

HEALTHY MINDS
A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS
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Carl Rogers and Client-Centered Psychotherapy



Carl Rogers is one of the most highly emulated and respected psychotherapists in the current era for his work not only with mental and emotional problems, but as an educator; his work in both fields won him great recognition and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

He studied and described the development of the human personality from an undifferentiated self to a fully differentiated one, with a definite form and relationship to others and to the surrounding world, but still in a fluid state that permitted change and the ability to adapt. As a psychotherapist he realized that in order to best help most clients he had to treat them with unconditional positive regard. Raising children in an environment of unconditional regard develops their feeling of self-worth and helps them reach their full potential. If their environment is conditional then they will only feel worthy if they match the conditions laid down for them.

In order for a person to be a “fully functioning person”, reaching their full potential, s/he must possess the following characteristics:

- must be open to experience and not be defensive, and not prevent troubling thoughts from passing into their conscious mind (from their unconscious mind);
- should try to live life in the here and now, trusting to live life fully with great openness; one must be trustful and not rigid in order to be adaptable, tolerant, spontaneous, daring, and willing to accept healthy excitement into their lives. Rogers taught that individuals should “open one’s spirit to what is going on now”;
- should trust their inborn ability to know right from wrong, to be able to choose appropriate behavior, and not just rely on existing social norms and rules;
- should exercise freedom of choice and take responsibility for their own behavior rather than be tied by restrictions which may have no real relevance to their lives;
- should avoid the need to conform, and instead adapt to their own particular circumstances; this will lead to great personal creativity;
- should be open to all of their needs, even the more aggressive ones because they will ultimately act in a constructive manner, reliably balancing their all their needs;

Following this prescription, they will lead a richer, fuller, more exciting life as they become a fully functioning person, experiencing all of the heartbreaks, joys, fears, pain, love, and courage that life offers.

All humans have a gap between the person that they are and the ideal person that they could be. Rogers called this gap incongruity and urges us all to move toward the ideal state, without fear or hesitancy. The more we allow conditions, rules, or the approval of others to stifle our honest behavior, the less authentic or genuine we are, and the more difficulties we have, spending lots of effort trying to protect the image that we are trying to convey.

The amount of energy we use to protect this image is often directly in proportion to the level of our lack of ease or dis-ease: emotional and psychological.

Carl Rogers said, back in 1961, “this process of the good life is not, I’m convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one’s potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life.”

TIP OF THE WEEK: A recent online report in Health Services Research pointed out that a study of a Medicare demonstration program seems to indicate that older smokers (over 55, those who find it most difficult to quit), when given nicotine patches and access to telephone counseling, will achieve twice the quitting rate (nearly 20%) as those who receive the usual care (a few words and a brochure about smoking cessation – only 10%). Yes, I am like a broken record about your smoking - but only because I love you.