

During my time of studying and enhancing my skills in counselling the core counselling conditions developed by Carl Rogers has been a staple set of skills that has been the foundation that I and many others have been able to fall back on when considering how best to help potential clients to the best of my abilities (Gallagher & Hargie, 1992).

Carl Rogers core conditions include Empathy toward the client, Unconditional positive regard and congruence. Unconditional positive regard alone is incredibly important to the world of counselling as it provides an environment for the client which is devoid of any judgement or evaluation, therefore creating a safe environment for the client to freely express any feelings regardless of religion, race, beliefs etc (Bozarth, 2007).

And lastly, Roger's last core condition is congruence. Congruence which was considered the most important condition according to Carl Rogers, being congruent is when the counsellor is open and genuine with the client, as appearing false towards the client be it accidentally or purposefully can lead to the client feeling the counsellor may not be interested in what they have to say and could easily make any feelings they intended to share worse (Kolden, Klein, Wang & Austin. 2011).

As one of my final reflexive assessments I was required to counsel a mock client. My client, who i will be referring to as client X for anonymity purposes was a single female who had recently lost her job due to the pandemic who was also living alone and was faced with personal issues of having to begin to face the challenges that come along with living alone and in addition to this the pandemic (Mukhtar, Sonia. 2020).

The client came to the session presenting with symptoms of stress and frustration in addition to anxiety with her current situation. During the session as it was our first session I was required to go through the process of therapeutic contracting with client X. As the session was being recorded for assignment purposes, this needed to be explained to client X as well as the fact there were observers in the call at the same time. Once the client had

agreed to the conditions of being recorded and the implications that if they mentioned anything that may be of harm to themselves or others then I would need to report this back to my supervisor whilst keeping client X involved in the whole process (Heinssen, Levendusky & Hunter, 1995).

Although this is my third year of studying psychology and counselling, I personally feel I have a long way to go when counselling clients effectively. Although receiving positive feedback from my peers who were the observers during my session with client X, I find it difficult to stop myself from asking too many questions during the session, asking too many questions may not seem like an issue to the client, some clients could feel offended or hurt by too many questions as this could lead to them thinking you are not properly listening to the issues they are trying to talk about (Haley, 1963).

As previously mentioned, after the session, I received feedback provided by my observer peers. I personally find it difficult to give myself positive feedback, whereas negative feedback is often easier to give yourself. From this point on I will be referring to the observers as observer 1 and observer 2.

Observer 1 mentioned that I had good demonstration of person centred therapy, when doing this I was encouraging client X to put themselves first whilst they were mentioning how they did not want to put any pressure on their on of their family members, as they may have their own problems mentally or in general that may be affecting them. This i felt quite strongly about as I was making a conscious effort to circle back to how the client was feeling and emotions regarding herself as well as taking actions to specifically benefit herself as the client was repeatedly mentioning how she did not want to put a burden onto others (Raskin & Rogers, 2005).

In addition to this, observer one also remarked that I ended the session with positive communication as well as highlight the clients improvement with their emotions and

motivations. This helps feed into the previously mentioned point of making client X consider her own feelings and how she is feeling in the moment rather than how others are feeling (McGivern & Fischer, 2012).

To do this I used skills such as summarising and asking open ended questions, one of these was at the beginning of the session as an opening question, to ask how client X was feeling on a scale of 1 to 10 emotionally, with 1 being feelings amazing and 10 being as though the client was going to break down at any moment. Client X rated at the beginning of the session that she was a 7 on the scale and with the information she provided about the stressors in her life this made sense (McGivern & Fischer, 2012).

When asked this same question at the end of the session the client rated a 5 on the scale. Even though there were only two points of movement there was still movement on a positive, and for a first session this is still a big thing for the client to achieve (Rautalinko, 2013).

And coupling this question with skills of paraphrasing and summarising to show the client that when the session first started she was using negative words to describe coping mechanisms such as “a waste of time” or “pointless” but when the session was coming to an end the client was using words such as being “excited” to try a creative outlet to fill her day as one key issue she mentioned was that she felt as though she had lost her identity when she lost her job (Strick & Papies, 2017).

