

Empty Chair Experiments

What is it?

- Coach the client on imaginably interacting with an "other" in an empty chair.

When might you use it?

<i>Gestalt</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the client is expressing conflict about another who is not in the room. • Particularly helpful when the client is caught in "story telling" about a past hurt, conflict, or "unfinished business". • From a Gestalt perspective, feelings not fully experienced linger in the background and interfere with effective contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person is engaging in experiential avoidance around feelings related to an interpersonal relationship • Person is fused with their stories about an interpersonal difficulty

What's the function?

<i>Gestalt</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not</i> a form of catharsis - about developing awareness & facilitating contact. • Used to help clients explore their relationships with others as experienced in the present rather than through the story they tell themselves about it. • To help the clients move from talking about something or their conflicts with someone towards the fullness of immediate, present experience • To facilitate here and now process rather than focusing on content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present moment – can bring antecedent conditions of interpersonal struggle into the present moment and help client build awareness of their reactions in these situations • Acceptance – Can be an exercise in willingly and intentionally stepping into difficult experience • Defusion - implicitly, the task is observed as an ongoing dialogue, a process, not an outcome • Self process – can be built into exercise in various ways, for example by bringing a third chair into the experiment where the client sits as an observer of the dialogue.

Two Chair Experiments

What is it?

- Encouraging a client to dialogue between two aspects of the self
- One aspect is expressed while sitting in one chair and the other expressed while sitting in the other chair switching as needed from one chair to the other.

When might you use it?

<i>Gestalt</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an internal conflict is observed • When one aspect of the self is suppressing the expression of another aspect of the self • One version of internal conflict is self-criticism (implicit criticism of one part of the self by another) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When client is fused with a self-critical thinking process • When client is engaging in experiential avoidance with little awareness

What's the function?

<i>Gestalt</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal is to increase awareness and integration of seemingly disparate parts • Particularly helpful in highlighting and bringing in to the present moment self-critical processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present moment – builds awareness of self-critical thinking and avoidance behavior • Willingness/acceptance— Same as above. The goal of these processes is explicitly not to resolve the conflict, but to build acceptance and defusion. • Defusion - processes of languaging is objectified and observed from perspective of other chair. The task is observed as an ongoing dialogue, a process, not an outcome. • Self process - use a third chair to develop compassionate observing stance with conflict

Exaggeration Experiments

What is it?

- A person is asked to exaggerate some feeling, thought, movement, etc., in order to experience the more intense (albeit artificial) enacted or imagined version.

When might you use it?

<i>Gestalt</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an action is usually expressed in minimal or barely visible fashion • When there seems to be a discrepancy between statements and behavioral expressions (e.g. client says they are not angry but they are clenching their fists) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build awareness of more subtle forms of avoidance • To elicit behavior that serves as a discriminative stimulus for avoidance or fusion (e.g., evoking an emotional response)

What's the function?

<i>Gestalt</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through exaggeration the behavior becomes easier to see or hear, both for the client and the therapist. • The function from a Gestalt therapist is to highlight the "inner meaning" of the behavior. • The goal is to become more aware of subtle signals and cues that are sent through the body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present moment – to help client develop finer and more sensitive discriminations of present moment experience • Acceptance - bringing the discriminative stimuli that occasion avoidance into the room creates an opportunity to practice acceptance • Defusion – putting a thought in a non-literal context by exaggerating it (e.g., exaggerating how terrible you are) • Self process – client can be asked to purposely notice reactions as they exaggerate them and notice that they are noticing.