

KATHY

Interview with Carl Rogers (1977)

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- Source: Shostrom, E. L. (1975). *Three approaches to psychotherapy II* [Film]. Orange, CA.
- Throughout this interview the responses of the therapist (T) (Rogers), and the client (C) are numbered for easy reference

Introduction of Carl Rogers:

I want to meet this client as a person. And I want our encounter to be that of two persons. I have no desire to have advance information regarding her. I'll work with whatever she wishes to reveal of herself. It's my hope that I can first of all be myself. Be present. Be real in the relationship. I usually find it easy, also, to feel a caring for the client. But I can't predict in advance whether I will feel that. I would like to let myself enter into her inner world of feelings and perceptions as accurately and as sensitively as I can.

In order to experience that kind of empathy, I'll need to lay aside, as far as possible, my own biases and preconceptions. The extent to which I can do that will to a considerable degree determine the progress which she is able to make in the time we have together. I feel I'm a responsible therapist. I'm responsible for doing my best to create a facilitative climate in which she can explore her feelings in the way that she desires, move toward the goals that she wishes to achieve. It's in this deep sense that my approach to therapy is centered in the client.

Aiming to empower him or her to search out and experience the areas of conflict or pain, to perceive self in new ways, to choose to follow new options in behavior. It is my own self I find feelings other than those of caring and of understanding I'll feel free to express these; but as my own feelings, not as any judgment of or guide for the client. Or, especially on a first interview, I may have no other feelings than a prizing of the client and a desire to in-dwell in her experience. There's no way I can tell in advance. For me each encounter with a client is fresh, unpredictable, often enriching to my learning as well as hopefully, enriching the self-learning of the client. So I look forward with eagerness to whatever our time together may bring.

- T: Hi, Kathy.
- C: Hi, Dr. Rogers.
- T: I'm really glad to meet you.
- C: Thank you.
- T: And... I don't know whether you're feeling a little uptight under these lights and all, but I think I'm feeling a little uptight, but I don't think that will last very long. And I have, not having met you before I, I don't have any idea what sort of concerns or issues you want to bring up, but I'd be glad to hear whatever you want to say.
- C1: I'm not quite sure where to begin.
- T1: Uhm, hmm.
- C2: But, uh, some of my concerns are, um, I've become very much aware since my husband was killed last December, um, my own feelings of aloneness.
- T2: Uhm, hmm.
- C3: And I don't think it's directly related to his death because we had been separated for about four years before he was killed. And I, I became aware that, after he died especially, that he was really very important in my life. I was kind of using him as a shield against going out and having other relationships. And now he's gone and I can't use that anymore. And I feel very, very frightened of new male relationships.
- T3: So in some way his, his death, uh, really made you aware of the fear you have of, of new relationships, especially with men.
- C4: Right, right. Definitely, I didn't have him. I didn't have that to hide behind anymore. And, uh, I had a tremendous feeling of loss when he died because I did care for him. But, um, in going out with other men lately, I just have this feeling of, uh, it's very strange. I'm very uncomfortable.
- T4: So that, the feeling you have is something more than just the loss of him. It's a different feeling, a feeling of uneasy or scared or unsure.
- C5: Yes. For a long time I didn't feel like going out and that was fine. I was going through my loss of him, but that was all right. I didn't push it or anything. But just recently I started going out and I've been aware for years of how lonely, I have been very, very lonely. I haven't been dating very much for the last four years, mostly just working and taking care of the kids. And um, I think I'm keeping myself in kind of a no-win situation where I'm really lonely. And yet it's kind of like I'm keeping myself there because I've got a guard around me, and I'd kind of like to break out of that.

- T5: It's as though you're in some way sort of responsible for your loneliness.
- C6: Yes, I know that. I'm very... I am.
- T6: And that's something you'd like to break out of that shell, or that safeguard that you've been hiding behind.
- C7: Part of me does.
- T7: Part of you does. Ok, ok.
- C8: Part of me says, "No way".
- T8: So it really is a very ambivalent, two-way thing. (C takes a breath) I suspect it's been pretty comfortable, um, behind that safeguard; it's more of risk if you break out. Is that part of it?
- C9: I, I can almost, well I was going to say I can almost go back to the point where I really built up that safeguard in me when my marriage was going bad. Over five years ago and I could feel myself, and I know I did, I withdrew and I've been withdrawn ever since. It's kind of like, "No more. I don't want any more hurt." So...
- T9: Uhm, hmm, it's just too damn risky, taking the possibility of being hurt again. And you've withdrawn from that for a long time.
- C10: Uhm, hmm. See, and I've been aware of this for a long time too, but I never go beyond the awareness level.
- T10: So that the knowledge isn't new, it's the um, question of what you do about it.
- C11: That's right, that's right. How can one stay safe and still be open?
- T11: The way you shake your head makes me feel, "I don't see any way."
- C12: I don't, I really don't. If I did, maybe I probably would have done it a long time ago, but I don't.
- T12: Just seems kind of unbearable to, to be, open with a person and yet feel safe.
- C13: I, I think I'm a pretty open person to begin with. And uh, everything is fine in a relationship as long as the focus does not turn onto me.
- T13: I see, I see. If you can keep the focus on the other person you're ok.
- C14: That's right. And the focus on me up to a certain level, but not in the romantic kind of a way. A friendship, I would value that.

