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## What is person-centred counselling?

If you are considering having therapy – either to help you with anxiety or depression, recover from a trauma or improve a relationship – finding the right type of therapist is key. However, navigating the many different styles of therapy and counselling can be overwhelming. To make the process a little easier, this series will look at the various options – so you can find the right type of therapy for your needs.

## What is person-centred counselling?

Person-centred [counselling](#) is one of the 'humanistic' approaches, meaning it focuses on human potential, free will and self-discovery. Unlike other types of [therapy](#), it focuses on the ways in which people perceive themselves consciously, rather than their unconscious thoughts or ideas.

"Originally it was developed in the 1940s by the American psychologist Carl Rogers as a part of humanistic [psychology](#), which believes that everybody has the capability to find their own answers rather than have them dictated by a [therapist](#)," says Yuko Nippoda, psychotherapist and spokesperson for the UK Council for Psychotherapy ([UKCP](#)).

"Person-centred therapy focuses on self-actualisation, which emphasises the ability for us to become who we want to be rather than having it determined by third parties or society," she explains. "It is the client rather than the [therapist](#) who is in the driving seat during sessions, as the client is the expert of their own self and life. The client's autonomy is a big part of person-centred therapy."

With support from the therapist, clients in person-centred counselling are helped to accept, acknowledge and affirm themselves. This can lead to change and growth. "In this way, there is improvement in whichever issues the client initially brought to the consulting room," says Nippoda.

# What does a person-centred therapist do?

Person-centred therapists believe three core conditions are necessary for a client to make progress in [therapy](#): empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard.

"Empathetic understanding is the therapist's ability to identify the experience and the feelings of the client sensitively and accurately, as if they were their own," says Nippoda. "Congruence means showing authenticity and transparency in how they experience the client and the client's [environment](#)."

The third condition, unconditional positive regard, is the acceptance of the client for who they are, with a non-judgemental attitude.

"[Listening](#) is an integral part of person-centred therapy, and it is important for the therapist to listen to clients actively and carefully, rather than telling them what they think," explains Nippoda.

"Most people do not experience being listened to. By being listened to by the therapist, clients feel understood and accepted. That leads to them accepting themselves more easily, reducing self-blame, and gaining more [self-confidence](#)."

## Active listening

Person-centred therapists will engage in 'active listening' - the process of listening attentively to the client, while paraphrasing and reflecting back what is said. [Therapists](#) will withhold advice and may also tentatively reflect back a client's emotions, to help them understand how they feel about an issue.

"This can also be a healing experience for the client. It is very important for the therapist to give the client the space to feel and think for themselves," says Nippoda.

"However, a person-centred therapist does not only listen but also gives feedback about the client's views and issues, which raises the client's self-awareness. By going through this process, the person-centred therapist helps the client to bring about positive change and fulfilment despite the [difficulties](#) they are experiencing."

## Who might benefit from person-centred counselling?

Person-centred counselling can be effective for people who are experiencing difficulties in their daily life, or have psychological or mental health issues. This might be [depression](#), [anxiety](#), [relationship](#) problems, [loneliness](#), low [self-esteem](#), a sense of loss, or [anger](#).

However, person-centred therapists may specialise in certain areas, such as helping people with [confidence](#) issues. "It's most effective for people who want to change themselves and the situation they are in," says Nippoda. "Person-centred therapy underlines the concept of finding the client's own resources and using them effectively in daily life.

"By working with a therapist, clients feel less alone as they deal with their [challenges](#), yet they become more aware of themselves, including their views, their value system and how they relate to others," she adds. "This leads to more [self-confidence](#) and feelings of empowerment."

It's important to note that no single approach is better than another, however. All therapeutic styles have positives and negatives, depending on the needs of the client. Often, the effectiveness of therapy is determined by the relationship between the therapist and client.

## How is person-centred counselling different from other types?

Unlike in other types of [therapy](#), the client leads person-centred sessions. Humanistic therapy, of which person-centred counselling is a part, focuses on people's potential and helps them to live their lives to the full.

"Humanistic therapists believe people have their own answers to their [issues](#). They are the experts themselves, not the therapist. Change occurs by going through the difficulties that are affecting life," says Nippoda.

"By exploring the client's issues during the process of therapy, the client becomes more aware of how they want to change and how they can change, and the therapist helps the client to feel empowered. By the end, they will be equipped to tackle any future difficulties."

[Cognitive behavioural therapy](#) differs from person-centred as the therapists take more of an active role. [CBT](#) emphasises that thinking affects feelings and behaviours and aims to change unhelpful thought patterns.

"In CBT, people's illogical and unrealistic [thoughts](#) are challenged by the therapist," adds Nippoda. "Through this process, the client becomes able to change their thinking, which then changes their feelings and behaviours."

## Is person-centred counselling available on the NHS?

The NHS has mainly provided cognitive behavioural therapy for psychological and mental health issues. You can self-refer for [talking therapy](#), which will often be a form of CBT.

"Person-centred therapy is also offered on the NHS on a smaller scale," says Nippoda. "However, [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) is not for everybody and the NHS is planning to expand available treatments to other approaches, including person-centred therapy."

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