

## **Empathy Reflection**

Haley Rasmussen

The University of the Southwest

COUN-7206: Counseling Skills and Techniques

Dr. Lewis

April 4, 2025

## **How Empathy is Used in the Counseling Relationship**

In the Carl Rogers Video, Carl talked about how research has shown that there are specific words and phrases that promote higher client progress in sessions, however these words can come off harsh or be received poorly (VIDEO). That is where empathic listening comes in. I plan to use empathetic listening to step into the life of the client and be curious about what is there. Using empathy in the therapeutic setting will allow me to nurture the therapeutic relationship and create an environment that feels safe and promotes trust. With this empathetic lens, as the counselor, I will be able to add a fresh set of eyes that will guide questions that explore experiences and draw out possible meanings in the client's experiences. This will hopefully promote change and learning in the client's experiences.

## **How a Counselors Display and Communicate Empathy**

The first step a counselor makes when communicating empathy is setting their worldviews aside so that they can attempt to approach the client's lives with unbiased judgment. For me, this includes not approaching challenges as an expert, but rather approaching it from the same level as a client to show that I am with them, not talking down on them. Next, a counselor enters the client's world and gently takes note of what is there. The counselor may question things, or prompt different meanings to explore, asking guiding questions that keep the client interacting with specific things in their worlds. As the counselor we display empathy by not being judgmental, connecting with the client in hopes to make them feel less alienated, being mindful of multicultural views, using active listening, and being truly engaged in the sessions. In order to show empathy to clients, counselors also need to have their own strong sense of self that they go back to so they do not end up getting lost in their client's worlds.

## **Personal Reflection of Empathy**

Personally, I feel the most touched by empathy when people have shared experience on what I am talking about. I understand as a counselor, we keep our personal experiences to ourselves, but I am going to use this question to focus on the connectedness that comes from the understanding of shared experience. I lost someone close to me due to substance use. I felt that many people I met struggled to empathize with the pain and confusion of this experience which led to me internalizing it. Two years later I met my friend who lost their brother to substance use. They were able to listen, and ask meaningful questions that my friends who had not gone through the experience had failed to ask. That friend also showed empathy by approaching the situation from what felt like the same place I was at, and they just existed there with me in the suck of the situation. For me, it was overwhelmingly impactful to have someone sit with me in my experience and know that they were familiar with the pain that was there.

What I learned from this experience is how to empathize with grief, and approach it from a place of empathy instead of pity. Even if I do not share in my clients experiences, knowing to approach their experiences from a place of “I am by your side” instead of using pity phrases that can make the client feel isolated will be a useful tool that I can implement in my sessions as a counselor.

### **Growing in Empathy as a Counselor**

While watching Carl Rogers on Empathy, I noticed he made the argument that experienced therapists show a higher amount of empathy than inexperienced therapists (Whiteley & Rogers, 1974). He went on to further state that clients and unbiased readers are better at judging the empathic quality of a relationship than the therapist themselves (Whiteley & Rogers, 1974). In the videos Rogers discusses at length verbal skills and empathy, however I think that there is a third important element to all of this that he touched on- client feedback. Therapists are fairly inaccurate at determining the quality of their own relationships so we should be asking the clients as counselors whether or not we are understanding them (Whiteley & Rogers, 1974). A research article posted in the *Methodological issues and strategies in clinical research* discussed how counselors who receive feedback from their clients have better therapeutic outcomes and suggested that counselors consider making formal methods of collecting client feedback a part of their daily practice (Lambert & Shimokawa, 2016).

To me, client feedback is an important part of the counseling process because it will allow me to reflect on my therapeutic strategies and align with my clients. I have seen the argument made that newer counselors can be more effective than experienced counselors because they are more open to client feedback than more experienced counselors who have settled into their own ways. I think there are truths to both sides. Regardless, I hope that nurturing the therapeutic relationship, and creating a space where counselor feedback is welcome, will help me be able to better connect and understand my clients. By actively working with my client to find techniques that work for them, along with setting my own worldviews aside and approaching their lives with curiosity, I will be able to communicate empathy and help them explore different meanings and experiences that they have had in their lives.

### References

- Lambert, M. J., & Shimokawa, K. (2016). Collecting client feedback. In A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), *Methodological issues and strategies in clinical research* (4th ed., pp. 361–372). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14805-023>
- Whiteley, J., & Rogers, C. (1974). *Carl Rogers on Empathy* [Video]. Academic Video Online. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1822700884?accountid=39522&parentSessionId=hByhQAAQp%2BiTL3zP2MCHATHNxsVocC3tdfoeAa7PRG4%3D#/media-object/2364089&sourcetype=Audio%20&%20Video%20Works>