

Beyond Empathy: A Therapy of Contact-in Relationships

Richard Erskine, Janet Moursund, and Rebecca Trautmann

Relational Needs

loc: 58	Integrative psychotherapy, the method of therapy upon which this book is based, focuses on relationship.
loc: 59	psychologically healthy—
loc: 59	is to be in relationship
loc: 64	Contact is the touchstone of relationship; it is what makes relationship possible.
loc: 69	In a psychologically healthy individual, internal and external contact interact; each depends upon the other, and neither can exist in isolation.
loc: 78	three therapeutic elements
loc: 78	can further this process: inquiry, attunement, and involvement.
loc: 83	help the client to integrate his or her self:
loc: 87	integrates concepts and techniques from a wide range of approaches.
loc: 89	that is logically consistent,
Page: 1	For generations, psychotherapists began their training by learning the skills of active listening. They studied Rogers' (1951) three "necessary and sufficient" growth conditions: genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and accurate empathy. Most—perhaps all—carry these foundation skills into whatever additional approaches they use. Empathic understanding, offered in the context of honesty and respect, is the basic principle that holds the therapeutic relationship together.
Page: 2	It is an integrative therapy with a particular focus on relationship. We believe that psychic dis-ease arises from relational failure: the repeated failure of one's significant relationships to meet basic relational needs. Similarly, we believe that healing occurs in the context of a relationship that actively responds to or meets those needs.
Page: 3	Self—the human self—is a product of relationship,
Page: 4	Humans are unequivocally social animals. The essence of our humanness is inextricably tied up in the ways we relate to others. We are conceived and born within a matrix of relationships, and we live all our lives in a world that is inevitably and constantly populated by other humans
Page: 4	To be human is to be in relationship with others.
Page: 5	Psychotherapy, as we view it, is a relationship that can be utilized to heal the cumulative trauma of previous ruptures in relationships

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Page: 5	Relationship and Becoming Human
Page: 5	It is through relationships that a child learns to make interpersonal contact in increasingly sensitive and inclusive ways. It is through relationships that this same child learns to set and maintain boundaries: he or she learns that I and me are separate and distinct from you. It is through relationships that the child learns to accept and use appropriately all the aspects of internal contact: to recognize needs, to daydream, to be angry or sad or joyful or scared. To join internal with external contact: to ask for help or to enjoy the interpersonal transactions that make us fully human.
Page: 6	Much has been written about trauma and how traumatic events can leave psychic scars that influence a person's ability to function throughout life. Usually, however, it is not the traumatic event itself that creates such scars: it is the event unmitigated by healing through relationship (Erskine, 1993/1997, 1997). A single abusive experience is just that—an experience. For a child who can work through that experience in relationship with a caring and sensitive adult, the experience will become just one memory among many others. What is truly damaging is the absence of a healthy relationship following such an experience. When we have been traumatized by the actions of others or by some circumstance of life, we need a reliable other who will listen and respond to our pain.
Page: 6	Neglect and isolation produce a kind of cumulative trauma, a growing set of expectations that others will never be available and that life is difficult and painful. Many psychotherapists work with people who have suffered from cumulative trauma (Kahn, 1963). These people cannot identify any single or repeated experience that they can use to account for their sense of dis-ease, and they often feel guilty and ashamed about their need for help.
Page: 7	Needs
Page: 7	When a need arises, is met, and fades away, the person can move on to the next experience. When the need is not met, it persists, demanding attention and energy—a sort of psychic glue that refuses to let go and go away. The needs engendered by the absence of healthy relationships, past and present, are no different: they keep reemerging, intruding, and getting in the way of making ongoing contact with self and others.
Page: 8	Since relationships between people are based on contact, a major effect of trauma (both acute and cumulative) is damage to one's ability to form and maintain relationships.
Page: 8	Awareness of anything that might remind one of the old pain must be blocked off: needs, feelings, perceptions. And people.
Page: 8	Gestalt therapy has given us a useful way of understanding how needs shift and change in normal life. It uses the concept of figure-ground relationships: a vast complex of potential needs and wants lie in the background of our

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	<p>experiencing. At any given moment, one of these needs is figural: it comes to the foreground; it enters our awareness. When that need is dealt with appropriately, it recedes into the background and another need becomes the figure (Perls et al., 1951; Perls, 1944/1947). We move ahead, not so much propelled by instinctive drives (as Freud believed) but by acting purposefully to satisfy the shifting patterns of our needs.</p>
Page: 10	<p>Think of a child who is experiencing a need to make physical contact with a nurturing adult. The need that emerges is, “I need touch.” For the child who has no one with whom to meet that need, the next immediate awareness is, “No one is here.” Those two adjacent awarenesses soon fuse: “When I need touch, no one is here.” This is a typical script belief, a conclusion drawn from experience or learned from a significant other that becomes an unquestioned, out-of-awareness part of one’s way of experiencing the world (Erskine & Moursund, 1988/1997; Erskine & Zalcman, 1979; Berne, 1972). The script belief, “When I need touch, no one is here,” implies that the need for physical contact cannot be satisfied—there is no way to meet it. But needs, once experienced, have a demand quality: they must be dealt with somehow. If they cannot be taken care of naturally, by meeting the need, people find a way to close them off artificially: “I don’t really need touch; I’ll entertain myself instead.” So the “need-touch” experience fuses with an artificial closure, a way to push that nagging, demanding need into the background. In the short run, this artificial closure is reinforcing: the need does seem to go away, but the demand abates. And so the pattern repeats itself the next time that need emerges. Repeat, reinforce, repeat, reinforce. Gradually, the whole thing becomes fixated, seamless, and indivisible. What was once an experience of “need touch” is now experienced as a need to entertain oneself; thus the “fixed gestalt” is born. Because the original need has been distorted and the whole pattern fused together, there is no way to undo or adjust it to fit changing circumstances. The need for touch will not be satisfied, because it is no longer allowed into awareness; unsatisfied, it will never fully subside (Perls et al., 1951).</p>
Page: 12	<p>Symptoms, as presented by our clients, begin as coping strategies.</p>
Page: 12	<p>that protect the client from painful awareness.</p>
Page: 12	<p>The external and internal aspects</p>
Page: 12	<p>are mutually reinforcing.</p>
Page: 12	<p>internal splitting and defensiveness are necessary in order to maintain the distortion of interpersonal contact and to limit relationship to the outside world.</p>
Page: 12	<p>restoring contact should cure the disruption and ease the pain.</p>
Page: 12	<p>the therapist needs to</p>

