

GESTALT THERAPY: Humanistic counseling skill, incorporating **Gestalt principles** with a focus on **emotional experience in the here and now**.

Gestalt therapy emphasizes present awareness, embodied emotions, and how experiences unfold in the moment. These responses will **heighten awareness of bodily sensations, emotions, and internal conflicts** as they emerge.

Blending **Gestalt therapy** with **humanistic counseling skills** enhances emotional depth and **focuses on the here-and-now experience**. These responses **help clients process emotions more fully, integrate bodily awareness, and connect with their present experience** in a transformative way.

Here is a **comprehensive guide** to key **humanistic counseling skills**, integrating **Gestalt therapy principles** with **emotional experience in the here and now**:

Each skill is structured as follows:

1.

Definition – A clear explanation of what the skill is.

2.

Why It Matters – How it impacts the counseling process.

3.

Six Gestalt-Based Examples – Each one focusing on **emotional experience in the here and now**.

1. Active Listening

Definition:

Active listening is **fully focusing on the client with an open and engaged presence**. It involves **not just hearing words, but also noticing tone, body language, and emotional undercurrents**.

Why It Matters:

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Helps clients **feel truly seen and heard**.

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Encourages **deeper emotional processing**.

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Strengthens the **therapeutic relationship**.

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Tracking Non-Verbal Cues

Client: "I'm fine." *Smiles slightly but looks down and sighs.*

Counselor: "I hear you say you're fine, but I also noticed you sighed just now. What's happening for you in this moment?"

→ **Brings attention to subtle, unspoken emotions.**

2. Reflecting Emotional Energy

Client: "I just feel stuck." *Voice is quiet, shoulders slumped.*

Counselor: "Even as you say that, I notice your body seems heavy. How does 'stuck' feel for you right now?"

→ **Encourages the client to embody and explore their emotions.**

3. Tuning into Breathing Patterns

Client: *Begins speaking faster and breathes more shallowly.*

Counselor: “As you talk about this, I notice your breath is becoming short. What do you sense in yourself right now?”

→ **Brings awareness to physiological responses tied to emotions.**

4. Holding Silence Without Interrupting

Client: *Pauses, looks away, tears up but doesn't speak.*

Counselor: *Sits quietly, maintaining soft eye contact, allowing space for the client's emotions to emerge.*

→ **Honors emotional expression without rushing to fill the silence.**

5. Mirroring the Client's Experience

Client: “It's like I'm drowning in responsibilities.”

Counselor: “‘Drowning’—that sounds overwhelming. What does that feel like in your body right now?”

→ **Reflects the metaphor back and invites deeper exploration.**

6. Bringing Attention to Shifts in Energy

Client: *Starts speaking quickly and louder than before.*

Counselor: “Something shifted just now. What’s happening for you as you speak?”

→ **Encourages present-moment awareness of emotional changes.**

2. Empathy

Definition:

Empathy is **feeling with the client, tuning into their emotional world without judgment or detachment.**

Why It Matters:

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Creates **emotional safety** for deeper sharing.

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Helps clients **feel understood on a deep level.**

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Encourages **self-compassion** by modeling acceptance.

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Naming the Emotion You Feel in the Room

Client: “I don’t know why, but I feel like I’m falling apart.”

Counselor: “As you say that, I feel a heaviness in this space. What’s happening for you in this moment?”

→ **Acknowledges the emotional atmosphere in the session.**

2. Expressing What You Imagine They Might Be Feeling

Client: “I just feel lost.”

Counselor: “It sounds like there’s a deep uncertainty inside you right now. Does that fit?”

→ **Gently checks in with the client’s emotional state.**

3. Reflecting a Subtle Feeling the Client May Not Be Aware Of

Client: “I guess I should be used to this by now.”

Counselor: “I hear a sadness in your voice. Is that part of what’s here for you?”

→ **Brings subconscious emotions into awareness.**

4. Using ‘I Feel With You’ Instead of ‘I Understand’

Client: “No one ever listens to me.”

Counselor: “That sounds so painful. Sitting with you now, I feel the weight of that loneliness.”

→ **Communicates presence without assuming full understanding.**

5. Noticing What’s Left Unspoken

Client: “I guess I just have to keep going.” *Eyes well up but they don’t cry.*

Counselor: “I notice your eyes filling with tears as you say that. What’s happening inside?”

→ **Invites awareness of suppressed emotions.**

6. Letting Empathy Be Felt in Your Tone and Presence

Client: “I don’t think I matter to anyone.”

Counselor: *Leans in slightly, voice softens* “That must be so painful to carry.”

→ **Expresses care through voice, body language, and pacing.**

5. Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)

Definition:

Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) is **accepting and valuing the client without conditions or judgment**. It involves **genuine warmth, non-judgment, and deep respect for the client’s experience**.

Why It Matters:

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Helps clients **feel safe to explore vulnerable emotions**.

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Reduces **shame and self-judgment**.

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Allows clients to **connect with their authentic self without fear of rejection**.