Observer 2 provided feedback on a few aspects that I could improve on in the future for future clients. The observers main point being that in delivering the opening contract to the client it came across that I was possibly rushing through and possibly giving the idea to the client that they did not have the ability to say no or back out of the session if they were not comfortable with being recorded or having observers in the room. If this was the case then I believe it was due to being nervous due to the exercise being an assessment, but this is

definitely something I can work on in the future. I would intend to do this how someone may practice speaking in public, although in this case it is speaking with one client, that client still matters (Daly, Vangelisti & Lawrence, 1989).

Once the counselling session had come to a close, it was very important to me to reflect on my feedback for myself straight away, even though i could have rewatched the session as it was recorded, feelings that I may have had at the time may have changed or been forgotten. To do this, I referred to the reflective cycle by gibbs (Gibbs, 1988), this then allowed me to properly formulate my feelings and evaluate them in a way that made sense so that I could then come up with an appropriate action plan to help me better my skills in the future (Gibbs, 1988)

This ties in to the point I made above about the comments made by Observer 2, in the moment I felt that I had simply done okay with my contracting but upon evaluating the feedback comments and analysing the contract as whole I came to the conclusion that I may have indeed been stiff when delivering the contract to client X, and because of this, in the future I could try calming techniques before the contract takes place so I do not feel like i am rushing through the contract and give the client space to reply in case they are in fact not comfortable with anything mentioned in the contract (Brantley, 2003).

One other such point I picked up on while utilising Gibbs reflective cycle, is that although I was using positive feelings and reassurance toward client X about them considering their own feelings when it comes to trying to lessen her anxiety and stress, I could have suggested some mindfulness techniques that she could have tried on her own in her own time to help this. Although yes I did suggest that she try and get back into art, as she said in the past she used to draw and paint and perhaps combining this with going for a walk would give her some inspiration to have a subject to draw or paint, if this did not work then

the client would have to go an entire week or however long would be discussed between sessions with no other coping mechanisms to fall back on (Strick & Papies, 2017).

Therefore in hindsight I could have suggested that if stress and anxiety were beginning to build up, then the client could have completed perhaps a body scan. This being where the client lies down or sits in a comfortable position and systematically goes through every part of their body and focuses their attention on these specific body parts and tries to notice any physical sensation going on with that body part without reacting to it. This can then as a result relax the client and let them take their mind off stressors and other thoughts that may be making them anxious by redirecting their thoughts towards their body instead (Corbett, Christina, Egan, Jonathan, & Pilch, Monika. 2019).

Throughout my time taking part in the psychology and counselling course, I feel I have learnt a lot about not only the world of counselling but also myself. When I First started the course I felt quite confident that I wanted to work in a 1 to 1 counselling setting later on in life, but having experienced this in volunteering to a degree, I now believe that my personality and skill set would benefit more being in a hospital setting, and without this course I would not be able to do that.

But even though I no longer think I will be working in a 1 to 1 counselling setting I Will still be able to apply my skills in a hospital setting as I will still be dealing with potential clients and the things I have learned from tasks like this such as perhaps coming off too stiff in contracting may be able to help me with first meetings with clients.

In addition to this, no only will I be able to use these techniques on clients but, If i am beginning to feel anxious myself or stressed out in the present or the future, this course has taught me many mindfulness techniques and activities that I can use myself, such as previously mentioned, body scanning but also taking a break from whatever I am, doing and taking part in mindful breathing, this is very similar to the body scan but instead you are

focussing all of your attention on your breathing and becoming aware of the sensations of each inhale and exhale. And with this practice alone there are many different types of mindful breathing. If one technique does not work for me, it would be easy to move onto a different style (Sauer-Zavala, Walsh, Eisenlohr-Moul & Lykins, 2013).

I know that even with this expansive set of skills I have practiced and tried to demonstrate I still have a lot to learn, with this being my final year on this course I am confident in the fact that I will continue to learn new skills that I can perhaps integrate with old skills to go further in my journey of helping people feel at least a little bit better in life.

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