



Carl Rogers' 19 Propositions Decoded

Of all the work Carl Rogers published, “The 19 Propositions” seems to give students more than a little difficulty.

The theory first appeared in the book *Client Centred Therapy*, written by Rogers and published in 1951. It is steeped in the psychological and philosophical language of the time.

I also suspect that as this was Rogers’ unified theory of personality. He was keen to make it as academically robust as he could. Unfortunately for those students who in the course of their studies revisit the theory, it can seem inaccessible and wordy.

The decoded version is of course an interpretation; however, the explanations give an accurate idea of what Rogers was trying to convey, hopefully in a more accessible language.



Did you know that this resource is available in the Counselling Study Resource with links to related topics for further reading? [Read it online.](#)

How to use this resource

If you are writing a case study in which it is expected that you refer to “The 19 Propositions”, consider what attitudes you client expressed that fits with the ‘decoded’ explanations, then use Rogers explanation in the assignment.

For example, a client states:

“I had to leave her – we wanted different things. I wanted to travel, see different countries before returning home to go to college; she wanted to party all the time. It is hard to admit, but she was holding me back and as much as I loved her, I had to let her go.”

In this case, Proposition 8 in decoded form *‘I behave as I do in order to meet my needs, as I experience and perceive them, and as I experience and perceive ‘reality’.*

Rogers’ Theory		Decoded
1	Every individual (organisms) exist in a continually changing world of experience (phenomenal field) of which they are the center.	I make sense of myself, others and my world based on my own consistently changing experience.
2	The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived. The perceptual field for the individual is reality.	My sense of reality is unique, formed out of what I experience, and out of how I process and understand my experience
3	The organism reacts as an organized whole to this phenomenal field.	My entire way of being and doing arises out of my personal sense of reality.
4	The organism has one basic tendency and striving – to actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism.	I have an innate impulse to care for myself, heal and grow. This includes seeking to keep myself safe and intact, and to realise my inner potential, becoming who I am capable of being.

5	Behavior is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced, in the field as perceived.	I behave as I do in order to meet my needs, as I experience and perceive them, and as I experience and perceive reality.
6	Emotion accompanies, and in general facilitates, such goal directed behavior, the kind of emotion being related to the perceived significance of the behavior for the maintenance and enhancement of the organism.	I am emotionally present in my behaviour. My feelings are part of how I attempt to get my perceived needs met. What I feel now strongly depends on how important the need is.
7	The best vantage point for understanding behavior is from the internal frame of reference of the individual.	You can adequately understand my behaviour only through understanding how I see myself and others in the world.
8	A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self.	Part of my reality is my sense of self.
9	As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of the self is formed – an organized, fluid but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships of the “I” or the “me”, together with values attached to these concepts.	My sense of self arises from my experiences and perceptions, especially from comparing myself with others, and from the opinions and judgements of others as I perceive them. My sense of self is fluid but includes consistent perceptions. I attach values to these perceptions.
10	The values attached to experiences, and the values that are a part of the self-structure, in some instances, are values	The values I attach to my experiences and how I value myself are based on

	experienced directly by the organism, and in some instances are values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in distorted fashion, as if they had been experienced directly.	my own experience but also include values taken and absorbed from others. I may be unaware of some of my values derived from others. (<i>Introjected values – Conditions of Worth</i>)
11	As experiences occur in the life of the individual, they are either, a) symbolized, perceived and organized into some relation to the self, b) ignored because there is no perceived relationship to the self-structure, c) denied symbolization or given distorted symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the structure of the self.	There are a number of ways I can meet my experiences. I can make personal some of the meanings and integrate them into my view of the world. Or I can ignore them because they do not fit with how I see myself or the world.
12	Most of the ways of behaving that are adopted by the organism are those that are consistent with the concept of self.	I usually behave in ways that are consistent with how I see myself. So, if I believe that I have little value, I will behave as if this is true.
13	Behavior in some instances, may be brought about by organic experiences and needs which have not been symbolized. Such behavior may be inconsistent with the structure of the self but in such instances the behavior is not “owned” by the individual.	Underlying needs and experiences that I deny or distort – or have not managed to make sense of – will tend to leak through in my behaviour. This behaviour may be less consistent with how I see myself. I am not likely to own this behaviour.
14	Psychological maladjustment exists when the organism denies awareness of	When I disconnect from my own self, I will deny