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Holding Space for the Client's Emotional Experience

Client: "I don't even like myself most of the time."

Counselor: "Right now, I hear a lot of pain in your words. I'm here with you in this moment—there's no judgment here."

→ **Affirms the client's experience without trying to 'fix' it.**

2. Accepting Contradictions Without Forcing Resolution

Client: "I love my partner, but I also resent them."

Counselor: "Both love and resentment exist in you at the same time. What happens inside you as you hold both emotions?"

→ **Encourages awareness of emotional complexity without pressure to resolve it.**

3. Meeting the Client Where They Are Emotionally

Client: "I don't think I can talk about this right now."

Counselor: "That's completely okay. We don't have to go anywhere you're not ready for. What do you need in this moment?"

→ **Respects emotional boundaries while fostering safety.**

4. Accepting Emotional Intensity Without Minimizing

Client: *Crying* "I just feel so overwhelmed!"

Counselor: “I see how deeply this is affecting you. Let’s stay with this feeling together for a moment.”

→ **Validates and sits with the client’s raw emotion rather than rushing to comfort them.**

5. Normalizing Self-Judgment with Compassion

Client: “I feel weak for crying about this.”

Counselor: “A part of you is judging your tears. But another part clearly needs to express this. What happens if we let go of ‘right or wrong’ and just feel this moment?”

→ **Helps the client engage with their emotions without self-criticism.**

6. Allowing the Client’s Experience to Be Fully Theirs

Client: “I don’t even know what I feel.”

Counselor: “That’s okay. Let’s notice together—what’s happening in your body right now?”

→ **Encourages present-moment awareness instead of forcing clarity.**

3. Congruence (Genuineness & Authenticity)

Definition:

Congruence means **being real and transparent as a counselor**, rather than hiding behind a “professional mask.” It involves **aligning words, emotions, and body language** to model **authenticity** for the client.

Why It Matters:

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Builds **trust**—clients sense when a counselor is being authentic.

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Encourages clients to **drop their own masks** and be honest about their emotions.

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Creates a **genuine relational experience**, rather than a scripted session.

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Acknowledging Your Own Emotional Response

Client: “I bet you think I’m ridiculous for feeling this way.”

Counselor: “Actually, I feel deep respect for the courage it takes to share this. And as you said that, I noticed a sadness in myself—perhaps because I see how hard you are on yourself.”

→ **Models authenticity while staying present with emotion.**

2. Expressing Honest Uncertainty Instead of Pretending to Know

Client: “Why do I keep repeating this pattern?”

Counselor: “That’s a powerful question. And honestly, I don’t have an answer, but I’d love to explore it with you—what do you notice in yourself as you ask that?”

→ **Shows humility and openness rather than rushing to interpret.**

3. Naming a Relational Shift in the Here & Now

Client: *Becomes withdrawn and quiet*

Counselor: “I notice that something shifted in the space between us just now. What’s happening for you?”

→ **Brings awareness to the emotional dynamic in the present moment.**

4. Owning a Genuine Emotional Reaction

Client: “I’ve never told anyone this before.”

Counselor: *Takes a deep breath* “That means a lot—that you feel safe enough to share this here.”

→ **Allows the counselor’s emotional response to be real and present.**

5. Correcting Misalignment Between Words and Presence

Client: “I feel fine about it.”

Counselor: “I hear you saying you’re fine, but I also notice your hands are clenched and your breath is shallow. What’s happening in your body right now?”

→ **Gently calls attention to unspoken emotional experiences.**

6. Being Transparent About a Rupture in the Relationship

Client: *Becomes distant and avoids eye contact*

Counselor: “I have a sense that something in our connection feels different right now. Do you feel that too?”

→ **Acknowledges and invites exploration of relational ruptures in real time.**

4. Open-Ended Questions

Definition:

Open-ended questions **invite exploration rather than a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response.**

Why It Matters:

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Encourages **deeper self-reflection.**

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Helps clients **discover emotions they hadn’t fully processed.**

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Supports **greater awareness of present experience.**

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Bringing Attention to Bodily Sensations

“Where do you feel that emotion in your body right now?”

2. Encouraging Self-Exploration

“What is it like for you to say that out loud?”

3. Inviting Present-Moment Awareness

“What happens inside you as you hear yourself say those words?”

4. Expanding on Emotional Metaphors

“You said it feels like drowning—what does that experience look like for you?”

5. Exploring Unspoken Feelings

“If your body could speak right now, what would it say?”

6. Deepening Awareness of Patterns

“How do you experience this feeling in other areas of your life?”

5. Summarising

Definition:

Summarizing is **condensing and reflecting key themes, emotions, and patterns** that the client has shared. It helps bring clarity, reinforce insights, and highlight emotional shifts.

Why It Matters:

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Helps the client **make sense of their emotions and experiences.**

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Shows that the counselor **fully understands the client's emotional world**.

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Encourages **awareness of patterns and contradictions** in the here and now.

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Reflecting the Client's Emotional Journey in the Session

Client: "At first, I was angry, then I just felt lost."

