



Gestalt Therapy

What is Gestalt Therapy?

Gestalt Therapy is an approach to treatment that emphasises the importance of the 'present moment' in the therapeutic encounter. It is what happens here and now between client and therapist that matters, rather than previous events or the problems that brought them to counselling.

Emphasis is on the client's personal responsibility, the present environment, the context of the client's life and the relationship between client and counsellor. The client is encouraged to be authentic and truthful about her thoughts and feelings, no matter how confronting, personal or embarrassing they may be.

Building a trusting relationship with the client and making sure she feels safe and accepted is an important task for the therapist. By being authentic, real growth can occur and a whole, healthy state of mind, body and emotions can be reached and maintained.

In Gestalt Therapy, the direct experience of the client is paramount. Clients are encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts as they really are, without the need to interpret or judge them. The aim is to encourage the client to access their 'real feelings' and 'real self.' They are to be more authentically 'alive,' 'honest' and 'genuine.'

Events, beliefs, fears and other items that may be blocking clients or inhibiting their growth and progress are to be swept aside. They are to be replaced with the person's unveiled, true perceptions of things. When this happens, clients often discover they have 'unfinished business' – things that have happened in the past that they have not adequately dealt with. More than likely, this is because they weren't 'authentic' and 'honest' at the time.

The 'Empty Chair' Technique

But now in relationship with their trusted therapist, the client has the opportunity to put that right. For example, a client may discover she suffered residual anxiety from her father's death.

A relationship breakdown was not mended. There were things unsaid that she would like to have said to him. But now it is too late because he is no longer there.

In the therapist's care, the client will be encouraged to do this to the 'empty chair' that now represents her father sitting there. By role-playing the desired situation, the client becomes unburdened, pent-up emotions are released and the way to healing is opened.

Gestalt Therapy likens the person's world to an interactive 'field,' in which connections are continually made and broken. The field is constantly changing. It is dynamic and the client has the freedom to change it. By so doing, she restores her wellbeing and psychological health.

The interpersonal relationship between client and therapist is crucial to the process. Therapists who specialise in Gestalt Therapy are comprehensively trained and undergo Gestalt therapy themselves.