

SELF-SUPERVISION

There are times in every journey with a client that you feel completely stuck. This may or may not coincide with the client also feeling stuck, but nevertheless you start to think that the work is not moving. Of course, your most valuable and important resource is your regular supervision, where there are myriad perspectives to be explored (see for example Chidiac et al., 2017). However, there is much you can do to self-supervise in the course of your work.

There are three questions you can ask yourself when you feel stuck. First, has the client reached an impasse that he needs to stay with and explore?

It is easy for a therapist, especially at the beginning of her training, to see stuckness as a failure on her part and to become despondent about ever getting it right. One of the strengths of Gestalt therapy is its positive attitude towards such stuckness. Gestalt does not see an impasse as an obstacle to be overcome – rather as a difficulty to be understood.

Second, is it a difficulty in your approach that needs to be resolved before progress can continue? Are you finding yourself doing 'more of the same' with this client? If you look down the chapter headings of this book, do you notice any areas of focus that you have been ignoring? Is there a co-transference issue that has you both in its grip? Obviously, it is easier to explore this in supervision with another mind, but taking the time to be with and think through your experience with your client can be useful.

Third, new clients sometimes expect a magic cure or come because they were sent by their friend, partner or GP. This leads to problems at the level of 'psychological contract'; in other words, you are working with unexpressed and unagreed expectations.

Exercise: If a colleague was to stop your client as they were leaving a session with you, and ask 'What are you going there for?', what would their answer be? For example 'My HR director told me I should come', 'I don't know', 'Sorting out my problems', 'Trying to understand myself'. Your imagination of the client's responses may give you a clue to a hidden element in their expectations of therapy.