


# **Therapist Perspectives on the use of Congruence with children in School-Based Counselling**

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# Why Congruence?

## Why school-based counselling?

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- The importance of congruence in the therapeutic encounter
- My interest in the notion of congruence
- Gaps in research at the time



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# My definition of congruence

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## Therapist genuineness - *internal congruence*

The counsellor is sensitive and open to his or her own feelings and experiences and neither alters or rejects them (Sanders 2011, Mearns and Thorne 2013).

## Therapist communication – *external/outer congruence*

The counsellor articulates their experience, feelings and awareness of being in the relationship with the client and communicates to the client what is conjured up in him/her only when they are relevant to the client (Embleton-Tudor et al 2004, Lietaer 2001, Rowan and Jacobs 2002)



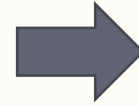
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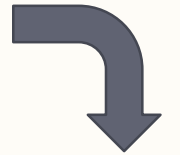
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# Method

Semi-structured  
interviews with 4  
therapists



3 Person-centred  
therapists  
1 integrative therapist  
2 Primary school & 2  
Secondary school



Interviews were  
transcribed and  
analysed using  
Interpretative  
Phenomenological  
Analysis (IPA)

Analysis with two  
university tutors lead to  
identification of two  
superordinate themes,  
each with subthemes



Through analysis a  
total of 16 themes  
were found



Superordinate  
themes and  
subthemes

## Intrapersonal Congruence

## Navigating Dual Terrains in the School Environment

- Insightful Incongruence
  - Being Your True Self
  - The Importance of Self-Disclosure
  - Barriers to Congruence
- Counsellor Role Vs Teacher Role
  - The Limits of Counselling in School



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# Intrapersonal Congruence

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“

*...the congruence is within me.*

*I think that thing about congruence, especially with children, that thing of...it's not always about saying and expressing what is going on in you.*

*Meg*

”

**Risk, challenge & voicing the ‘unvoicable’ - this is not what congruence is when working therapeutically with children**



# Insightful Incongruence

*‘a knowing  
incongruence’*

Withholding

Holding back

Not always expressing feelings when working with children

Participants described the ineffectiveness of being completely honest and outwardly congruent when working with children, but on the flipside of this, the significance of being aware that they are being incongruent in holding on to thoughts and emotions and understanding their reasons for doing this.

“ *It’s about having a real self-knowing...’, ‘I needed to find a way of just sitting with that, but knowing it was there. So the congruence in that situation was with me*

*Meg*

”



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**The 'communication' aspect of congruence**

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“

...congruence is more about the naturalness, the honesty, the openness, the kind of being present, being yourself...

”

*Deana*



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## Third Subtheme

**I think the relationship is always key and if they don't feel like they can trust you, or they don't know anything about you ...I feel that children, more than with adults, children need small self-disclosures.**

