, Gwee & Bateman, 2005)

By undertaking an assessment this allows the counsellor to gain as much information needed to help the client as possible, as without this entail assessment and ability to form a case formulation on them the start of the therapy session would be a slow start and the counsellor wouldn't know anything about the client to ensure they are safe and are using the correct tools. However, in the person-centred approach assessments are seen differently by Rogers as the client is the expert, not the counsellor. With this being the case all person-centred counsellors are against an assessment, case formulation or even diagnosis that gives the power to the counsellor rather than

the client, as it is the counsellor who knows what hurts not the counsellor. In other theories after the initial assessment, the counsellor will start to plan interventions and treatment for the client however the person-centred approach is very against this as the client will have no power is not seen as the expert, which is against everything the person-centred approach stands for. There are some disadvantages to this way of assessments though as some clients may not be able to communicate their feelings very well, some clients could be scared as it is their first session and some may find the fact the counsellor isn't giving them advice unhelpful.

However, in different organisations, they have different ways of presenting the assessment process, in my placement which is the Exchange the way they do their assessment process is now over the phone. Clients will first have to wait on a waiting list from where they have either referred themselves or been referred for counselling, the client will get a text from the exchange saying that they will be receiving a phone call for an assessment on a certain time and date to ensure they are available and safe to talk if not they can rearrange a suitable time. During this assessment process the counsellor will run through the contract with the client ensuring it is suitable for them and they agree to it, if so then the assessment process will start, this goes on for about 20 to 40 minutes. During this assessment questions will be asked such as GP details, emergency contact details, who does the person live with, have they got a job, anything that may affect attending sessions and what has brought them for counselling and what would they like to gain for it. By asking these questions it ensures that the client is suited for the exchange and the volunteer counsellors as if not then they would signpost these clients to a more suitable counselling service, this ensures that both trainee counsellor and client are safe.

Process notes

During any therapy session, the counsellor will always be seen jotting down some notes as the client is speaking. The counsellor is writing down notes on the client throughout the session so by the time they leave and the counsellor goes to write up their notes they could miss something quite important to add to their notes because they forgot but by jotting down some notes throughout the session this gives the counsellor some pointers.

After every session the counsellor will finish writing up the clients notes, every counsellor note-taking is different but they all near enough have the same set up of their notes. As stated by Gaie Houston (1995) what should be included in a client's notes is the clients name but this would either be initials or in code, why they were referred for counselling, their current situation such as where they work or who they live with, their history, what their reason for seeking or being referred for counselling is, what they have said which will need to be looked into more and their time slot and payment. Having this information in the notes can be so beneficial for both counsellor and client as stated by Bond

“The process of writing records involves counsellors in organizing their thoughts and feelings. This is in itself helpful to the counselling because it enables counsellors to reflect systematically on what has occurred and plan for future sessions. In other words, the process of making records enhances the quality of the counselling” (Bond, 2000)

It is so important that all notes that are taken about the client are kept safe and secure, whether this is handwritten notes kept in a secure cabinet or electronic notes on both on these notes it is so important that no information on there can link it to the client, such as their name can not be used instead their initials or numbers can be used. It is not just noted that need to be kept safe as stated by the BACP it is “ any information you hold relating to the client, contracts, permissions to keep records, process notes, text messages, emails or even a calendar, diary or artwork.” (BACP, 2018)

Within my placement, the way that they expect all volunteers to take process notes is by using an in house website which is secure by a personal username and password to each volunteer, on this website, there are sections where you can add the client's notes under their ID number with drop-down bars to what number session and date you are adding to, once you're in the correct drop-down box you may add the notes and save them, this means they are all secure and safe abiding by the client's consent and GDPR.

However when using the person-centred approach during counselling, when taking a client to supervision it is important to keep all this information from their notes anonymous and initials should be used at all times protecting the clients identity, a few questions that should be considered when in supervision as stated by Mearns "How do I behave in relation to this client", "What do I feel in relation to this client" and "What goes on underneath for me" (Mearns, 1997) as addressed all these questions are now about the counsellor when outside the counselling session rather than the whole focus being on the client.

As said previously every process notes can be different and in my placement how I process notes could be different to the next volunteer however they all will follow the same structure and protect the client, below there will be an example of how I would draft my process notes for a client I've had previously, ensuring all details are fully anonymous.

Client number- (....)

Initials- C

Sessions number- 3

Previous issues- OCD, struggling with containing it. Living with dad but wants to live with mum.

Current issues presented today- C is feeling proud today as they managed to complete one of the tasks of reducing the number of times they have done their OCD ritual, explains how happy they were and would like to reduce the number of times even more for next session. C shows a sense of guilt as giving attention to someone new when they find they obsess over something they like so such as an actor and is struggling with this. C is feeling guilty with different situations, torn between and wants to make a change.

Having brief notes such as these will help me when I come to writing up C notes after the session, it is anonymous and will help both myself and the client for our next sessions.

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