Counselor: "So, we started with anger, but now there's a sense of being lost. What's happening inside you right now as we bring that full circle?"

→ **Encourages awareness of emotional transitions in the present moment.**

2. Highlighting a Recurring Emotional Theme

Client: "I always feel like I'm too much for people."

Counselor: "I hear this deep fear of being 'too much' come up in different ways—at work, in relationships. What's it like to hear that pattern reflected back to you now?"

→ **Brings attention to underlying emotional patterns.**

3. Summarizing Conflicting Emotions Without Judgment

Client: "I love my family, but I feel suffocated by them."

Counselor: "You carry both love and suffocation at the same time. As you sit with both feelings now, what do you notice inside?"

→ **Creates space for the client to process complex emotions in real time.**

4. Bringing Awareness to What's Left Unspoken

Client: "I guess I should just move on."

Counselor: "You say 'move on,' but I notice there's still something lingering. What's unfinished for you in this moment?"

→ **Invites deeper awareness of unresolved emotions.**

5. Tying Present-Moment Feelings to a Larger Pattern

Client: "I feel like I always have to prove myself."

Counselor: "That feeling of needing to prove yourself—does that show up in this space between us right now?"

→ **Encourages in-the-moment awareness of emotional dynamics.**

6. Encouraging Integration of Emotional Insights

Client: "I just realized I never let myself ask for help."

Counselor: "That's a powerful realization. How does it feel to acknowledge that, right here, right now?"

→ **Helps the client embody emotional awareness in the present moment.**

6. Reflecting Feelings

Definition:

Reflecting feelings is **mirroring back the client's emotions** to deepen self-awareness. It helps clients recognize, accept, and process their emotional states.

Why It Matters:

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Helps clients **feel validated and emotionally understood**.

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Encourages **self-awareness of deeper emotions**.

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Strengthens the **therapeutic bond through emotional resonance**.

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Naming the Emotion You Hear

Client: "I don't know, I just feel off."

Counselor: "It sounds like there's unease in you right now. Do you sense that too?"

→ **Helps the client connect with their emotional state in the moment.**

2. Exploring the Energy of the Emotion

Client: "I'm frustrated."

Counselor: "That frustration feels strong. Where do you feel it in your body right now?"

→ **Encourages the client to embody their emotions.**

3. Giving Language to Unspoken Emotions

Client: “I guess I’m okay.” *Looks away, voice drops.*

Counselor: “It seems like there’s something underneath ‘okay.’ Is there another feeling there?”

→ **Brings hidden emotions into awareness.**

4. Connecting Emotions to the Present Relationship

Client: “People always let me down.”

Counselor: “As you say that, I sense some distance between us right now. What’s happening for you in this space?”

→ **Invites exploration of emotional patterns in real time.**

5. Reflecting the Emotional Weight in the Client’s Voice

Client: “I don’t care anymore.” *Voice is flat, eyes look tired.*

Counselor: “As you say that, I hear exhaustion. What’s it like to notice that?”

→ **Helps the client tune into their deeper emotional experience.**

6. Bringing Awareness to a Shift in Emotion

Client: *Starts speaking quickly, hands fidgeting.*

Counselor: “Something just shifted—your energy is different. What’s happening for you right now?”

→ **Encourages present-moment awareness of emotional changes.**

7.Minimal Encouragers

Definition:

Minimal encouragers are **small verbal or non-verbal responses** that show attentiveness and encourage the client to continue sharing. They include brief words, gestures, and sounds.

Why It Matters:

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Helps clients **feel heard without interruption.**

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Creates a **natural, open flow in the conversation.**

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Reinforces **emotional presence without taking over the space.**

Examples (Gestalt Focus on Emotional Experience in the Here & Now):

1. Using Simple Verbal Cues to Encourage Sharing

Client: “I just feel lost.”

Counselor: “*Mhm...*” (Soft nod)

→ **Creates space for the client to continue without pressure.**

2. Mirroring the Client's Emotional Energy

Client: "It's just so frustrating!"

Counselor: "Wow..." (Slightly raises eyebrows)

→ **Reflects the client's intensity without interrupting.**

3. Using Silence as a Holding Space

Client: *Pauses, looks down, tears welling up.*

Counselor: *Stays present, makes soft eye contact, breathes with the client.*

→ **Allows the client to process their emotions in their own time.**

4. Repeating Key Words to Invite Exploration

Client: "I just feel stuck."

Counselor: "Stuck?" (Gently, with curiosity)

→ **Encourages the client to expand on their experience.**

5. Using a Soft "Hmm" to Signal Understanding

Client: "I don't even know where to start."

Counselor: "Hmm..." (Leans in slightly, nods)

→ **Communicates patience and presence.**

6. Matching the Client's Breath to Create Emotional Alignment

Client: *Takes a deep, shaky breath before speaking.*

Counselor: *Takes a slow, grounding breath in sync with the client.*

→ **Creates a felt sense of support without words.**