

Some Words Concerning the Therapist-Client Relationship from the Perspective of James Bugental, Ph.D (Excerpt)

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The ideal therapist-client relationship as one that best facilitates the client's inner exploration (Bugental, 1978¹). The method of achieving this relationship depends on the type of client, stage of therapy, and other factors. However, certain qualities characterize a successful therapeutic relationship. These include, mutuality, respect, and vitality (in addition to honesty, and trust) (Bugental, 1978).

Mutuality refers to the commitment to collaboration, and acknowledgement of a shared common bond that transcends personal differences. "This is the bond of being human, of being incomplete, of being subject to fate and frustrations, of seeking to have good lives, of caring about what happens" (Bugental, 1978, pp. 66-67). Although they likely commence their relationship with great differences, ideally over time, the therapist-client bond draws strength from this commonality.

Respect implies that the role of client is imbued with dignity, and being chosen as therapist is an honor (Bugental, 1978). It means, too, that both client and therapist recognize the gravity of the endeavor, and are committed to the intensive work that is required. According to Bugental, this is because,

in a very real way they are engaged in a struggle with death for the life of one or both of them. The death of vitality, of possibility, of hope, or actualizing one's potential is a very real tragedy, and its reversal is a genuine triumph for the human spirit. (p. 69)

¹ James Bugental (1915—2008) was a brilliant psychologist, author and theorist whose works I have found be both inspiring and enlightening.

Vitality means that the focus of therapy is life itself (Bugental, 1978). The available experience of human life is richer, deeper, and more mysterious than most people wish to acknowledge. Depth psychotherapy seeks to help clients delve into those parts of themselves that are not necessarily socially acceptable: “sources of violence, murder, suicide, rape, . . . and other impulses and actions that civilizations and intelligent people abhor” (p. 70). A person is only truly safe from his or her most destructive impulses when those feelings are identified, explored, and understood.

References

Bugental, J. F. T. (1978). *Psychotherapy and process*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.