

6 Keys to Client Mental Health

During the 1985 Evolution of Psychotherapy conference, Carl Rogers commented that the philosophical origins of our profession are distinct from the medical model. He viewed the medical model as a narrow and negative orientation to understanding our clients. Rogers encouraged the *“creation of an environment where our clients can grow. We need to nurture growth and help our clients to become more of him or herself.”*

Client growth is the hallmark of mental health. Ryff (1989) has researched extensively the dimensions of essential mental health. Specifically, she identified *self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth* as six key aspects to human growth and development.

- **Self-acceptance:** *“I like most aspects of my personality”*
 - Having a positive view of oneself
 - Acknowledging and accepting the multiple parts of oneself
 - Feeling positive about one’s past

- **Positive relations with others:** *“People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others”*
 - Having warm, satisfying relationships with people
 - Being concerned with the welfare of others
 - Being empathic, affectionate, and intimate with others
 - Understanding the reciprocity of relationships

- **Autonomy:** *“I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus”*
 - Being independent and determining one’s own life
 - Being able to resist social pressures to think or behave negatively
 - Evaluating one’s life by internal standards

- **Environmental mastery:** *“In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live”*
 - Being able to manipulate, control, and effectively use resources and opportunities

- **Purpose in life:** *“Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them”*
 - Having goals in life and a sense of direction in one’s life
 - Feeling that one’s present and past has meaning
 - Having a reason for living

- **Personal growth:** *“I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world”*
 - Feeling a need for continued personal improvement
 - Seeing oneself as getting better and being open to new experiences
 - Growing in self-knowledge and personal effectiveness

Personal growth is a key process of successful counseling and of achieving overall happiness. According to Ryff (1989), “Optimal psychological functioning requires not only that one achieve the prior characteristics, but also that one continue to develop one’s potential, to grow and expand as a person. The need to actualize oneself and realize one’s potentialities is central to the clinical perspectives on personal growth” (p. 1071). As we counsel our clients, create an environment for growth and nurturance and champion the identifying nature of our profession: cultivation of client mental health.

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References

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*, 1069-1081.