

Gestalt Therapy Quick Reference

Fritz & Laura Perls | Linda Curran, BCPC, LPC, CACD, CCPD

Four Pillars of Gestalt	
Pillar	Description
Phenomenology	Focus on direct experience as it appears
Field Theory	Person and environment are interconnected
Dialogue	I-Thou relationship, authentic contact
Experimentation	Active exploration through experiments

Contact Cycle & Interruptions		
Stage	Healthy	Interruption
Sensation	Awareness of need	Desensitization (numbing)
Awareness	Recognition of need	Deflection (avoiding)
Mobilization	Energy to act	Introjection (swallowing whole)
Action	Reaching out	Projection (attributing to others)
Contact	Full engagement	Retroflexion (doing to self)
Satisfaction	Need fulfilled	Egotism (excessive self-monitoring)
Withdrawal	Completion	Confluence (merging boundaries)

Key Techniques	
Empty Chair: - Dialogue with absent person/part - Switch seats to embody other - "What do you want to say to them?" **Two-Chair:** - Dialogue between conflicting parts - Topdog vs. Underdog - Integration of polarities	**Experiments:** - Exaggerate gesture or posture - Reverse habitual pattern - "Try saying that louder" **Here-and-Now:** - Present-tense language - "What are you aware of now?" - Body sensation focus

Session Language	
Awareness: - "What are you experiencing right now?" - "What do you notice in your body?" - "Stay with that feeling"	**Empty Chair:** - "Imagine [person] is sitting here" - "What do you want to say to them?" - "Now switch chairs and respond"
Ownership: - "Say 'I' instead of 'you' or 'it'" - "Own that statement" - "Can you say 'I am' instead of 'I feel'?"	**Experiments:** - "Try exaggerating that gesture" - "What happens if you say it louder?" - "Let's experiment with the opposite"

Paradoxical Theory of Change
<i>"Change occurs when one becomes what one is, not when one tries to become what one is not." — Arnold Beisser</i>

Principle	Application
Full awareness	Accept current experience completely
No forcing	Change emerges naturally from awareness
Integration	Embrace all parts, including "negative" ones

Complex Trauma Modifications	
Modification	Purpose
Slower pacing	Prevent overwhelm
More grounding	Maintain window of tolerance
Titrated experiments	Small steps, check in frequently
Resource focus first	Build capacity before trauma work

Key Principle: Awareness itself is curative. Full contact with present experience—sensation, emotion, thought—naturally leads to integration and growth.

Perls, F. (1969) *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* | Polster & Polster (1973) *Gestalt Therapy Integrated*