



# Six Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

Carl Rogers stated that 'for constructive personality change to occur, it is necessary that these [six] conditions exist and continue over a period of time.' The conditions are:

1. Psychological contact between counsellor and client
2. The client is incongruent (anxious or vulnerable)
3. The counsellor is congruent
4. The counsellor shows unconditional positive regard towards the client
5. The client receives empathy from the counsellor
6. Client perceives acceptance and unconditional positive regard

The six necessary and sufficient conditions are 'the hypothesised conditions by which the therapist facilitates constructive personality change' (Tudor and Merry, 2002: 25).



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

## Origins of the Term

Carl Rogers first used the term in a paper published in 1957 by the *Journal of Consulting Psychology*. There, he claimed that ‘for constructive personality change to occur, it is necessary that these conditions exist and continue over a period of time:

1. Two persons are in psychological contact.
2. The first, whom we shall term the client, is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious.
3. The second person, whom we shall term the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship.
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client.
5. The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate this experience to the client.
6. The communication to the client of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard is to a minimal degree achieved.’

He continued: ‘No other conditions are necessary. If these six conditions exist and continue over a period of time, this is sufficient. The process of constructive personality change will follow’ (Rogers, 1957: 95–96).

## The Core Conditions

The term ‘core conditions’ was not used by Rogers, rather it was coined in the 1970s and 1980s by the British person-centred movement, to refer to conditions 3, 4 and 5. Other terms used are the ‘facilitative conditions’ or ‘therapist’s conditions’. These conditions can be expressed in plain English as follows:

3. The counsellor is congruent (genuine).
4. The counsellor experiences unconditional positive regard (UPR) – non-judgmental warmth and acceptance – towards the client.
5. The counsellor feels empathy towards the client.

Kelly (2017: 18) writes: ‘Together, the core conditions build deep rapport and trust within the relationship. And with deep rapport and trust, we are able to work at relational depth (Mearns and Cooper, 2005) – which is where real movement happens.’

## The Hidden Conditions

The other three conditions – numbers 1, 2 and 6 – are known as the ‘hidden conditions’, ‘client’s conditions’ or ‘lost conditions’. These are less well-known than the core conditions. These conditions can be expressed more simply as follows:

1. The counsellor makes psychological contact with the client (i.e., they are ‘on the same page’ psychologically).
2. The client is incongruent (vulnerable or anxious).
3. The client receives the congruence, UPR and empathy of the counsellor.

Psychological contact (condition 1) can be made only if the client is capable of giving informed consent. Barriers to this could be severe mental health issues such as active psychosis, severe learning difficulties, or attending under the influence of drugs, alcohol or prescribed medication. If psychological contact cannot be made, then there is an ethical issue around autonomy, the ability for the client to make an informed choice in contracting with the therapist.

If the client is seeking not counselling but friendship or expert advice (e.g., on debt management or the law), or if they are not ready for counselling (perhaps they are at stage 1 or 2 of the seven stages of process, and so are not yet open to change, and instead blame others for their misfortune or do not take responsibility for their actions), then condition 2 would not be met.

Finally, if a client is unable to trust the counsellor (for example, due to transference), or the two simply do not gel, condition 6 will not be met as the client will not feel safe enough to discuss what is really on their mind. This condition is arguably the most difficult to fulfil as it asks the counsellor both to give enough time for the client to build trust, and to be congruent enough in the relationship to explore with the client any reluctance to fully engage.

If any of the six necessary and sufficient conditions – which are ‘best seen as a gestalt or unity operating together rather than as separate elements’ (Merry, 2002: 71) – cannot be met, then referral to another therapist/service is the ethical course of action.

## References

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

Mearns D and Cooper M (2005) *Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy*, Sage

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

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