	significant sensory and visceral experiences, which consequently are not symbolized and organized into the gestalt of the self-structure. When this situation exists, there is a basic or potential psychological tension.	my awareness of my own experience, so it will be very difficult for me to make sense of the world and other people. This causes unease and tension (sometimes known as 'incongruence').
15	Psychological adjustment exists when the concept of the self is such that all the sensory and visceral experiences of the organism are, or may be, assimilated on a symbolic level into a consistent relationship with the concept of self.	When I am connected to my authentic being, I am able to be open to my actual experience – its immediacy and totality – and to integrate this into the world.
16	Any experience which is inconsistent with the organization of the structure of the self may be perceived as a threat, and the more of these perceptions there are, the more rigidly the self-structure is organized to maintain itself.	I may find the experience threatening if it is inconsistent with how I see myself in the world. The more experiences I find threatening, the more rigid my sense of self becomes, and the more tightly I cling to my viewpoint.
17	Under certain conditions, involving primarily complete absence of threat to the self-structure, experiences which are inconsistent with it may be perceived and examined, and the structure of self revised to assimilate and include such experiences.	If I feel accepted and understood, I may be able to look at experiences I had previously denied. When there is this lack of threat, I can begin to make sense of myself. In this way, I am healing myself. <i>(This usually happens in therapy)</i>

18	When the individual perceives and accepts into one consistent and integrated system all his sensory and visceral experiences, then he is necessarily more understanding of others and is more accepting of others as separate individuals.	When I am able to hold in awareness and integrate all my actual embodied experiencing, I am inevitably more understanding and tolerant of others, and more able to understand the value of others and to accept them as separate beings.
19	As the individual perceives and accepts into his self structure more of his organic experiences, he finds that he is replacing his present value system – based extensively on introjections which have been distortedly symbolized – with a continuing organismic valuing process.	When I am able to reshape my view of the world and myself, and include previously denied experiences, I begin to reshape my values. I can let go of introjected values and become a fully functioning person, trusting in myself and my own experience.

The 19 propositions are one of the three pillars of the person-centred approach, the other two being the seven stages of process and the six necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change. First presented in 1951 in Carl Rogers' book *Client-Centered Therapy*, the 19 propositions are based on phenomenology.

In developing this part of his theory, Rogers drew on the work of other psychologists and on his own experience of counselling clients:

'Taken as a whole, the series of propositions presents a theory of behaviour which attempts to account for the phenomena previously known, and also for the facts regarding personality and behaviour which have more recently been observed in therapy' (Rogers, 1951: 482)

Merry (2014: 34) writes:

'The nineteen propositions repay careful reading because together they provide us with an elegant theory of how and under what circumstances people change, and why certain qualities of relationship promote that change.'

Thus, they are of value to us as counsellors both in working with clients and in developing ourselves, since 'part of the counselling journey, specifically in PD [personal development] groups, is about encouraging those elements of our personality that are invisible to us – perhaps not-for-growth elements of ourselves – to come into our awareness, challenging us to look at them' (Kelly, 2017: 51).

Resources

Kelly K (2017) *Basic Counselling Skills: A Student Guide*. Warrington: Counselling Tutor

Merry T (2014) *Learning and Being in Person-Centred Counselling*, ROSS ON WYE: PCCS Books

Rogers, C. R., (1951). *Client-Centered Therapy*. London: Constable

Tudor K and Merry T (2006) *Dictionary of Person-Centred Psychology*, ROSS ON WYE: PCCS Books