

GESTALT THERAPY NOTES

1. Introduction to Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt Therapy is a humanistic and experiential form of psychotherapy that emphasizes personal responsibility, present-moment awareness, and the integration of thoughts, feelings, and actions. The word *Gestalt* is a German term meaning “whole” or “complete form.”

It was developed by:

- Fritz Perls
- Laura Perls
- Paul Goodman

Gestalt therapy focuses on helping clients become aware of what they are experiencing in the present rather than dwelling excessively on the past.

Kenyan Example (Introduction)

A university student in Nairobi feels constantly stressed but cannot explain why. A Gestalt therapist helps the student focus on what they are feeling *right now*—tightness in the chest, frustration, fear—rather than immediately analyzing past causes.

2. Gestalt Therapy View of Human Nature

Gestalt therapy views human beings as:

1. **Holistic** – Mind, body, and emotions are interconnected.
2. **Capable of Self-Regulation** – People naturally strive toward growth and balance.
3. **Responsible for Their Choices** – Individuals must take ownership of their actions.
4. **Oriented Toward Awareness** – Psychological problems arise from lack of awareness.

Humans function best when they are aware of their needs and respond to them appropriately.

Kenyan Example (View of Human Nature)

A small business owner in Eldoret feels irritable and disconnected from family. Through therapy, he realizes he has been ignoring exhaustion and stress. Increased awareness helps him restore balance between work and home life.

3. Key Concepts of Gestalt Therapy

1. Awareness

Awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and environment is central to change.

Kenyan Example A student preparing for KCSE exams notices tension headaches whenever thinking about parental expectations.

2. Here and Now

Focus is on present experience rather than past events.

Kenyan Example: Instead of analyzing childhood history, a therapist asks a Nairobi client: “What are you feeling as you talk about losing your job?”

3. Unfinished Business

Unresolved past experiences that interfere with present functioning.

Kenyan Example An adult in Kisumu still feels anger toward a parent who favored siblings, affecting current relationships.

4. Contact and Withdrawal

Healthy functioning involves balancing connection with others and personal space.

Kenyan Example: A young professional constantly avoids social gatherings due to fear of criticism, limiting healthy contact.

5. Personal Responsibility

Clients shift from blaming others to owning their experiences.

Instead of saying: “You make me angry,” they learn to say: “I feel angry.”

Kenyan Example: A married partner in Mombasa realizes they must communicate their needs rather than blaming their spouse.

4. Goals of Gestalt Therapy

1. Increase awareness.
2. Promote self-acceptance.
3. Encourage personal responsibility.
4. Help clients complete unfinished business.
5. Improve contact with others.

The goal is integration—helping individuals become whole and authentic.

Kenyan Example (Goals)

A young woman pressured into a career she dislikes becomes aware of her true interests and takes responsibility for pursuing further training in her desired field.

5. Techniques Used in Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt therapy is experiential and action-oriented.

1. Empty Chair Technique

Client speaks to an imagined person or part of themselves in an empty chair.

Kenyan Example: A client speaks to an absent father, expressing unresolved anger and sadness.

2. Role-Playing

Acting out conflicts or situations.

Kenyan Example: A university student practices confronting a lecturer respectfully about grading concerns.

3. “I” Statements

Encouraging ownership of feelings.

Kenyan Example: A teenager learns to say, “I feel ignored,” instead of “You never care.”

4. Body Awareness

Paying attention to physical sensations.

Kenyan Example: A corporate worker in Nairobi notices clenched fists when discussing workplace conflict.

5. Exaggeration Exercise

Exaggerating a gesture or expression to increase awareness.

Kenyan Example: A client repeatedly sighing while talking about work exaggerates the sigh to explore hidden frustration.

6. Application of Gestalt Therapy

a) Individual Counselling

- Anxiety

- Depression
- Low self-esteem

Kenyan Example: Helping youth dealing with identity confusion in urban areas.

b) Marriage and Family Therapy

- Communication breakdown
- Conflict resolution

Kenyan Example: Couples balancing traditional expectations and modern lifestyles in Nairobi.

c) Group Therapy

- Personal growth
- Interpersonal awareness

Kenyan Example: Youth empowerment groups in community centers practicing assertive communication.

d) Organizational Settings

- Leadership development
- Workplace conflict management

Kenyan Example: Corporate team-building workshops focusing on effective communication.

7. Conclusion

Gestalt Therapy emphasizes awareness, personal responsibility, and living fully in the present moment. It views individuals as capable of growth when they become aware of their feelings, behaviors, and choices.

Rather than analyzing problems intellectually, Gestalt therapy encourages experiential learning and self-discovery.

In the Kenyan context—where individuals navigate academic pressure, family expectations, economic challenges, and cultural transitions—Gestalt therapy provides practical tools for increasing awareness, resolving unfinished issues, and promoting authentic living.

PERSON-CENTRED THERAPY (PCT) NOTES

1. Introduction to Person-Centred Therapy

Person-Centred Therapy (PCT), also known as Client-Centred Therapy, is a humanistic approach to counselling that emphasizes empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness. It was developed by Carl Rogers in the 1940s.

