

With

10 Questions to make our helping relationships, helpful. From 'On Becoming A Person, Carl Rogers (1967)

Supported by research findings (see appendix), Rogers offers 10 questions which these studies and his own clinical experience have raised for him about his practice, and some of the hypothesis / beliefs which guide his behaviour.

1. *Can I be dependably real, or congruent?* By this I mean that whatever feeling or attitude I am experiencing is matched by my awareness of that attitude. When this is true, then I am a unified or integrated person in that moment, and hence I can be whatever I deeply am. I find others experience this as dependable.
2. *Can I express my inner experience unambiguously?* When as a parent or a therapist or a teacher or a leader I fail to listen to what is going on in me, fail because of my own defensiveness to sense my own feelings, my communication confuses the other person and makes them distrustful, though they too may be unaware of what is causing the difficulty. It has made it seem to me that the most basic learning for anyone who hopes to establish any kind of helping relationship is that it is safe to be transparently real. To accept myself to be what I am, and to permit this to show through to the other person, is the most difficult task I know and one I never fully achieve. But to realise that this is my task has been most rewarding – if I am to facilitate the personal growth of others in relation to me, then I must grow, and while this is often painful it is also enriching.
3. *Can I let myself experience positive attitudes toward this other person? Not to fear becoming trapped by them?* This is the opposite of building up distance, aloofness, a “professional” attitude, an impersonal relationship as a defence against what positive feelings might seem to ask of us – from experiencing the caring which would exist if we recognised the relationship as one between two persons. We can learn that it is safe to care.
4. *Can I be strong enough as a person to be separate from the other?* Can I be a sturdy respecter of my own feelings, my own needs, as well as theirs? Am I strong enough in my own separateness that I will not be downcast by their depression, frightened by their fear, nor engulfed by their dependency? When I can freely feel this strength of being a separate person, then I find that I can let myself go much more deeply in understanding and accepting them because I am not fearful of losing myself.

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5. *Am I secure enough within myself to permit them their separateness?* Can I permit them to be what they are – honest or deceitful, infantile or adult, despairing or over-confident? Can I give them the freedom to be? Not to induce conformity to myself, but encourage the authentic freedom of the 'helpee'?
6. *Can I let myself enter fully into the world of the helpee's feelings and personal meanings and see these as they do?* Can I step into their private world so completely that I lose all desire to evaluate or judge it? I am often impressed with the fact that even a minimal amount of empathic understanding – a bumbling and faulty attempt to catch the confused complexity of the client's meaning – is helpful.
7. *Can I accept each facet of this other person which they present to me?* Can I receive them as they are? Can I communicate this attitude? It has been my experience that people cannot change or grow in those areas in which I cannot fully receive them. When I try to discover why I have been unable to accept some aspect, I usually discover that it is because I am myself frightened or threatened by the feelings they present.
8. *Can I act with sufficient sensitivity in the relationship that my behaviour will not be perceived as a threat?* If I can free them as completely as possible from external threat – i.e. from any threat from me – then they can begin to experience and to deal with the internal feelings and conflicts which they find threatening within themselves.
9. *Can I free them from the threat of external evaluation?* These evaluations do not make for personal growth. Curiously, a positive evaluation is as threatening in the long run as a negative one. So I have come to feel that the more I can keep a relationship free of judgement and evaluation, the more this will permit the other person to reach the point where they recognise that the locus of evaluation, the centre of responsibility, lies within themselves.
10. *Can I meet this other individual as a person who is in process of becoming?* Or will I be bound by their past, or my past? If I accept the other person as something fixed, already diagnosed, labelled and classified, already shaped by his past, then I am taking part in confirming this limited hypothesis, (limiting belief). If I accept them as a process of becoming, then I am doing what I can to confirm or make real their potentialities.

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Appendix - Context

In a paper the psychotherapist Carl Rogers delivered to the American Personnel and Guidance Association in 1958, he drew on research – more than 10 studies – to provide evidence for some of the key characteristics of helping relationships, and how he has responded to those insights in his own 'becoming'.

In his findings from the research, Rogers draws the following characters of helping relationships, showing that it is the attitudes and feelings of the helper's, rather than his theoretical orientation, which is important. What emerges as most important is:

1. An attitude of acceptance by the helper – from a study of parenting (Baldwin, 1945)
2. Active personal participation in a person-to-person relationship, less likely to offer interpretation, instruction or advice, and more likely to develop a relationship of felt trust and confidence in the physician (helper) – from a study of successful resident physicians (Whitehorn and Betz, 1956)
3. Clients attributing the changes they've achieved to the trust they had felt for the therapist, being understood by the therapist, a feeling of independence to make their own choices, and the therapist openly stating their feelings; as opposed to therapists who had been remote, distant or overly sympathetic – from a study of patient outcomes undergoing a diverse range of therapeutic treatments (Heine, 1950)
4. An ability to understand the other person's meanings and feelings, sensitivity to the client's attitudes, and warm interest without emotional over-involvement – a study of expert therapists (Fiedler, 1953)
5. An attitude of wanting to understand – (Quinn, 1950)
6. Mutual liking and respect – (Seeman, 1954)
7. An absence of even subtle attitudes of judgement that provoke a psychological anxiety / threat response – (Dittes, 1957)

He explores others, too, that seem to support his view that 'if the helper is congruent or transparent, so that their words are in line with their feelings rather than the two being discrepant; if the helper likes the "helpee", unconditionally; and if the helper understands the essential feelings of the helpee as they seem to the client – then there is a strong probability that this will be an effective helping relationship.'