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Page: 12	help the client work through and integrate the old trauma, bring the split-off aspects of self back into awareness, and regain full internal and external contact.
Page: 12	it is based on the unfolding of awareness through relationship.
Page: 121	Relational Needs
Page: 122	Although relational needs are present for both participants in every relationship, the therapeutic relationship is unique in that the needs of the therapist must be secondary to those of the client. The client's relational needs are in the foreground; the therapist's needs are in the background.
Page: 122	Attunement to client needs is essential,
Page: 123	appropriate affective response—genuine, spontaneous, caring—is the essence of a contactful relationship.
Page: 123	it is not the trauma itself that causes lasting damage to the human psyche, but the absence of a healing relationship during or after the trauma that does so
Page: 123	And a healing relationship is one in which relational needs are recognized and responded to appropriately.
Page: 123	our clients experience not only the needs of the here-and-now relationship, but the unmet relational needs of the past as well.
Page: 124	Eight Relational Needs
Page: 124	Security
Page: 124	It is important to know that the relationship is a place where we can be who we really are, where we can show all of ourselves without fear of losing the other person's respect and affection for us.
Page: 124	Security requires more than verbal reassurances from the therapist. It is the visceral experience of having one's vulnerabilities respected and protected.
Page: 124	It is the absence of rejection or ridicule.
Page: 125	In order to be secure in the therapeutic relationship, clients need to know that the therapist will continue to be the therapist and that the commitment to the clients' welfare will not waver.

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Page: 127	Valuing
Page: 127	to be valued, cared about, and thought worthy is an obvious part of any relationship.
Page: 127	It has to do with being understood and being valued for that which is understood
Page: 131	Acceptance
Page: 131	The qualities of the person doing the accepting are critical:
Page: 131	the need for acceptance from such a strong and stable person
Page: 134	Mutuality
Page: 134	someone who has walked in your shoes: who understands what you are experiencing because he or she has experienced something similar, in real life or in imagination.
Page: 134	need for the therapist
Page: 134	also to have an affective and cognitive sense of that experience—
Page: 134	important, though, is the experience of acknowledgment and validation that comes with mutuality.
Page: 137	Self-Definition
Page: 137	the need to experience and to express one's own uniqueness and to have the other person acknowledge and respect that uniqueness.
Page: 137	the client's efforts at self-definition should always be supported and encouraged.
Page: 137	some clients benefit from active and explicit requests for self-defining statements.
Page: 138	Inability to meet the relational need for self-definition is often associated with depression or aggression.

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Page: 140	A significant aspect of self-definition involves disagreement. Saying “No” is the 2-year-old’s favorite way of telling the world who he or she is.
Page: 140	In the process of growing up,
Page: 140	most children are taught that it is not a good thing to say, “No”
Page: 140	because it is rude, uncooperative, and selfish.
Page: 141	Making an Impact
Page: 141	“impacting” another means having the ability to influence the other in some desired way, to change their thinking, to make them act differently, or to create an emotional response in them.
Page: 141	the whole purpose of therapy, after all, is to help the client to change in some way.
Page: 144	Having the Other Initiate
Page: 144	Any relationship in which I must always make the initial approach, always initiate, always take the first step, will eventually become dissatisfying if not painful.
Page: 145	Therapist initiation also underscores the reciprocal nature of the therapeutic relationship.
Page: 147	If you feel manipulated by a client’s “passive” behavior, try translating that behavior as an expression of the client’s need for you to step in and help,
Page: 147	If the client grows confused or does not know what to say, try offering a suggestion.
Page: 148	behavior. Too little initiation,
Page: 148	may create a relational lack that will never be dealt with;
Page: 148	To Express Love
Page: 148	Expressing these feelings is a relational need;

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Page: 148	A therapy of contact-in-relationship creates one of the closest and most intimate of all human connections,
Page: 149	Rather than assuming that an expression of gratitude, a loving gesture, or an affectionate word must be a sign of some hidden agenda on the part of a client, at least until proven otherwise, we believe it is better to assume the opposite.
Page: 149	As clients begin to re-own the denied and dissociated parts of themselves, they are likely to recover the ability to feel more intensely.
Page: 149	will have a strong need to express them.
Page: 149	Because the need for love is present (at least as background) in any relationship, children who are abused or neglected by caretakers find themselves in an emotionally-confusing situation.
Page: 149	to feel the pain of the abuse, they risk losing their love for the abuser.
Page: 149	maintaining the child's own love for the abuser is the only way to have any love at all in the relationship. It is the only way to keep open the possibility that things will get better
Page: 150	This need to feel and to express love toward one's caretaker can be a major factor in working through abuse issues in therapy.
Page: 150	clients who have been abused may experience a sense of protectiveness toward their abusers that is so strong that it interferes with their ability to re-own the aspects of self that have been kept out of awareness