The College of Nurses of Ontario presents the Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship, Revised 2006, practice standard: An Overview.
At the core of nursing is the therapeutic nurse-client relationship. Nurses establish and maintain this relationship by using nursing knowledge and skills, as well as applying caring attitudes and behaviours. The College’s Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship practice standard applies to all nurses, regardless of their role or area of practice.
The five key components of the therapeutic nurse-client relationship are professional intimacy, power, empathy, respect and trust. Regardless of the context, length of interaction and whether the nurse is the primary or secondary care provider, these components are always present. Now we’ll examine these components individually.
Professional intimacy:

- is inherent in the type of care and services that nurses provide; and
- may involve psychological, spiritual and social elements.

Professional intimacy is inherent in the type of care and services that nurses provide. It may be the physical activities, such as bathing, that nurses perform for and with clients that create this closeness. Professional intimacy may involve psychological, spiritual and social elements that are identified in the plan of care. Access to the client’s personal information also contributes to professional intimacy.
The nurse-client relationship is one of unequal power. Although a nurse may not immediately perceive it, the nurse has more power than the client does. This power imbalance arises from the nurse having more authority and influence in the health care system, specialized knowledge, access to privileged information, and the ability to advocate for the client and the client’s significant other. If a nurse misuses the power in the relationship, it’s considered abuse.
Empathy refers to expressing an understanding of what the health care experience means from the client’s perspective. It includes validating and resonating with the meaning of that experience. In nursing, empathy includes maintaining an appropriate emotional distance from the client to ensure objectivity.
Respect is the recognition of the inherent dignity, worth and uniqueness of every individual, regardless of the client’s socio-economic status and personal attributes, and the nature of the client’s health problem.
Trust is:

- critical in the nurse-client relationship;
- fragile; and
- difficult to re-establish once breached.

Trust is critical in the nurse-client relationship because the client is in a vulnerable position. At the beginning of a relationship, trust is fragile so it’s especially important to keep promises to a client. It’s difficult to re-establish trust once it has been breached.
Therapeutic Nurse-Client Relationship learning module

1. Guiding Principles
2. An Overview
3. Therapeutic Communication and Client-Centred Care
4. Maintaining Boundaries
5. Protecting the Client From Abuse

You have now completed Chapter 2. To work through another chapter in this module, close this presentation and return to the Learning Centre.

To ask a College Practice Consultant a question, click on the “Contact” button in the top right-hand corner of your screen.