

“Ordinary People”

Person-Centered Approach to Counseling Conrad Jarret

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Conrad is a new client who has recently lost his brother in a boating accident. This has dramatically impacted Conrad, causing him to suffer from depression and suicidal ideation. Four months ago, he attempted suicide in the bathroom at his home. Fortunately, his father came home in time and called 911. Conrad was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, where he stayed for four months, and has been back home for over a month. He has returned to school and has been having some difficulty adjusting. He has also had trouble sleeping. Conrad has stated that his goal for counseling is to have more control over his life.

I will be applying the person-centered theory founded by Carl Rogers. This theory is based on the fundamental belief that people are generally trustworthy, have the potential to self-heal, and do not need direct intervention. The person-centered therapy consists of four periods of development that span from the 1940s to the 1990s. The first period stressed a nondirective counseling approach and encouraged therapists to foster a permissive atmosphere for the client. It challenged the traditional therapeutic concept that the counselor knows best. The second development period focuses on the client and their phenomenological world and calls for the counselor to enter the client's subjective world. While the third developmental stage highlights self-actualization, "becoming the self one truly is." This period teaches that the therapist is more of a facilitator to help the client grow. The fourth phase of development shows the evolution of the person-centered approach. It expands to include family and group counseling and teachings and principles for politics, conflict resolution, and world peace (Corey, 2015).

Rogers believes that people have the potential to understand themselves, and with the right client-therapist relationship, they resolve their problems and can achieve self-directed growth (Corey, 2015). Moreover, Rogers emphasized that the success of the therapeutic process is

significantly influenced by the therapeutic alliance rather than any counseling technique. The connection between the counselor and client is primarily based on the therapist's personal characteristics and unconditional positive regard for the client (Corey, 2015). If the therapist creates a nonjudgmental, empathetic environment where the client feels accepted, the counseling session becomes more conducive to self-healing.

Two of the primary techniques that will be incorporated during Conrad's counseling sessions to help him achieve his desired outcome are genuineness and congruence and unconditional positive regard. Genuineness and congruence entail the counselor being authentic with the client, honestly disclosing their thoughts and feelings to the client, and demonstrating how one's internal experiences interact with the external. Fostering a secure relationship with the client and demonstrating genuineness and congruence will help create a safe environment where the client feels safe and wants to be vulnerable (Corey, 2015). The unconditional positive regard technique consists of the therapist accepting the client for who they are, regardless of what they are experiencing. It calls for the therapist to show positive feelings, offers reassurance, and practice active listening that will exemplify how the client should conduct and express themselves during the counseling sessions.

Person-centered therapy is also known as talk therapy. No assessment of Conrad will be conducted. Instead, Conrad will be evaluated based on his self-report, which will also help me to understand Conrad's internal frame of reference (Core, 2015). Conrad will be doing most of the talking with little interruption from me. Often, I will restate to Conrad what he said. This will ensure Conrad that he is being heard, as well as allow Conrad to listen to what he is saying.

Foremost essential to this therapeutic process is to create an environment that will encourage Conrad's growth. This will allow Conrad to lower his defenses and be vulnerable. It is also vital

that Conrad does not perceive me as the authority figure who has control over the process of the sessions but understands that the primary responsibility for the outcome is his. To accomplish this, I will disclose enough information about myself and my experiences that Conrad can relate to so that he can freely do the same.

Life consists of choices, and he has to be willing to explore his inner world and choose the direction he wants to go in. My role is not to set goals for Conrad or actively direct the conversation but to attentively listen and facilitate him in identifying his goals and establishing the objectives. Conrad has the ability to intentionally make the necessary changes in his attitude and behavior to develop more control over his life. Whatever impediments, internally or externally, Conrad must understand that he has what it takes to overcome them (Corey, 2015). He must be willing to peel back the mask which he has created through the process of socialization and understand how these facades have compromised him from connecting with his authentic self.

During the sessions, while Conrad might be inclined to have me answer questions for him or direct his thought process or interpret for him his concerns or events which have occurred, it is vital that Conrad himself explore the answers to his questions and hear what he thinks, as I help him access thoughts and feelings that he may not have been previously aware of. Conrad's self-exploration and perception of his life and experiences—his emotions and core beliefs—will help us to understand what is hindering him from feeling in control and effectively directing his own life. Conrad will gradually learn how to listen acceptingly to himself. His answers to his questions will allow answers to come to the surface that will help him resolve his challenges (Corey, 2015).

As counseling progressed, Conrad expressed concerns about his relationship with his mother. He feels disconnected from her and believes she does not love him, but he wants their relationship to change (Redford, 1980). Not receiving the love and value he needs from his mother has more than likely affected Conrad's self-worth and value. By demonstrating unconditional positive regard and showing Conrad that he is valued and accepted without any contingencies—during the counseling process—Conrad will subsequently model this behavior and learn to accept and value himself (Corey, 2015). He will come to embrace his authentic self instead of being concerned about meeting other people's expectations.

Conrad disclosed his belief that his mother loved his brother Buck but has always been emotionally detached from him. When he explained how she found it difficult to talk to or connect with him, I showed Conrad accurate empathy because I wanted Conrad to know and feel I understood his situation and genuinely cared.

As Conrad began to feel more accepting of himself, he began to gain more control over his life. He started to make choices for himself, such as quitting the swimming team and distancing himself from his brother's friends, and is learning to accept that his mother can only love him as she can and that he is worthy of love. It seems that Conrad was walking in his brother's shadow and may have believed that walking in his brother's footsteps would help him gain his mother's love or alleviate the guilt he has been carrying for his brother's death.

As Conrad learns how to separate his life from his brother and develops more self-direction, he will understand that he did not cause his brother's death. On the night of the boating accident, he and his brother held on to each other's hand over the capsized boat and struggled against the current. Now that Conrad can better clarify his thoughts and is developing an internal source of evaluation, he can reevaluate what took place on the night of the boating accident when his

brother died. He can see that he did not let go of his brother's hand but that Buck let go because he could not hold on any longer.

In addition, using Emotional-Focused Therapy (EFT), a person-centered approach technique, in the counseling sessions has helped Conrad understand his guilt. Conrad was taught how to identify and explore his emotions as well as how to manage them. He can also understand that he could not save his brother but did the only thing he could do: hold on to the boat to survive. He had the right to choose to live. EFT will help Conrad to manage his emotions.

Through accurate empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard Conrad has become more vulnerable and can identify and resolve the incongruence within himself (Corey, 2015). Once the therapeutic core continues to be implemented into the counseling session, there will be constructive personality change in Conrad's life. He will move toward self-actualization and gain more control over his life (Corey, 2015).

Reference

Corey, G. (2015). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy, Enhanced*
10th Edition. Cengage Learning

Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary People*. Wildwood Enterprises Production.