

Human Connection: Why It's Vital in Mental Health Support Services

How does the human connection impact on therapy?

In therapeutic settings, neural mechanisms that underpin human connection are harnessed to **create a safe, trusting environment where clients can explore their thoughts and emotions**. The therapeutic relationship becomes a significant tool for healing, as it **taps into these foundational neural pathways, facilitating emotional regulation, stress reduction, and personal growth**.

Beyond activating these pathways, therapy also plays a key role in **re-building and re-mapping neural circuits through the process of neuroplasticity**. As clients repeatedly experience safety, trust, and empathy in therapy, their brains begin to **form and**

strengthen new neural connections. This re-mapping helps the brain to adapt, **replacing maladaptive patterns with healthier ones**, both consciously and subconsciously.

The therapeutic relationship also serves as **a practical template for clients to internalise and replicate in other relationships**. By consistently experiencing a positive, bounded connection, clients effectively "train" their brains to respond differently, reinforcing these new pathways. Over time, this neuroplastic change promotes lasting improvements in the client's ability to form and maintain healthy, fulfilling connections with others.

So what is human connection?

Human connection is the deep and intrinsic bond that forms between us all, **rooted in our biology and essential to our mental and emotional wellbeing**.

From a neuroscience perspective, human connection is underpinned by a complex interplay of neural circuits, neurochemicals, and brain structures that facilitate our ability to empathise,

bond, and communicate with one another. Mirror neurons, oxytocin, dopamine, our prefrontal cortex and our amygdala all work together, and **in conjunction with other people, to create connections with each other for safety, fostering trust, empathy, and emotional regulation**.

To what extent does human connection determine how successful therapy is?

Research consistently shows that **the quality of the therapeutic relationship – often referred to as the "therapeutic alliance" or "therapeutic relationship" – is one of the most significant predictors of positive outcomes in therapy**. This alliance is characterised by mutual trust, empathy, and a strong emotional bond between the therapist and client, which allows for openness, vulnerability, and engagement in the therapeutic process.

The extent to which human connection influences therapeutic success can be understood through its impact on the client's willingness to explore difficult emotions and experiences. **A strong connection with a therapist provides a sense of safety and support, encouraging clients to undertake difficult or tricky emotional work**. This safe, relational environment is

so important for clients to confront and work through past traumas, cognitive distortions, and emotional challenges. **Without a solid connection, clients may struggle to fully engage in therapy, potentially limiting the effectiveness of the interventions**.

As previously mentioned, the therapeutic relationship **activates and strengthens neural pathways associated with trust, empathy, and emotional regulation**. This neuroplastic process helps rewire the brain, **leading to lasting change**. Therefore, the success of therapy isn't just determined by the techniques used, but also **by the strength of the human connection between therapist and client**.



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What else determines how successful therapy is?

In addition to human connection, the success of therapy is significantly influenced by the client's motivation and engagement. **A client who is actively involved, open to exploring their thoughts and emotions, and committed to the therapeutic process is more likely to have a positive experience of therapy**, and make progress or lasting change. This is often driven by the client's readiness for change, and how effective they believe the therapy will be. The therapist's competence and approach also has a huge impact: **a skilled therapist who uses techniques and tools tailored to the client's specific needs can greatly enhance the therapeutic process.**

The ability of the therapist to adapt their methods and demonstrate cultural attunement further strengthens the therapy's effectiveness.

The choice of therapeutic modality, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), person-centred therapy, or psychodynamic therapy (to name a few of many), is another important factor in whether or not therapy will be successful.

Different approaches may be more effective for certain issues/people, and selecting the right one based on the client's needs or wants is essential.

A therapist who can flexibly integrate multiple approaches to suit the client's unique circumstances often achieves better outcomes.

What mechanisms can we put in place to promote and support human connection in therapy? i.e. how can we offer people therapy that works?

First and foremost, we should be following the decades of evidence that shows that therapy is most effective when we support the creation of a strong therapeutic alliance by offering clients autonomy and choice in therapy.

When clients are empowered to choose their therapist and therapeutic modality, they're more likely to feel engaged and motivated, which allows them to connect more deeply with therapy and their therapist and therefore, naturally, leads to better outcomes.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to the uniquely unique nature of human beings. Flexibility and adaptability is fundamental to counselling & psychotherapy practice. Unlike single-skilled therapists, such as those trained exclusively in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), counsellors and psychotherapists are often trained in multiple therapeutic tools and modalities (many including CBT).

This broad training allows them to tailor their approach to the specific needs of each client, working in a more reflexive and holistic manner. The NCPS proposes allowing direct referrals to the 70,000+ of accredited counsellors and psychotherapists that are on Accredited Registers, significantly reducing waiting times and as an alternative to referrals to NHS Talking Therapies for those who would prefer this approach. This would not only increase accessibility, but also enhance the quality of human connection in therapy by allowing clients to choose their preferred therapists from a diverse range of therapists. By reducing barriers to support and offering more immediate access to therapy, the NCPS's proposed solution moves us towards a more responsive and client-centred mental health support system, ultimately improving the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions.

Do you want to read the research that supports this briefing?

- [Patient preference in psychological treatment and associations with self-reported outcome: national cross-sectional survey in England and Wales](#)
- [Common Factors in Psychotherapy](#)
- [Some implicit common factors in diverse methods of psychotherapy](#)
- [Accredited Register Programme](#)
- [Public Perceptions of AI and Counselling & Psychotherapy in Mental Health Support](#)



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