

**Ordinary People – Person-Centered Therapy**

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Person-centered therapy was developed in the psychological field by Carl Rogers. The main characteristics of person-centered therapy are along the lines of the therapist directing very little of the therapy session as well as the therapist showing congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. Congruence is when the therapist shows genuineness towards their client. Unconditional positive regard is when there is no judgement being passed upon the client. Empathic understanding is when the therapist tries to understand their client from their point of view. According to Corey (2017), person-centered therapy is centered around the clients' self-directed growth and also emphasizes the counselor's creation of a growth promoting climate. Different from traditional psychotherapy that includes diagnoses, this theory has more of a focus on the therapist acting as a teacher as well as there being an increase in the quality of the relationship between the client and therapist.

In the movie, *Ordinary People*, we can see person-centered therapy being used on a few occasions by Dr. Berger with Conrad, especially towards the ending of the movie when Conrad is going through a crisis. During the beginning stages of therapy with Dr. Berger, Conrad is very guarded and skeptical that he can be helped even though he knows that he desperately needs it. As Dr. Berger builds trust with Conrad, we can see that trust is being built through the use of person-centered therapy. This is due to the fact that he is helping Conrad to be more self-aware and find the answers he is looking for by only asking necessary follow-up questions and restating important aspects of conversation with Conrad. This allows Conrad to feel understood, listened to and ultimately open up more, little by little throughout the movie. When Conrad learns that his friend had committed suicide, he begins to spiral into crisis mode in the middle of the night and begs Dr. Berger to meet him at his office to help him. With person-centered therapy, the therapist

will give free range to their client to express any and all emotions, especially during a crisis. We can see this very clearly during this scene in *Ordinary People*.

If I were in Dr. Berger's shoes, the two main techniques I would use in order to help Conrad would be congruence and empathic understanding. Congruence would be used in order to help Conrad to see that although I am a professional therapist, I am also a human being that can feel and understand the same emotions that my clients do. Conrad already feels he is not surrounded by genuineness ever since his big brother had passed away. Within this therapeutic relationship, congruence is of absolute importance. Empathic understanding, along with congruence, will help Conrad feel listened to and that I really want to help him get through whatever he needs to get through.

## Reference

Corey, G. (2017). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy (10<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Cengage Learning.

Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary People* (Film). Paramount Pictures.