

What is Person-centred therapy?

Person-centred therapy, also known as person-centred or client-centred counselling, is a humanistic approach that deals with the ways in which individuals perceive themselves consciously, rather than how a counsellor can interpret their unconscious thoughts or ideas.

Created in the 1950s by psychologist Carl Rogers, the person-centred approach ultimately sees human beings as having an innate tendency to develop towards their full potential.

However, this ability can become blocked or distorted by certain life experiences, particularly those the experiences which affect our sense of value.

The therapist in this approach works to understand an individual's experience from their perspective.

The therapist must positively value the client as a person in all aspects of their humanity, while aiming to be open and genuine.

This is vital in helping the client feel accepted, and better able to understand their own feelings.

The approach can help the client to reconnect with their inner values and sense of self-worth, thus enabling them to find their own way to move forward and progress.

What is person-centred counselling?

The core purpose of person-centred therapy is to facilitate our ability to self-actualise - the belief that all of us will grow and fulfil our potential. This approach facilitates the personal growth and relationships of a client by allowing them to explore and utilise their own strengths and personal identity.

The counsellor aids this process, providing vital support to the client and they make their way through this journey.

“The person-centred counsellor is not an expert; rather the client is seen as an expert on themselves and the person-centred counsellor encourages the client to explore and understand themselves and their troubles.

- Counsellor [Mary-Claire Wilson](#)

An important part of the self-actualising theory is that in a particular psychological environment, the fulfilment of personal potentials include; sociability (the need to be with other people, and a desire to know and be known by others); being open to experience; being trusting and trustworthy; and being curious, creative and compassionate.

This psychological environment is one where a person feels both physically and emotionally free from threat.

There are three conditions believed to help achieve this environment, particularly in the therapy room.

- **Congruence** - the counsellor must be completely genuine.
- **Empathy** - the counsellor must strive to understand the client's experience.
- **Unconditional positive regard** - the counsellor must be non-judgemental and valuing.

A number of factors can affect a person's ability to flourish, including low self-esteem, a lack of self-reliance and very little openness to new experiences.

The person-centred approach recognises that a person's social environment and personal relationships can greatly impact these, so therapy is offered in a neutral and comfortable setting, where a client can feel at ease, authentic and open to learning about themselves.

By offering a safe, comforting environment, the client is able to understand the past experiences that have impacted the way they feel about themselves or their abilities, and take the steps to positive change. The person-centred approach can also help the client to:

- find closer agreement between an idealised self and actual self
- achieve better self-understanding and awareness
- release feelings of defensiveness, insecurity and guilt
- have greater ability to trust oneself
- develop healthier relationships
- see improvement in self-expression
- achieve a healthy sense of change overall

The benefits of person-centred therapy

Generally, person-centred counselling can help individuals of all ages, with a range of personal issues.

Many people find it an appealing type of therapy because it allows them to keep control over the content and pace of sessions, and there is no worry that they are being evaluated or assessed in any way.

The non-direct style of person-centred counselling is thought to be more beneficial to those who have a strong urge to explore themselves and their feelings, and for those who want to address specific psychological habits or patterns of thinking.

The approach is said to be particularly effective in helping individuals to overcome specific problems such as depression, anxiety, stress and grief, or other mental health concerns. These issues can have significant impact on self-esteem, self-reliance and self-awareness, and person-centred therapy can help people to reconnect with their inner self in order to transcend any limitations.

While person-centred counselling was originally developed as an approach to psychotherapy, it is often transferred to other areas where people are required to build strong relationships, such as teaching, childcare and patient care.

This approach is not limited to qualified counsellors, many people will use the approach in some form to help guide them through day to day work and relationships.

The theory behind the approach

In some psychotherapeutic approaches, the therapist and their observations are deemed 'expert'.

The person-centred approach moves away from this idea, and instead trusts that we have an innate tendency to find fulfilment in our own personal potentials (self-actualisation).

By facilitating this, the approach helps the client to recognise their own capacity for not only self-healing, but personal growth too.

Another key factor in this theory is the notion of self-concept. Self-concept refers to the organised and consistent set of beliefs and perceptions a person has about themselves.

These form a core component of our total experience and influence our perception of the world.

Person-centred counselling recognises that our self-concept can become displaced if striving too hard to belong and be accepted by those around us.

As people, we typically cope with any conditional acceptance offered to us by gradually and unconsciously incorporating these conditions into our own self-image.

This can lead to the development of a self-concept that consists of characterised ideas, for example, "I am the type of person who will always respect others".

Because we generally desire positive regard from those around us, it is often easier to 'be' this accepted, simplified 'type' of person.

To be anything else, or to be different, could see us losing that positive regard from others.

Over time, our identity - our personal judgements, meanings and experiences - can become displaced with the ideals of others.

It is for this reason that person-centred counselling aims to help clients to self-actualise and achieve personal growth.

This is cultivated through the provision of a supportive environment, where clients can strengthen and expand on their own identity, and begin to separate themselves from their developed notions of how they should be.