

What is Gestalt Therapy?

Gestalt Therapy was created by Fritz Perls, MD, and is a style of psychotherapy that I use and find very effective in helping others who are dealing with a wide variety of mental health issues.

So, what does the word “Gestalt” mean? The German word “Gestalt” means a complete pattern or configuration. In Gestalt psychology, it is a perceived whole, which is greater than the sum of its parts. Applied to therapy, it is about seeing the client as a whole, and not reduced down to his or her individual systems. Gestalt Therapy is a form of Humanistic Psychology, which places emphasis on aspects of the human being such as authenticity, growth, and actualizing their potential.

Gestalt theory stresses four main concepts: growth, experience, present-mindedness and seeing the person as a whole being.

Through the concept of growth, Gestalt Therapy seeks to identify both blocks and creative solutions to growth. Often times, we are unaware of the barriers we have put up that prevent us from growth and balance. Working with Gestalt in my practice, we will identify those blocks, barriers and old “tapes” and worn out “messages” that prevent that growth and harmony.

Through experience, we will work towards creating greater self-awareness, through identifying emotions, thought patterns and behaviors that have been suppressed. Through experiencing and experimenting, Gestalt Therapy seeks to bring a lived experience to your problems, and not just talk about them or recite them over and over in your head.

Through working in the present moment, Gestalt Therapy is rooted and begins the journey towards healing, well-being and integration. Although the past influences present behaviors greatly, the focus of Gestalt Therapy is centered in the present. In the present moment lie the accumulated past influences of thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and other experiences. I will provide you feedback about what I notice in the here and now, in the present moment, and we will work from the present moment to work through the past.

Seeing the person as a whole, the Gestalt Therapy model embraces the person, group, or organization as a dynamic integrated organism. As complex systems, the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of individuals are constantly working toward balance. Similarly, organizations are viewed as a whole entity with interactive parts. To focus on only one part of the individual or the organization lessens the potential for awareness, growth, and productivity.

What you need to know:

- Gestalt Therapy is not a magic cure of fix to your problems; it is a mode of psychotherapy that I use to help clients seek greater awareness so that they can then choose different behaviors, ways of being, thoughts, etc.
- I do Gestalt experiments, such as the two-chair method, in which I will ask you to talk to an empty chair where someone or thing that you are in conflict with might sit temporarily.
- Although Gestalt Therapy includes talk therapy, it is rooted in the experience, in which change can then happen.
- Gestalt Therapy has roots in psychodynamic theory, Zen Buddhism, body work, psychodrama, and other therapeutic modalities. Although touch can be involved, I generally do not use touch within the course of a session, although through an experiment, the need for touch may arise based on your individual problem or “piece of work,” as we call it in the Gestalt world.
- Like many therapies, Gestalt Therapy sometimes produces an environment in which distressing emotions arise; this is crucial for the work that we are doing. Distressing emotions may be with you upon leaving my office, but we will work carefully to process that in session, or at the next appointment.
- You may continue to experience “processing” of emotions, thoughts, insights, and new awareness after our session, and through your week until the next session. This is healthy and normal, and please communicate with me if you have questions or concerns about this.

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