

"Gestalt therapy is an experiential and mindfulness-based approach to counselling and psychotherapy that has inspired many other experiential therapies since its inception in the 1950's" ([Diana Lalor](#), Psychologist and Gestalt Therapist, [Cottesloe Counselling Centre](#)).

The therapeutic relationship in Gestalt therapy and Horse-Assisted learning is highly regarded. The following article by [Diana Lalor](#) explains the process of Gestalt Therapy further;

"Gestalt is a German word meaning 'whole'. Our body, emotions, sensations, thoughts, perceptions and experiences, together represent the 'whole' person that we are. A core concept of Gestalt therapy is that we 'creatively adjust' or adapt to our life circumstances. This can result in us developing habitual behaviour that is not in our awareness, and can affect our capacity to function effectively and flexibly, preventing us from fully experiencing and enjoying our lives.

The primary focus of Gestalt therapy is to increase awareness. As our awareness is heightened, we develop a deeper understanding of ourselves, and how we function in the world.

Awareness is an ongoing process. With awareness we develop the ability to become fully who we are and to recognize that we have the potential within us for change. The aim is to become aware of what we are doing and how we are doing it, with acceptance and without judgement.

The Paradoxical theory of change is an important concept in Gestalt therapy. The paradox being that the more one tries to become who one is not, the more one stays the same. When we accept what is and who we are, then change can begin to take place.

Gestalt therapy focuses more upon process (what is happening – 'the experience') rather than content (what is being discussed). The emphasis in therapy is on our experience moment to moment and what is being thought, felt and done, rather than what was, might be, could be, or should be. For example, when sharing about the end of an important relationship – the details would be the content. Tears, sadness, anger, feelings of regret, are the experience.

Gestalt therapy increases our capacity to become aware of the process of experiencing as it is happening. We become increasingly skilful at noticing our conditioned patterns of behaviour, develop a greater awareness of choices and potential for change, and experience an increasing sense of ease and acceptance with the way things are.

The fundamental propositions that lie at the heart of Gestalt therapy relate to human functioning and how change takes place. The main principles are:

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- Awareness leads to change
- Heightened awareness leads to a greater understanding of self, needs and choices.
- Through awareness we are able to take responsibility for ourselves
- Emerging, dominant needs organize our field of perception (i.e. we see and notice things dependent upon our need in that moment)
- We can only be understood within the context of our environment (i.e. influences, environment, culture, beliefs, behaviour, and our past.
- We have a tendency to perceive in wholes. If closure is not reached around an issue, or if a need is unfulfilled, this will push into our conscious awareness
- We have an instinctual need to give meaning to perceptions and experience
- We are organismically self regulating (i.e. we have the ability to be aware of and own our senses, feelings, emotions, needs, wants and beliefs – growth begins with the awareness and experience of these things)
- Learning occurs when we are curious and interested in our 'here and now experience'

Diana Lalor. Gestalt Therapy [article].

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