T14: But love, you want to, keep that at arms length.

C15: But you know, that's important though, because um, if a person doesn't want to really be your friend, how can you have them for a lover?

T15: Uhm, hmm.

C16: No way.

T16: Not quite sure I get that. You mean friendship is a necessary first step, is that what you're saying, or...

C17: It is for me.

T17: Yeah. (Long pause)

C18: We've gotten to the point where I won't go beyond.

T18: Uhm, hmm, that's what I was sort of thinking. You've thought your way this far, but then where do you...

C19: I've laid the cards out and that's all I want to play.

T19: So that, in this relationship it's like in your other relationships.

C20: That's right.

T20: It goes so far and then, "Let's stop. That's as far as I want to go." (Pause) (C: Hmm.) If you go any further, there's a risk, isn't it?

C21: Yes, it is.

T21: And I think your eyes tell me you're feeling that risk right now. (Pause)

C22: So here I am. (Pause) I feel like saying to myself, "Well you got this far. It's not so bad." (Laughter) It's all right; I make the best out of it.

T22: It's all right up to this point.

C23: Yeah, right.

T23: So let's laugh it off.

C24: Yeah, make a joke. Talk about something else.

T24: Could, very easy to run away from yourself.

C25: See, but that's it. I made a bargain with myself. There's two parts: the part that understands and it's all right, and the other part that's scared silly. But

the part that understands isn't going to force the part that's scared. When it's safe enough, I'll be kind to myself.

- T25: And let the scared part come out when, when you're ready for it, when...
- C26: When the scared part feels ready. It's as if part of me is in a cave away from the rest of the world. But it cert-, I certainly can't come out of that cave, unless I know that it's all right, that there won't be a lot of pain to greet me. What's the sense in coming out? So it's up to the best of me to make sure that there are nurturing people around me.
- T26: And when you feel safe enough, either in this relationship or with other people, then you can let yourself come out of the cave and let the scared part of you emerge.
- C27: That's right. That's why, that's why I value the friendships with men and with other people. I don't care for the rest. Not to say that I don't need it, I do, but I need the friendship, and the safety and the security of that first. I, um, took a trip not too long ago and I met a man that I had known years and years ago, only very briefly. And I met him again I went out with him. And he was such a lovely person, such a kind person, and a very ... a very good person. Anyway, it was in the mountains and as I was driving home from his, um, his home, looking at the mountains, I, I had this feeling. It's kind of funny, I haven't read the Carlos Castaneda books, but I know the concept of the third eye. And I was feeling as I was driving through those mountains that, "Now it's all right for my third eye to come out, and to be able to perceive." And I felt so good. But when I came back home, I've kind of busied myself with woodworking, and the house, and that kind of thing. And I'm kind of back in the same environment, in the same predicament. But I know that I, I consciously at times choose between focusing in on things and not.
- T27: I'm, I'm really interested in that experience, when you were away from him, then there was just a little while, when it felt safe. And you could perceive...
- C28: When I was driving.
- T28: Yeah, when you were driving and you could perceive yourself and the whole situation, I guess.
- C29: I could perceive, it doesn't have much to, it did have to do with him, but I could perceive myself, and my closed-offedness. And at that time I was open, and I had that perception of myself and that awareness that I had been closed. And that, when I was driving through that canyon I was feeling very open and now I could have my understanding, and it was all right.
- T29: You let yourself for that time come out of the cave.

C30: Yeah, yes, it was great. And then he came to see me. He flew in to see me a couple of weeks ago. And um, I felt, see I was aware I had this memory of that opening up and so I felt more guarded.

T30: Ah, is that right.

C31: But kind of slowly unpeeling layers, or slowing coming up.

T31: But somehow, having, having come out of the cave, you were afraid you might come out of the cave too easily.

C32: Too, yeah that's right, that's right.

T32: "So, watch out, be careful".

C33: That's right.

