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## The Mutual Journey, Occupational Therapists' Meaningful Experiences of Therapeutic Use of Self: A Phenomenological Study

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**Introduction:** 'Therapeutic use of Self' is considered integral to the therapeutic process. The purpose of the study was to elucidate therapists' perspectives relative to meaningful therapeutic relationships.

### Objectives

1. Describe the elements of meaningful therapeutic relationships.
2. Articulate the benefits and challenges of engaging in meaningful therapeutic relationships.

**Method:** The study utilized a phenomenological research methodology. Six occupational therapists with 5-30 years of experience completed two semi-structured interviews. Coding of transcripts between and within transcripts were completed to aid in constant comparative analysis.

**Results:** The findings of this study revealed four overarching themes. *Entering into the client's world*, entails therapists acknowledging clients' experiences by expressing empathy and validating the clients' realities. *Forming a connection* may occur instantly due to similarities between therapist and client or can develop over time when both have a shared investment in the therapeutic process. There can also be 'tipping points' when a breakthrough occurs in the relationship that strengthens this connection. In *maintaining equilibrium: emotional attachment versus stepping back*, both the client and occupational therapist bring their vulnerabilities, emotional needs, and shared humanity to the therapeutic relationship. Tension in the relationship may occur as the therapist is challenged to maintain balance between professional roles and the needs of clients. Lastly, in *finding meaning*, therapists may experience profound professional and personal transformation.

**Conclusion:** The findings demonstrated the cyclical nature of therapeutic relationships, as well as multiple characteristics of client-practitioner connections. The results demonstrate how these relationships impact practitioners and further informs their current and future practice.