

Person-Centered Theory: Ordinary People

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Carl Rogers was a pioneer in his therapeutic approach and proposed that clients are experts in their own lives and hold the potential to resolve their own problems. Rather than holding the counselors as experts, he focused on the phenomenological world of clients, while therapists were the facilitators of growth or self-actualization.

In order to create the space for this growth, therapists need to facilitate a warm climate which helps clients to be themselves without the need to be defensive. For this therapists need to maintain three main attributes: 1) congruence or genuineness, 2) unconditional positive regard or acceptance, and 3) empathic understanding. (Corey, 2015). In this environment, clients will be more open to themselves and their own experiences, and be inclined to make positive changes in their lives through self-actualization, which humans are naturally inclined towards, according to Rogers.

In the movie, *Ordinary People*, the character of Conrad presents with incongruence within himself. He has a lot of difficult feelings he can't process related to his brother's death.

If I were employing the person-centered modality with Conrad, I would start by fostering a warm and caring environment, displaying the three characteristics of a therapist as noted by Rogers (i.e congruence, unconditional positive regard, empathy). I would encourage Conrad's vulnerability to express his feelings of guilt, fear, anger, shame, powerlessness and any other feelings which are deemed unacceptable by the people around him, and reflect on them with him. As his therapist I would communicate to him that his feelings are valid and he is still accepted and that I understand his pain. I would want to help Conrad get in touch with himself, especially the part he felt he had to bury after the loss of his brother, and value his own self.

My main goal with the person-centered approach would not be to solve Conrad's problems. Rather, through listening with acceptance, I would guide him to listen to himself with the same acceptance. I would want to give him the freedom to express his feelings and work through his experiences in order to achieve a greater degree of independence to cope with his problems, so that he can live his most authentic life.

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References

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