T33: You sound like a very tender, vulnerable part of you that lives in that cave.

C34: I think my most tender part. (C cries)

T34: Your most?

C35: My most tender part.

T35: Your most tender part. Uhm, hmm. Uhm, hmm. Uhm, hmm. It's really a very precious part of you that you keep in the cave

C36: (C takes long breath) I, for a long, long time, I've had the feeling of hopelessness of ever coming out. And do you know life is an existence without all of you...

T36: Without?

C37: ...all of you.

T37: Yeah, I see.

C38: Right.

T38: So, you, the hopelessness, I gather is because you know you're not living with all of you. Part of you you're keeping well hidden.

C39: That's right.

T39: Well guarded. And it isn't really living, unless you can live it with all of you.

C40: That's right, it's just doing things, just doing things. The part that, you know, that I consciously avoid are the arts. The things that I love, music, theater, paintings, that kind of thing.

T40: Those are the things that touch your feelings.

C41: I don't get to the core.

T41: Ok, things that touch your feelings or touch the core of you, those you want to stay away from.

C42: That's right.

T42: They got, they get too close, too close to this very tender part of you.

C43: (Pause) I've reached another stop.

T43: Uhm, hmm, but you felt safe enough to let out a little bit more and now it's come to another stop.

C44: (Pause) I have to give equal time to all of my dimensions. We just have, I just felt, you know, in touch with my vulnerability, but now I'm feeling angry.

T44: Ok.

C45: Like, "It's none of your business..."

T45: Uhm, hmm.

C46: ...what I'm feeling.

T46: Uhm, hmm, what am I doing getting that close to the vulnerable part of you? "Damn it, stay away."

C47: That's right, that's right. What do you want to do that for?

T47: Uhm, hmm. Uhm, hmm.

C48: You've got other things to do. (C laughs)

T48: So you're putting up all kinds of guards against me, and striking out, "What the hell are you doing", and, "getting so close to the vulnerable part of me, why don't you go do something else", hmm?

C49: That's the part that keeps me lonely.

T49: Uhm, hmm. So that, that pushing away part, that kind of angry, "Get away from me" part, is what keeps you very lonely.

- C50: It's like I don't really trust that I can trust you to know that. I can tell this and that. You may feel a little something about it, but what then? You know, I mean you know, "It's a nice story, so, big deal, something else to do".
- T50: What I hear is that, is that you feel that I don't really care, just a story...
- C51: That's right.
- T51: Just something... but what if I do ...
- C52: You know...
- T52: But what if I do care.
- C53: (C takes a breath) I want to make a joke and say, "Aw, go on." (C laughs) You know, um, I'm a nurse and, a psychiatric nurse, worked in a psychiatric hospital last year. One of the big things there, the patients got a lot of points if they would talk in group. I mean everybody wants you to talk. You know, the good patient talks. And I thought, you know, anybody can talk. The reason why people don't talk is not because they can't talk, it's because they don't know how people are going to respond. That's where it's at. So I don't think the patients were not being good patients. I don't think they were being bad patients because they weren't talking. I think that the staff should have a demerit for not responding. Ok, these patients talked, now how do you respond? Makes it a whole new ballgame.
- T53: Yeah.
- C54: And so now, I talked. (C laughs)
- T54: You've earned some points.
- C55: Yeah now I earned my points, that's true. But, um, I think that's the fear of everyone. It's not so much revealing themselves, but being cared about. That's my fear. That's my fears after I've revealed myself, "Who cares?"
- T55: It's uh, when you've let out a tender part of yourself, then it's damned important to know, "Does this other person care? Does it make any difference?"
- C56: My husband used to say he cared, but it was just words, it was words. He um, I think he cared as much as he could care but, he had so many conflicts inside of himself that he didn't even see me as a person. Didn't even see me. It's not that he didn't want to care. It's that he couldn't, he was too busy with himself. But I understand that. And I understand that with other people, too. But see I just can't go around revealing myself all the time to people who are just too busy with themselves.
- T56: Uhm, hmm. You need a response, you need a caring, you need to make a difference to somebody.