Rogers believed that individuals have an inherent capacity for growth and self-healing when provided with the right therapeutic environment. Unlike directive approaches, the therapist does not lead or interpret but facilitates a safe and supportive space for the client's self-exploration.

Kenyan Example (Introduction)

A Form Four student in Nairobi feels overwhelmed by KCSE exam pressure. Instead of giving advice, the counsellor listens empathetically, allowing the student to express fear, parental expectations, and self-doubt openly.

2. Person-Centred Therapy View of Human Nature

Person-Centred Therapy views human beings as:

1. **Inherently Good and Trustworthy** – People naturally move toward growth.
2. **Self-Actualizing** – Individuals have an inborn tendency toward fulfillment and potential development.
3. **Capable of Self-Understanding** – With the right conditions, clients can solve their own problems.
4. **Driven by Subjective Experience** – Personal perception shapes reality.

Psychological problems occur when there is **incongruence** between the real self and the ideal self, often due to conditions of worth imposed by others.

Kenyan Example (View of Human Nature)

A university student in Eldoret studies medicine to please parents but feels drawn to art. The conflict between personal interests (real self) and parental expectations (ideal self imposed by others) creates anxiety and dissatisfaction.

3. Key Concepts of Person-Centred Therapy

1. Self-Concept

How individuals perceive themselves.

Kenyan Example: A young entrepreneur in Kisumu sees herself as “not good enough” after business failure.

2. Self-Actualization

The natural drive to grow and fulfill one’s potential.

Kenyan Example: A youth from a rural area pursues higher education despite financial hardship, striving to improve their life.

3. Congruence

Alignment between self-concept and actual experiences.

Kenyan Example: A teacher in Nakuru feels fulfilled when career choice matches personal passion for mentoring students.

4. Incongruence

Mismatch between self-image and real experiences.

Kenyan Example: A married man in Mombasa pretends to be emotionally strong but internally feels overwhelmed, creating inner conflict.

5. Core Conditions (Therapeutic Conditions)

According to Carl Rogers, three core conditions promote growth:

- **Empathy** – Understanding the client’s feelings.
- **Unconditional Positive Regard** – Accepting the client without judgment.
- **Congruence (Genuineness)** – Therapist is authentic and real.

Kenyan Example: A counsellor working with a young person struggling with substance abuse shows acceptance rather than condemnation, encouraging openness.

4. Goals of Person-Centred Therapy

1. Increase self-awareness.
2. Reduce incongruence.
3. Promote self-acceptance.
4. Encourage autonomy and independence.
5. Facilitate self-actualization.

The therapist aims to create conditions that allow clients to grow rather than directing solutions.

Kenyan Example (Goals)

A young woman pressured into early marriage gains confidence through counselling and decides to pursue her education, aligning choices with her personal values.

5. Techniques Used in Person-Centred Therapy

Person-Centred Therapy is less technique-driven and more relationship-focused. However, key methods include:

1. Active Listening

Careful attention to the client's words and emotions.

Kenyan Example: A counsellor listens attentively to a jobless graduate expressing frustration about unemployment.

2. Reflection of Feelings

Mirroring emotions back to the client.

Example:

Client: "I feel like a failure." Therapist: "You're feeling deeply disappointed in yourself."

Kenyan Example: A KCSE candidate expressing fear hears the counsellor reflect, "You're really worried about letting your family down."

3. Paraphrasing

Restating content in the therapist's words.

Kenyan Example: A small business owner discussing financial struggles hears the counsellor summarize their concerns clearly.

4. Clarification

Helping clients explore deeper meaning.

Kenyan Example: A university student explores what "success" truly means beyond parental expectations.

5. Minimal Encouragers

Simple prompts like "I see," "Go on," encouraging further sharing.

Kenyan Example: A client discussing grief feels supported to continue sharing painful emotions.

6. Application of Person-Centred Therapy

a) School Counselling

- Academic stress
- Peer pressure

Kenyan Example: Supporting secondary school students coping with exam anxiety.

b) Marriage and Family Counselling

- Communication issues
- Parenting challenges

Kenyan Example: Helping couples in Nairobi navigate work-life balance and family expectations.

c) Youth and Community Programs

- Substance abuse recovery
- Self-esteem development

Kenyan Example: Youth empowerment groups in informal settlements fostering self-worth and hope.

d) Healthcare Settings

- Chronic illness adjustment
- Emotional support

Kenyan Example: Supporting patients adjusting to HIV diagnosis through empathetic counselling.

7. Conclusion

Person-Centred Therapy emphasizes empathy, acceptance, and authenticity as the foundation for psychological growth. It views individuals as capable of self-healing when provided with the right supportive environment.

By reducing incongruence and promoting self-awareness, this approach encourages clients to move toward self-actualization.

In the Kenyan context—where cultural expectations, economic pressures, and academic competition influence identity—Person-Centred Therapy provides a compassionate framework that empowers individuals to discover their own solutions and live authentically.