

The importance of personal therapy for the trainee therapist.

As you train to be a psychotherapist, you will become anchored by the phrase 'you can only take your client as far as you have gone'. So, what does this really mean? It is easy to think you can leave your own problems at the door when your future clients walk into their therapeutic space, but what happens when they present an issue that feels uncomfortably familiar to you? Relatable client issues are inevitable. Many of the themes that present in personal therapy are universal such as loss, relationship breakdown, anxiety, and stress. This means that you yourself will have been exposed to some or all of these themes throughout your life, empowering your humanity but ultimately increasing your vulnerability. Despite being willing to dedicate years of your life to becoming a qualified psychotherapist/counsellor, you, the trainee counsellors, might experience resistance when informed of the requirement to attend mandatory counselling for yourself. Vulnerability is scary but if you cannot be comfortable of that within yourself, how can you ask that of your clients?

Attending personal therapy encourages and supports you to reflect on your own life issues, values, beliefs, and relationships. Without having had a dedicated space to explore these values or issues, one of the previously mentioned universal themes that present in the room could potentially be the first time that you become aware of one of your own issues. Attending personal therapy creates a space for you to have these realisations on your own and in a professional space that is appropriate, safe, and reinforced by boundaries. Unconscious triggers inevitably present and cannot be avoided altogether. However, so many of them can through targeted self-exploration and increased self-awareness gained only through personal counselling.

Through attending your own personal therapy, you are exposed to a very specific kind of professional relationship, whereby you will begin to understand the importance of Carl Rogers core conditions of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957) . This exposure to the core conditions enables you to become aware of your potential to tap into issues that need to be processed. Through this unique experiential learning, you will begin to master your own craft and authentically learn what it means to be vulnerable and release what you once felt important to bury/repress. In order to be a genuinely helpful, supportive, and successful therapist, it is crucial to know the weight of attending therapy and to appreciate how far your client has come by walking through the door for their very first session, as well as appreciate what it is they take on when agreeing to attend weekly. This is why personal therapy is a responsibility for you, the trainee therapist, to look at your own stuff and see for yourself what it is you are asking your clients to do. Let this be your anchor, lean into the vulnerability, discomfort and fear and know that for every step further you make it, you will one day be able to help a client take that one step further too. This is what is meant when you hear the phrase you can only take your client as far as you have gone.

Works Cited

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95-103.