

Gestalt Therapy Techniques: One-Page Overview

Core Principle: Here and Now Awareness

Focus on present moment experience, not past analysis
Awareness itself is curative - full awareness naturally leads to change

Empty Chair Technique

What It Is:

Place empty chair, imagine someone sitting there
Speak to the chair, then switch chairs and respond

Used For:

Dialogue with absent person (deceased, estranged)
Internal conflicts (Topdog vs Underdog)
Unfinished business - unexpressed feelings

Why Effective:

Makes abstract concrete, bypasses intellectualization

Exaggeration

What It Is:

Amplify subtle behavior to heighten awareness
Make unconscious conscious through amplification

Examples:

Tight fist → Make it tighter (reveals anger)
Nervous tap → Tap faster (reveals anxiety)
Quiet "I'm fine" → Shout it (reveals falseness)

Purpose:

Body truth revealed, can't ignore when exaggerated

"I" Statements

Taking Responsibility:

Change passive to active language
Own feelings and actions explicitly

Language Changes:

"My hand is shaking" → "I am shaking my hand"
"It makes me angry" → "I make myself angry"
"You make me feel..." → "I feel... when you..."

Why Important:

Shifts from victim to agent, acknowledges choice

Topdog vs Underdog

Internal Conflict:

Topdog: Demanding critic, shoulds/oughts
"You should work harder, stop being lazy!"
Underdog: Passive rebel, makes excuses
"Yeah but I'm tired, I'll do it later..."

Resolution:

Use Empty Chair to externalize both parts
Full dialogue leads to integration

Additional Techniques

Dream Work

All dream parts are parts of self
"Be the angry dog in your dream"
Act out elements to integrate projected aspects

Staying with Feeling

Don't run from discomfort
"Stay with that sadness"
Allow full experience
Avoidance creates problems

Awareness Continuum

Present-moment reporting
"Now I am aware of..."
Stream of consciousness
Grounds in here and now

Reversal

Act opposite of usual pattern
Shy person acts outgoing
Discover hidden parts of self
Behavior is changeable, not fixed identity

Unfinished Business

Unexpressed feelings from past
Incomplete interactions, unsaid words
Addressed through Empty Chair dialogue
Complete emotional experience in present