

Experiential therapy

A way of working that attends to what you are living through in the session itself: feelings, bodily sensations, thoughts, and the relationship with your therapist.

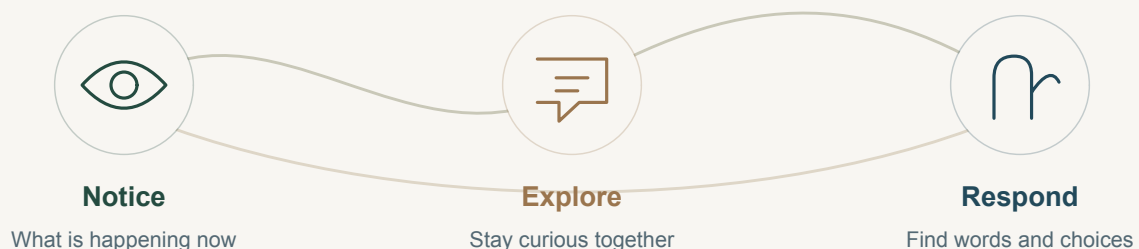


Understanding through experience

Experiential therapy is a family of humanistic approaches: person-centred therapy, Gestalt therapy and emotion-focused therapy among them. They share a conviction: that a difficulty is understood not only by talking about it, but by noticing how it is happening now, in the room. A tightening in the chest, a pause, a change of tone can show something that an explanation alone has not reached.¹⁻³

What might happen in a session?

Your therapist may invite you to slow down, to find words for a feeling, to say a sentence aloud, or to address someone imagined in an empty chair. These are possibilities, not a set of exercises. You can decline, pause or change direction at any point. The aim is not to intensify emotion for its own sake; it is to find a more workable way of experiencing and responding, at a pace you can manage.^{1, 2}



A flexible conversation between experience, reflection and action, not a prescribed sequence.

A pace set together

The work can include reflection, practical problem-solving and attention to daily life. You do not have to be expressive, at ease with your body, or ready to discuss everything at once. In my own work, which is grounded in Gestalt therapy, awareness, contact and the relationship as it unfolds in the present are central. What is useful, what is too much, and how to adapt the work are things we discuss as we go.

Questions to bring to a consultation

- Given what I wish to address, what is the best way forward?
- How would you work with the difficulty I am bringing?
- Can we go gradually if attending to feelings is hard for me?
- How will we know whether the therapy is helping?

Québec · In Québec, psychotherapy is a reserved activity: only professionals legally authorised may practise it. You can ask about qualifications, arrangements and the limits of the support offered.

Sources and further reading

1. Yontef (1993) · Gestalt Therapy: An Introduction.
Introductory chapter from *Awareness, Dialogue and Process*; available online.
2. Greenberg (2017) · *Emotion-Focused Therapy*, 2nd ed.
American Psychological Association. doi 10.1037/15971-000
3. Rogers (1957) · The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change.
Journal of Consulting Psychology. doi 10.1037/h0045357

General information to support a clinical conversation. Whether this approach suits you depends on your situation.