- C57: That's it, not to someone who'll say, "Oh, well, Kathy, I really care," and then I don't see them for a couple of years. Or, "I'll call you" and then they never call. You know, when I first split up from my husband, I would go to these different functions, not with a date, but with friends, and meet a man and he'd say, "I'll call you". And for a while there I'd be sure that I wasn't home, because I couldn't stand to know if he didn't call. And that way I didn't know if he didn't call, so there was a possibility that he had called. But I wasn't home, so how could I know. So with that, that, that vulnerable I was really in touch with it.
- T57: It makes so much difference to you to know whether the other person is going to really respond. "When they say they care, do they care?"
- C58: That's right, caring people, will call you, or drop by, "How's it going?", that kind of thing.
- T58: And that's not enough?
- C59: No, it would be enough, if they would do that. (C laughs) That'd be just great, that would be just great. I don't think I really want that much from another person. The morsels are fine, but I'm not even getting the morsels.
- T59: Uhm, hmm, it isn't as though you want a whole meal, it's that...
- C60: Yeah, I mean I could work up to it all right. That's why I think with this friend it was nice. And may have gone back in but I felt myself, come alive a little bit. A little bit of magic had come into my life, and that was nice. And I'd rather not come out all at once and run back in. I'd rather come out bit-by-bit and stay out. But see the thing of it is that, and like we're talking now, a little bit, or I'm thinking about the focus of the relationship, it has to be this male-female kind of thing. And, um, I don't think that what I need to do is to come out and have love, and then, think about a male-female relationship. But I don't know how I can come out too much without a man (C laughs).
- T60: That's kind of a, contradiction, in a way. A dilemma, it's a dilemma. (T laughs) But you feel what you want first is a relationship with a person, only it helps if it's a man.
- C61: That's right. It must be a man. Or...
- T61: It isn't just better if it's a man, it's a necessity.
- C62: It must be a man, that's right, because that's where my fear is.
- T62: So that's where you fear is, a fear of a relationship with a man. And yet, you'd like to be able to really come out of the cave first, before it became a man-woman, sexual relationship, or anything like that. Is that what you're saying?
- C63: I'd like to have a caring relationship. And its kind of funny, it's like a little girl wanting a man to take her out of the cave, and, care about. I'll put it

back on me, I feel like a little girl. Someone to care about me and to know that I'm comfortable and that I'm all right, and then ask for himself.

T63: And then ask?

C64: For himself, of the relationship.

T64: But first, you'd like to have a man come at least to the entrance of the cave and take the hand of you as a little girl and lead you gently out, caring for you. Then maybe, other kinds of things might happen.

C65: (Pause) The little girl is the non-sexual, being. That's right, "Don't use me sexually first. And then if you like it good enough, keep coming back." That's what I don't want.

T65: The little girl, the little girl will grow up if you care enough, for her.

C66: That's right, and can respond as a woman, if the other is there.

T66: Can you tell him that? Could you tell him that?

C67: I'm confused, do I tell one man that, or is that what I...

T67: I was thinking of this, this one man.

C68: Oh, this individual.

T68: Uhm, hmm.

C69: Oh, I think I could tell him that, I know I could. But you know, I start putting him down. (T laughs) I know that's just, my sister told me, she said, "That's just because you're scared." Because I told her the kind of man I would, I thought I would be comfortable with, and he is this kind of person. And then I start telling her all these bad things. And she said, "Nobody would be perfect. You would do this with anyone, some." But with this person I think I could.

T69: Maybe you could let him know what you need.

C70: I'd like to be able to carry that over. I suppose maybe, maybe I'm glossing that over or something, but I'd like to carry it over in my relationships with everyone. To get what I need from the relationship, and not focusing in on the other person. See, I think the way I am I'm the perfect nurse, the perf-, you know, anything for somebody else. And that's fine, focus in on them any time. But on myself, like I'm too scared to do that. Like that's a no-no. But I'd like to be able to do that, focus in on my own needs, first. But I feel kind of selfish when I look at it that way. I feel like a taker instead of a giver and that's got a negative, connotation.

T70: You're so much a nurse that when you even think of saying, "But I need this for myself." that seems kind of wrong, selfish.

C71: "Wait a minute, you're the nurse. What is this?"

T71: "You're supposed to be caring for the other person."

C72: That's right.

T72: But once in a while you realize, "I'd like to care for myself, first."([Pause])

C73: Seems awful. (C laughs)

T73: Just to say that.

C74: "You're so naughty, just thinking about it." (C laughs)

T74: Just to say that, seems, "What a selfish person I am."

C75: Yeah.

T75: "Terrible, awful."

C76: I feel wicked, but I enjoy it. I'm enjoying thinking about it.

T76: It's fun just to imagine, "I might want something for myself, first."

C77: It's really a lovely fantasy to be completely narcissist, completely self-centered, and into pleasure, and into comfort. (C sighs)

T77: Just being good to yourself.

C78: But in a way, you know, in a way I am being good to myself by keep that vulnerable part of me away until it's safe. Because not everybody would be good to you, not everybody would be kind. There are people who would use you up, and not bat an eyelash, and not even think about it.

