

## **The courageous heart of the Person-Centred Experiential approach.**

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At the core of the learning process of becoming an empathic PCE practitioner lies the journey into the *courageous heart* of PCE practice.

The PCE model is founded upon the theoretical principle of the actualising tendency. The optimal condition for the flourishing of the actualising tendency is the gestalt of a genuinely caring, empathic relationship. Genuinely prizing empathic responses are the communication of validation. These kinds of empathic responses say: 'I hear you as you. You do not need to be anything different. You do not need to change yourself. I want to be here with you as you are. I just want to be alive with you as another human being: I can see how vulnerable you are, and I do not want you to feel like I am asking you to change or be any different from who you are. I also would like to help you find a way for you to feel fully present in your own life'.

Genuinely prizing empathic responses require courage on the part of the practitioner. This is because, in order to become fully empathic in the way described, the practitioner must shed many layers of emotional armour and defensiveness. This is difficult and yet freeing. Most social interactions *do not* encourage this. I believe that, sadly, being truly and deeply empathic, in the way described, is currently a countercultural activity. To intentionally shed layers of emotional armour and defensiveness is also to be countercultural and counterconditioning. Empathic presence is not a short-term solution. It demands consistence and dedication. To explore one's own capacity for deeply empathic presence, one needs to feel liberated from pre-conditioned, habitually embodied relating. New patterns are required. Mainstream culture will not teach you these new patterns. In fact, mainstream culture will only add to the pre-programmed pattern of superficial relational distance. To become deeply empathic means to abandon the centre ground. The centre ground never holds. However, to begin to move towards the outer limbs of social practice, can feel intimidating and scary. The route is not predictable, although the experience and journey holds familiar and common emotional landmarks and challenges. Each act of letting go of a pre-conditioned pattern is a miracle. Each act will allow you to feel more empathically able.

Keep being empathic. Consistency is the fundamental key, here. If you realise that you've stopped being empathically present: (a) come back to the moment of focusing towards empathic responsiveness; (b) drop all pre-conceptions of what you should be doing and/or saying; and (c) offer an empathic response to the other person as your next response. Keep with (c) until you feel sufficiently grounded again in the principle of not-knowing more than the present moment. What does the client want to share and be acknowledged? You do not need to 'get in there' or 'get the client to do something'. Instead, offer a grounded, caring and genuine empathic response: (i) listen to the client with all of your available energy; (ii) get a 'feel' for what the client is sharing; (iii) get a 'feel' for what the client means; (iv) allow yourself to feel changed and be changing in the moment; (v) notice how emotionally open or

closed you feel; (vi) allow yourself to feel more emotionally open through offering a genuinely caring, empathic response; (vii) allow yourself to 'lean into' the client's emotional experiencing; and (viii) offer an empathic response that is your clearest understanding of the client's frame of reference.