*Paul*



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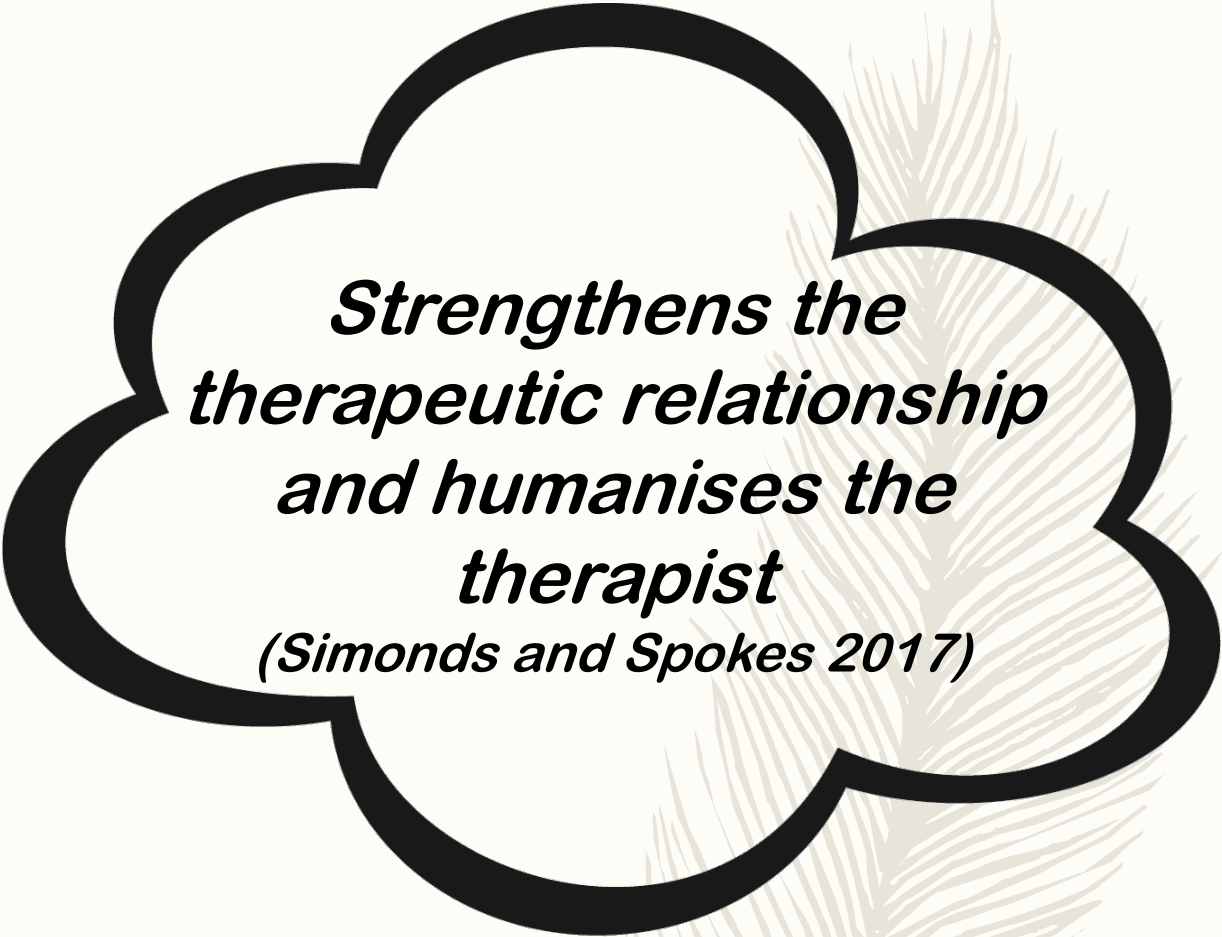
**The  
Importance  
of Self-  
Disclosure**

A large, light green feather graphic is positioned on the right side of the slide, behind the text 'The Importance of Self-Disclosure'.



**Inappropriate and  
risky**

*(Savic-Jabrow 2015,  
Sheperis et al 2017)*



***Strengthens the  
therapeutic relationship  
and humanises the  
therapist***

*(Simonds and Spokes 2017)*



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#### Fourth Subtheme

- Awkwardness, discomfort & embarrassment

*“And I’ve been in that situation with children and I’m thinking okay am I going to be honest here and say actually I don’t like that, it’s making me feel uncomfortable? But [also thinking] this is the child’s frame of reference, this is where, if I kind of say something about how I am feeling uncomfortable it’s going to stop them from releasing whatever they need to release”*

*Mark*

## Barriers to Congruence



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## Barriers to Congruence

Triggers / dual role of being a mother and a therapist

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*“...I wouldn’t say to a child well I can see where your Mum’s coming from, because that’s not my role...So I wouldn’t put it in that way, maybe that’s incongruence... in that sense I guess I’m not fully congruent”*

*Meg*



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# Countertransference

Therapist's reactions to their clients which are based on current or previous unresolved issues (Geldard et al 2018, Hayes and Gelso 2001).

In person-centred theory, the concept of **'parallel process'** has its origins in countertransference (Morrissey and Tribe 2001), and describes those situations where clients bring issues or concerns that mirror those of the therapist (Formica 2009).



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- Limits of the study
- Implications for future practice

# Conclusions



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