

## ACT & Gestalt Therapy

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## Outline of Workshop

- Brief overview of Gestalt Theory
- Some of the similarities and differences between Gestalt and ACT
- Modeling of some common Gestalt techniques from an ACT perspective
- Practice

## What is Gestalt Therapy?

- A process-oriented and relational approach based on a theory of healthy functioning rather than psychopathology
- An experiential form of therapy that focuses on present moment experience
- The goal of gestalt therapy is awareness

## Contact

- Contact is interacting with our present environment fully, including others in it, without resistance/struggle and without losing our individuality.
- Contact is something that we allow to happen rather than making it happen.

### How comfortable are we with contact in the here and now?

- Making the rounds exercise

### Main tenants of Gestalt Therapy

- Phenomenological Stance
- Holism
- Field Theory
- Organismic Self-regulation

### The Goal of Gestalt Therapy

Increased awareness

Change is not a goal

- Paradoxical theory of change
- "Change occurs when one becomes what he [she] is, not when he [she] tries to become what he [she] is not" --Arnold Beisser

### Similarities between Gestalt & ACT

- **Here-and-now**
- **Process not content**
- **Acceptance**
- **Experiential**
- **Health/vitality focused**
- **Focus on context**

## Key Differences

	Gestalt	ACT
<b>Agenda in therapy</b>	Tends not to have one	Therapists often set agendas for the sessions
<b>Goals in therapy</b>	Awareness	Psychological flexibility
<b>Self</b>	Innate/true self	Self is constructed
<b>Needs vs. values</b>	Focus on needs and wants– “discovering” process	Focus on values and choice– “constructive” process

## ACTifying Gestalt techniques

### Actifying Gestalt experiments: Empty chair technique

	Gestalt	ACT
<b>When might you use it?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Person is discussing a conflict about another who is not in the room.</li> <li>•Particularly helpful when the client is caught in "story telling" about a past hurt, conflict, or “unfinished business”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Person is engaging in experiential avoidance around feelings related to an interpersonal relationship.</li> <li>•Fused with their stories about an interpersonal difficulty</li> </ul>

### Actifying Gestalt experiments: Empty chair technique

	Gestalt	ACT
<b>What's the function?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Help clients explore their relationships with others as experienced in the present.</li> <li>•Move from talking about something towards the fullness of immediate, present experience</li> <li>•To facilitate here and now process rather than focusing on content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Present moment</li> <li>•Acceptance</li> <li>•Defusion</li> <li>•Self as process – can be built into exercise in various ways, for example by bringing a third chair into the experiment</li> </ul>

### Actifying Gestalt experiments: Two chair technique

Gestalt		ACT
When might you use it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•When an internal conflict is observed</li> <li>•When one aspect of the self is suppressing the expression of another aspect of the self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•When client is fused with a self-critical thinking process</li> <li>•When client is engaging in experiential avoidance with little awareness</li> </ul>

### Actifying Gestalt experiments: Two chair technique

	Gestalt	ACT
What's the function?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increase awareness</li> <li>•Integration of seemingly disparate parts</li> <li>•Highlight and bringing in to the present moment self-critical processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Contact with the present moment</li> <li>•Acceptance - willingly and intentionally stepping into difficult experience</li> <li>•Defusion</li> <li>•Self as context - through bringing in a third chair</li> </ul>

### Actifying Gestalt experiments: Exaggeration techniques

Gestalt		ACT
When might you use it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•When an action is usually expressed in minimal or barely visible fashion</li> <li>•When there seems to be a discrepancy between statements and behavioral expressions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•To build awareness of more subtle forms of avoidance</li> <li>•To elicit behavior that serves as a discriminative stimulus for avoidance or fusion</li> </ul>

### Actifying Gestalt experiments: Exaggeration techniques

	Gestalt	ACT
What's the function?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Through exaggeration the behavior becomes easier to see</li> <li>•Highlight the "inner meaning" of the behavior.</li> <li>•The goal is to become more aware of subtle signals and cues that are sent through the body.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Present moment</li> <li>•Acceptance</li> <li>•Defusion</li> <li>•Self process</li> </ul>

## Practice

- Now it's your turn!

## Discussion