T78: So you have a real respect for your, for your instinct for preserving yourself.

C79: That's right.

T79: You can't trust everyone, not everyone would care. (Pause)

C80: I was just smiling, I was thinking, but I care.

T80: And you say that with a smile, but that's pretty deep too isn't it?

C81: Uhm, hmm. I do care.

T81: "I care for myself".

- C82: I like caring. I like it. I like caring for myself, and not giving away every part of my, just because some Tom, Dick, or Harry wants it.
- T82: "I really prize myself, and I'm proud of that. I'm not going to just give myself away."
- C83: That's right. It's nice to have that feeling of caring for myself, that's good. But you know since Dick died, I was thinking, I could die tomorrow. Any of us could, and, I'm missing, I want to have more. I don't want to just care for myself, I want to, I want to be able to care for myself and at the same time be able to take in life more. But I'm not doing, see I've closed it off, if I could figure out some way of doing that, then, you're smiling (C laughs), so that'd be just great.
- T83: To be able to care for yourself, and yet open yourself up to life, and somehow that also tied up with the realization that, "You know, death will come one day." You'd like to live before you die.
- C84: That's right, I want, I saw a card one time that said, "Born, and then died." And you open it up and it says, "In between, he lived" or something like that. That's what I would like for myself, a little life in between the born and the death, a little more life, and pleasure. See that's what I'm missing. Deep down inside is the, pleasure, experience of pleasure and joy, those kinds of experiences. I've been happy. I have fun. I do enjoy my children, but it's on a limited level.
- T84: You don't really open yourself to joy. I guess fun, yes sure.
- C85: But joy is on a deeper level, you see, so... I want to say, "But how've you been lately?" (C laughs).
- T85: Well, "Lets change the subject." (T laughs).
- C86: Yes, "How's your wife, your house?" all that.
- T86: Um, it'd be pretty nice to just, run away from some of this.
- C87: It would, yes.
- T87: Just talk.
- C88: Well let's just have a rest for a while.
- T88: I'm impressed with the fact that when you need a rest, you really take it.
- C89: Oh, thank you. I was thinking my humor comes to the rescue, "Give me a breather."
- T89: It's one of the ways in which you preserve yourself.

- C90: That's right; I had a dream one time. And I dreamed that I was on a sled with two other girls, and we were going down a snowy hill. And we were going too fast. And I told them to stop, they had to get off, otherwise they were going to crash into this train station at the bottom of the hill. And they wouldn't believe me. So I got off, and they went on. And I side-stepped in the snow all the way down the hill, but there were lots of trees where I was side stepping, and I was hanging onto the trees, one by one as I went down. And when I got to the bottom of the hill, the sled had crashed, or something. And then I thought to myself, "That means, that has to do with me. Part of me would go too fast, and..."
- T90: And, and this morning has been an example of the fact that you're not going to go so fast that you crash. (C: That's right.) You're going to go at your own pace if its step-by-step down the hill, oh, that's the pace you have.
- C91: That must be it.
- T91: Maybe that's a good stopping point.

Rogers' Post-Session Commentary

I found it fascinating, the way in which this client very slowly lowers her defenses. I think those defenses could be broken through, but that in my estimation would not be as helpful as letting her proceed at her own pace. I think the client learns more that way. We did progress in the interview. We went from her perception of loneliness as her problem, to her fear of her relationships with men, to her feelings about letting the tender, vulnerable part of herself come out of a cave, to the recognition of the little girl in her that wants to be tenderly let out.

She then began to get to the recognition of the deep, of the pain that is deep inside of her. That is unspeakable, almost unbearable. We saw her partially experience that pain, in spots, and then draw back.

Then finally we saw the feelings that she has, that perhaps at bottom she is completely unlovable, one of the commonest feelings that people have. I thought that the dream at the end was almost a perfect description of the hour. She went deeper into herself, step-by-step, by slow degrees, cautiously and guardedly because she didn't want to crash into that pain. And she took resting times between the steps.

So I thought that described the whole progress of the hour. I feel that it was a working interview, not highly dramatic, and much of therapy is work, and this was a good example of it. I felt present to her. I felt a companion in her exploration. If I were to continue to see her I think that she would gradually move toward experiencing that care of herself of which she is quite frightened. I like the way we got into metaphors.

Clients can say more in metaphors than they can say, than they dare to say openly. And I like the way I responded to the metaphors. I liked the way she was able to express her anger toward me whenever she felt it, whenever she felt that she was close to a dangerous part of her experiencing a painful part of her experiencing and that was easy for me to accept that anger. I felt good about this as a first interview.