

## **Genuineness**

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### **Description and Prevalence**

In the 1940's -1950's, Carl Rogers, founder of Person Centered Psychotherapy, outlined three essential ingredients of a successful healing therapeutic relationship: *unconditional positive regard, genuineness (or congruence) and accurate empathy*. Neither empathy nor positive regard can be conveyed in the therapeutic relationship unless the therapist comes across as genuine. So genuineness is essential to the healing counseling relationship. Being genuine, authentic and real is considered one of the six 'core conditions' for therapeutic change and growth. (Tan 2011)

*"It's the relationship that heals, the relationship that heals, the relationship that heals - my professional rosary", says Irv Yalom, M.D. in Love's Executioner (1989, p.91).*

### **Therapeutic Genuineness**

A person-centered therapist who is congruent and genuine, practices the art of being themselves, without playing a role or being a false self. They are authentic, real, honest and open when relating to the client in the therapeutic relationship. Being a genuine therapist requires being aware of who you are and what is going on inside yourself. It means not shutting off your own experience, but being present and open to it in a way that the client benefits. When we are fully human and fully alive, or a 'fully-functioning' person as Rogers would say, we can be totally genuine.

Genuineness requires the therapist to be self-aware and comfortable with being themselves, not adapting or changing roles in order to be acceptable to the person they are with. (Norcross, 2002) The therapist may share experiences or engage in appropriate self-disclosure with the client as well as express both positive and what may be perceived as negative feelings that would be beneficial to the client. For example, if the therapist feels disconnected from how the client is reporting events of the week, the therapist may reflect that to the client in a genuine statement that helps the client be aware of their distance and lack of connection in other relationships.

This means that both therapist and client are able to be real and more truly in touch with his or her real self. (Tan, 2011) This reduces the emotional distance in the relationship helping the client identify with the therapist. It also encourages collaboration between the therapist and the client.

However, some discernment and self-regulation is necessary. The therapist doesn't say everything that they think in the name of honesty, but what is appropriate and most therapeutically helpful to the client. Self disclosure needs to be applicable to the client's experience, not for the therapists own gratification. Some thoughts and feelings should not be shared with the client directly, but with a supervisor such as

times of sexual attraction, negative feelings or strong counter transference.

Genuineness has at least four components: *supporting nonverbal behaviors, role behavior, consistency and spontaneity*. Rogers also suggested that if techniques were ever used, they should be approached and used in a genuine and spontaneous way and only as they are appropriate to the particular needs of the client. (Tan, 2011)

### **Genuineness Criteria**

The positive results of effective psychotherapy have over 30 years of clinical research to verify the findings that there is a direct correlation to the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client. The take away conclusion is that a genuine, authentic connection between the client and therapist is far more crucial than various theories, models and psychotherapy techniques. Lambert (1986) states that: "...at least from the patient's point of view, effective treatment is due to factors associated with relationship variables and the personal qualities of the therapist" (p.189).

God calls us to powerful life-changing interactions through genuineness in love. Love changes everything. When we are 'real', living out our most authentic self that God has created us to be, we become agents of change and transformation. (Hart Weber, 2010) God calls us to truth and sincerity, and authenticity in our interactions with one another.

That being said, being 'real', genuine, authentic and developing this kind of relationship with clients requires being self aware and intentional. Here are some suggestions for reflection and affirmation in being authentically therapeutically genuine:

In my professional role, I don't use a façade to be guarded or protect myself  
I aim to reflect the genuine Love of God through me as an authentic person  
I work in collaboration with my client viewing us both as experts in the  
relationship  
I aim to practice the art of being genuine, real and authentic as a therapist  
I am not hiding behind a role or a false front, but focus on the genuine relationship  
I am non-defensive. I am comfortable with myself, open to hearing and  
responding to negative feedback and criticism honestly  
I validate my client's insights, strengths and self-discovered decisions about  
change  
I am able to share genuine facial expressions  
I am spontaneous and provide freedom, yet not impulsivity  
I am not rule or technique bound, but relationship centered  
I am consistent in my thought, feeling, and behavior. I have few discrepancies, not  
having different values for each situation I am faced with.  
I show consistency in my value statements and behavior  
I am capable of deep self-disclosure, able to share genuinely both verbally and

nonverbally when appropriate to help the client, to achieve goals in the counseling process and build authenticity in life.  
I don't just rely on techniques or intellectual interventions to help my clients reach their goals, but focus primarily on the genuine relationship connection I can openly express my feelings, thoughts and reactions that are present in relationships with my clients

## **Conclusion**

No matter what therapeutic model you may follow, the degree to which you are able to be genuine and congruent in relationship with your client will determine the quality and effectiveness of the healing relationship.

## **References**

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