



WHAT IS UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD?

The person-centred approach views the client as their own best authority on their own experience, and it views the client as being fully capable of fulfilling their own potential for growth. It recognizes, however, that achieving potential requires favourable conditions and that under adverse conditions, individuals may well not grow and develop in the ways that they otherwise could.

In particular, when individuals are denied acceptance and positive regard from others -- or when that positive regard is made conditional upon the individual behaving in particular ways -- they may begin to lose touch with what their own experience means for them, and their innate tendency to grow in a direction consistent with that meaning may be stifled.

One reason this may occur is that individuals often cope with the conditional acceptance offered to them by others by gradually coming to incorporate these conditions into their own views about themselves. They may form a self-concept which includes views of themselves like, "I am the sort of person who must never be late", or "I am the sort of person who always respects others", or "I am the sort of person who always keeps the house clean".

Because of a fundamental need for positive regard from others, it is easier to 'be' this sort of person -- and to receive positive regard from others as a result -- than it is to 'be' anything else and risk losing that positive regard. Over time, their intrinsic sense of their own identity and their own evaluations of experience and attributions of value may be replaced by creations partly or even entirely due to the pressures felt from other people.

That is, the individual displaces personal judgements and meanings with those of others.

Psychological disturbance occurs when the individual's 'self-concept' begins to clash with immediate personal experience -- i.e., when the evidence of the individual's own senses or the individual's own judgement clashes with what the self-concept says 'ought' to be the case.

Unfortunately, disturbance is apt to continue as long as the individual depends on the conditionally positive judgements of others for their sense of self-worth and as long as the individual relies on a self-concept designed in part to earn those positive judgements. Experiences which challenge the self-concept are apt to be distorted or even denied altogether in order to preserve it.

Therapeutic Approach of Person-Centred Counselling

The person-centred approach maintains that three core conditions provide a climate conducive to growth and therapeutic change. They contrast starkly with those conditions believed to be responsible for psychological disturbance. The core conditions are:

1. Unconditional positive regard
2. Empathic understanding
3. Congruence

The first -- unconditional positive regard -- means that the counsellor accepts the client unconditionally and non-judgementally. The client is free to explore all thoughts and feelings, positive or negative, without danger of rejection or condemnation.

Crucially, the client is free to explore and to express without having to do anything in particular or meet any particular standards of behaviour to 'earn' positive regard from the counsellor.

The second -- empathic understanding -- means that the counsellor accurately understands the client's thoughts, feelings, and meanings from the client's own perspective.

When the counsellor perceives what the world is like from the client's point of view, it demonstrates not only that that view has value, but also that the client is being accepted.

The third -- congruence -- means that the counsellor is authentic and genuine. The counsellor does not present an aloof professional facade, but is present and transparent to the client. There is no air of authority or hidden knowledge, and the client does not have to speculate about what the counsellor is 'really like'.

Together, these three core conditions are believed to enable the client to develop and grow in their own way -- to strengthen and expand their own identity and to become the person that they 'really' are independently of the pressures of others to act or think in particular ways.

As a result, person-centred theory takes these core conditions as both necessary *and sufficient* for therapeutic movement to occur -- i.e., that if these core conditions are provided, then the client *will* experience therapeutic change. (Indeed, the achievement of identifying and articulating these

core conditions and launching a significant programme of scientific research to test hypotheses about them was one of the greatest contributions of Carl Rogers, the American psychologist who first began formulating the person-centred approach in the 1930s and 1940s.)

Notably, person-centred theory suggests that there is nothing *essentially* unique about the counselling relationship and that in fact healthy relationships with significant others may well manifest the core conditions and thus be therapeutic, although normally in a transitory sort of way, rather than consistently and continually.

Finally, as noted at the outset, the person-centred approach takes clients as their own best authorities. The focus of person-centred therapy is always on the client's own feelings and thoughts, not on those of the therapist -- and certainly not on diagnosis or categorization.

The person-centred therapist makes every attempt to foster an environment in which clients can encounter *themselves* and become more intimate with their own thoughts, feelings and meanings.

Definitions of Unconditional Positive Regard

- Using the client's first name, this may seem obvious but for clients who are in the prison system used to being referred to by their surname or by their offence. The use by the Counsellor of their first name can convey warmth that is not experienced in day to day life.
- Using a 'warm' tone of voice, and words which convey empathy.
- Showing genuine interest in the client, listening attentively and not being dismissive of their frame of reference or story.
- Separating the client from their behaviour, what a client may have done is only a part of who they are.
- Physically moving closer to the client.
- Being aware of your body language, such things as raising eyebrows, not paying attention or sitting in a defensive posture (for example arms and legs crossed). Research shows that between 60-70% of how we perceive other people is by their non verbal communication.

Developing a non-judgmental attitude

We can develop a non-judgmental attitude by:

- Recognising and carefully scrutinizing our values and attitudes we may decide to change some of them.
- Trying to see the world from the client's frame of reference.
- Not saying I know how you feel.
- Not comparing the client with someone else.
- Not becoming over involved.

To formulate a non-judgmental response involves:

- Being receptive and accepting.
- Being interested in the person, not just the problem itself.
- Demonstrating sincere respect for the client as a person of worth.
- Trying to understand what it means to be this client, not rushing to answer.
- Being aware of your own values

Unconditional Positive Regard: Accepting Myself

In order to accept others, we need to accept ourselves first. To do this, we need to develop a greater understanding and awareness of ourselves,

Try this exercise in exploring some of your attitudes, values and qualities.

1. One thing I like about myself is -----
2. One thing others like about me is -----
3. What I dislike in others is-----
4. What others dislike about me is -----
5. I am really pleased with myself when-----
6. One thing I would like to change is -----

7. One thing I cannot cope with very well is -----
8. One thing I do very well is -----
9. One way I show I care for others is -----
10. I really give myself a hard time when-----

Now find a partner, and choose share some of the above statements, Remember to use to give the accepting response to your partners statements –don't judge, or criticise.