

## **What is Gestalt?**

This is a question often asked. It then leads one to the next question which is, “Do you mean just Gestalt, Gestalt theory, Gestalt psychology, Gestalt therapy, Gestalt approach, or Gestalt principles?” Perhaps the answer would be “all of them.”

**Gestalt** by definition is a physical, biological, or symbolic configuration or pattern of element so unified as a whole that its properties cannot be identified from a simple summation of its parts.

**Gestalt theory**, as Max Wertheimer explained when he put forth from his studies on the perception of movement, seeing an effect of the whole event, not contained in the sum of the parts.

**Gestalt psychology** is a school of thought that looks at the human mind and behavior as a whole. When trying to make sense of the world around us, Gestalt psychology suggests that we do not simply focus on every small component. Instead, our minds tend to perceive objects as part of a greater whole and as elements of more complex systems. This school of psychology played a major role in the modern development of the study of human sensation and perception.

**Gestalt therapy**, a psychotherapeutic approach developed by Fredrick S. Perls and others in the 1940s, influenced by Gestalt psychology, is a therapy that takes into account the whole individual and is concerned with the obstacles to the functioning of the whole in the context of the present.

**Gestalt approach** has the basic premise that life happens in the present—not in the past or the future—and that when we are dwelling on the past or fantasizing about the future we are not living fully. Through living in the present we are able to take responsibility for our responses and actions. To be fully present in the here and now offers us more excitement, energy, and courage to live life directly.

**Gestalt principles** commonly referenced are:

- Similarity – we tend to group similar items together
- Continuation - The law of continuity holds that points that are connected by straight or curving lines are seen in a way that follows the smoothest path.
- Closure – if something is missing in an otherwise complete figure, we will tend to add to it
- Proximity – The law of proximity suggests that objects near each other tend to be viewed as a group.
- Figure-ground – we seem to have an innate tendency to perceive one aspect of an event as the figure or fore-ground and the other as the ground or back-ground.