

# A Purposeful Approach to Therapeutic Use of Self: Maximising the impact of Occupational Therapy in Complex Rehabilitation.

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## INTRODUCTION, AIMS & OBJECTIVE

Therapeutic use of self in healthcare involves the therapist's healing influence, purposeful use of personality, judgments, and opinions, and building strong client relationships through interpersonal skills. (2,3,7,11,12,14). It is considered a highly influential aspect of therapy. (2,3,7,11,12,14) However, Occupational Therapy research shows that formal teaching is limited, and therapists often have low self-efficacy in this area (11,12).

Given its impact on client outcomes, a thorough understanding and application of relevant approaches and techniques are essential for quality rehabilitation, especially in complex cases such as brain injuries and the skill can be used with both the injured persona and families.

The author completed a literature search and personal reflection with the aims to:

1. Define therapeutic use of self for Occupational Therapists in Complex Rehabilitation.
2. Identify key components.
3. Compile practical activities for reflective practice and skill acquisition.

## METHODOLOGY

Using EBSCO Discovery Services and Databases, CINAHL, MEDLINE, and the Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, a search for "therapeutic use of self" yielded 29 peer-reviewed articles. Fourteen articles were selected for full review based on their abstracts.

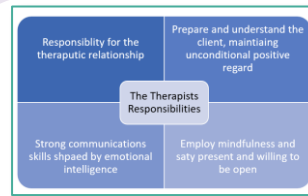
Definitions and key components of therapeutic use of self were noted, and themes identified. This was used to develop a proposed definition for Therapeutic Use of Self for Occupational Therapists in Complex Rehabilitation and provided an overview of key skills.

A table of activities that can be used to develop, maintain, and enhance skills in practice was devised.

## RESULTS

The 14 fully reviewed articles were analysed for descriptions of therapeutic use of self, key components, and tools for skill development, monitoring, and maintenance.

The analysis highlighted the therapist's responsibility in the therapeutic relationship, emphasizing 4 core elements – 1. Overall responsibility for the relationship(s) (1,4,10), 2. authentic and effective communication (1,4,5,8,12,13,14), and a compassionate, attentive approach (1,3,4,5,10,12,13), 3. A commitment to prepare, understanding the client and approaching with unconditional positive regard (1,4,10), and finally

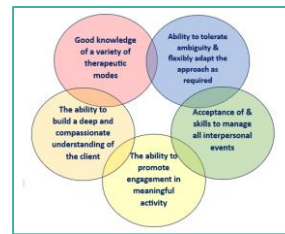


The 4 themes found relating to the therapists responsibility

4. Therapists must also practice mindfulness, both to continuously monitor and adapt to the clients needs (2,8,9,11,12,13,14,15), but also understanding their own emotional state, triggers, and boundaries before engaging with clients (3,4,10,14).

Some cross-over is seen in the Key Skills. Developing and maintaining self-awareness of one's own interpersonal skills and an awareness of potential triggers was regarded as highly important in many articles (1,2,8,10,11,13,15). Accepting and working with challenging interpersonal events (2,8,9,11,13,14,15), recognising clients may have had traumatic experiences (1,2,8,12,13) and that difficult reactions can be positive learning opportunities if the therapist is equipped to help the client to navigate them (2,8,9,11).

Visual representation of the 5 keys which can be blended to achieve an optimal therapeutic relationship



Several articles discussed the Intentional Relationship Model (IRM), a comprehensive training program for therapeutic relationship skills. It describes many useful therapeutic modes the therapist might adopt. The IRM's has its strengths, although the structured taught approach may be inaccessible to some and could restrict natural, intuitive skills. (2, 6) However, awareness of therapeutic styles enables purposeful interactions and the model is one of many formal training options clinicians could utilise to enhance their knowledge and understanding of different therapeutic modes and how to manage challenging interpersonal events (2,6,8,12,13,14).

The use of meaningful occupations as mechanisms for change and primary goals was a frequent theme (2,11,12,15), perhaps unsurprising given 8/14 articles were found in Occupational Therapy publications.

The majority of articles did not focus on the tools and strategies to develop and maintain the skills needed to effectively implement therapeutic use of self, however general themes were noted and alongside some specific techniques.

The author suggests this as a good starting point for individual therapist to create an individualised suite of activities to implement.

Table of suggested activities for developing and maintaining skills.

Training	Grounding	Self-reflection
Interpersonal relationships	Pausing at the door	Journaling
Communication	Consciously opening ones heart and mind	Discussion with colleagues
Trauma informed delivery	The simple act of noticing	Supervision and feedback

## Defining the therapeutic use of self for occupational therapist working in complex rehabilitation.

*"The therapeutic use of self during meaningful activities promotes recovery, wellbeing, and return to meaningful occupations. By observing and listening to clients, we tailor a flexible interaction style and create a safe space for collaborative dialogue. Through empathy, compassion, and unconditional positive regard, we guide them through their ups and downs, fostering a healthy working relationship and maximising results."*

## CONCLUSION

Via the literature search and personal reflection's the author has increase confidence in how therapeutic use of self is integrated into the their own practice and hopes to have provided tools others clinicians can use to support ongoing development in this area. This includes a clear outline of the therapist's responsibilities, five core skills to check knowledge, skills, and actions against, as well as a list of relevant CPD activities. This approach allows for more purposeful use of self and helps identify learning areas to enhance flexibility in managing complex caseloads, benefiting clients and families.

The literature search was limited by using only the key phrase "therapeutic use of self," though a good range of articles with diverse perspectives was still found. Further work should explore specific techniques for training, grounding, and self-reflection.

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