

The Therapist as Self-Discovery Companion

Preview extract from a book in development

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Chapter 5: The Therapist Stance
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Author's introduction

This passage introduces the therapist's stance in Intrapersonal Relational Psychotherapy, the model I'm developing and writing about.

MANUSCRIPT EXTRACT

The phrase I use for the IRP therapist is *Self-Discovery Companion*. It describes someone who accompanies the client in examining how they have come to know and treat themselves, and in discovering what else may become possible. The companionship is purposeful. It is informed by training, experience, ethical responsibilities and a continuing concern for the client's welfare.

Some clients need help untangling relationships in which their needs have repeatedly been overruled. Others understand much of their history but remain caught in a familiar pattern of self-attack. Others are encountering changes in life that make an earlier identity difficult to sustain. The companion does not assume that all begin at the same point or require the same route. The task is to understand the relationship this person has with themselves now, including its existing resources.

The therapist brings something to that enquiry. They can notice a contradiction, offer language for an experience, identify a pattern or ask a question the client has not yet been able to ask. They may offer information or discuss possible courses of action. The client brings the experience of living the life, the meanings attached to it and the right to shape its direction. Neither contribution becomes useful by pretending the other is unnecessary.

In IRP, companionship should make self-discovery less lonely without taking possession of what is discovered. A therapist can become attached to an explanation that seems elegant or clinically familiar. The client then risks being fitted to the explanation. The stance requires a willingness to loosen that attachment and ask whether the proposed understanding genuinely helps this particular person.

This emphasis belongs within an established relational tradition. Rogers (1957) placed congruence, empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard among the conditions of therapeutic change. IRP draws on that account while foregrounding a further question: what is the client learning, through the relationship, about how they might relate to themselves? The therapist's kindness has particular significance when it helps the person recognise that their own experience can be approached with care.

The role also involves room for ordinary human qualities. Humour, warmth and straightforwardness can make exploration feel less forbidding when they fit the person and the moment. None should become a performance the client has to appreciate. The relevant test is whether the way of being supports their freedom to think, feel, disagree and discover.

Reference from the manuscript

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95–103. doi:10.1037/h0045357

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