

SAMPLE OF WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

- #1 Personal Growth & Spiritual Growth
- #2 The Unvirtues: A non-shaming exploration of self-interest in relationship
- #3 Shame and Belonging
- #4 Love and Power
- #5 Family Constellations
- #6 Authentic Dialogue
- #7 Gestalt process oriented model of working with couples and families
- #8 Phenomenology and the therapeutic use of awareness
- #9 Field Theory
- #10 Gestalt therapy

Presenter biography



Steve Vinay Gunther has been involved with psychotherapy education for 25 years. He was founder and director of the Northern Rivers Gestalt Institute for 17 years, and now teaches internationally in the USA, Mexico, Japan, Korea, China and India. One of his specialty workshops is on the topic of psychotherapy and spirituality.

He is author of *Understanding The Woman In Your Life*, a book of advice for men about relationships with women; this was a best seller in Mexico, and is also published in Australia and India. He has a private practice which includes Gestalt, Family therapy, and Career Decision Coaching.

He has been running Family Constellation workshops in Australia and the USA since 2000. He trained in this modality in Germany as well as Australia, and has applied the work to Aboriginal groups.

He has also trained in narrative therapy with Michael White, and Johnella Bird.

He has been actively involved in the development of Gestalt Therapy in Australia, and continues to learn and teach at the cutting edge of Gestalt theory and practice. His first thesis was on psychotherapy and social change, and he is interested in what makes a difference both interpersonally and socially. He is currently doing a Phd on the topic of the interpersonal dimensions of power.

#1 PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

PERSONAL GROWTH, SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Life is a journey involving the evolution of our soul. The fields of both spirituality and psychotherapy offer support in this process; but what is the difference? What does spiritual growth really mean, and how is it related to the personal growth achieved through therapy?

These questions will be examined and answered in this workshop by looking through the lens' of principles, practices and experience.

Because it is so easy to get lost in esoteric ideas, the emphasis is on achieving clarity through heightened self awareness and movement into dialogue on the topic of spirituality.

Transformative experiences hold the key to a personal understanding of the topic, so these are shared and explored in small groups. A safe container is created in the groups, so the intimacy of self revelation can be supported, building connection and an I-thou experience.

Participants are guided to examine their own beliefs systems in regard to personal and spiritual evolution. Core values and experiences reveal the deepest parts of ourselves, and often lead to conflict or misunderstanding when shared. The workshop creates a safe and supportive atmosphere in which to examine each person's deepest questions and reflections.

It is essential that abstract and esoteric ideas get grounded through application; the aim in this domain is to energise practical action for participants lives as a result of the workshop. The practices for transformation that each person uses are identified. Spiritual and therapeutic practices are compared and contrasted, and then linked to the previous explorations of personal beliefs and experiences.

The ground developed as a result of this exploration is used to explore the topic of religious wounding.

Religious wounding occurs when the spiritual realm is contaminated with oppressive and hurtful experiences, often stemming from the abuse of power in relationship. People come to therapy to deal with their pain, but rarely consider religious wounding to be a subject for therapeutic work.

By using therapeutic tools to work with spiritual issues, blocks to both personal and spiritual growth can be cleared. Doing so in a group context creates a setting for profound healing and transformation.

The workshop provides a clear template for work with clients. The topic is explored step by step, based on a Gestalt approach to addressing unfinished business, and promoting dialogue.

The workshop combines didactic presentation, group discussion, demonstration experiential work, and small group explorations of the following areas:

- Spirituality and field context
- The core nature of spiritual experience
- Providing a safe setting for spiritual belief systems
- The place of spiritual practices
- Differences between spiritual and personal growth
- Religious wounding
- The application of therapeutic process in working with each of the above domains
- The use of focused awareness, dialogue and creative experiment in working with issues related to spirituality
- Supporting and empowering the client to develop their unique and personal spiritual orientation

Resources will consist of an extensive list of questions which will be used for reflection and discussion in the training, and can be utilised on an ongoing basis for both self exploration and as a tool with clients.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

1. Understand the interface between the transpersonal and the personal domain of development and growth
2. Understand how to explore and utilise a client's spiritual field context
3. Dialogue and work with a client's spiritual belief system with the framework of a therapeutic session
4. Understand the role of spiritual practices in a client's growth and development, and know how to support that in a therapeutic context
5. Recognise the existence of religious wounds, and understand how to address the accompanying trauma
6. Understand the application of therapeutic techniques in working with spiritually related issues
7. Have a basic grasp of one's own spiritual ground, and identify personal issues of religious wounding

Seminar schedule

Introduction to the meta model.

Personal story as example of field context

Small group exploration of the field context of spirituality; Larger group discussion of the influence of the field, and ways to work with it in a therapeutic context

Spiritual experience as a core marker for spirituality

Personal story of spiritual experience

Small group exploration and sharing of unique experiences; larger group discussion.

Definitional perspectives on spirituality, referencing impressionistic approaching, research on transcendent experience, and relating to therapeutic theories.

Spiritual belief systems: personal exploration, small group sharing, large group reflection and discussion. application to therapeutic process with clients.

Spiritual practices: personal exploration, small group sharing, large group reflection and discussion, application to therapeutic process with clients.

Demonstration of therapeutic applications with the 4 areas so far introduced.

Spiritual growth and personal growth: exploration of differences: reflection on experience, drawing of larger conclusions, identification of role of support.

Contrasting spiritual and therapeutic concept/practices: places of conflict and choice.

Religious wounding: definition of sources of trauma.

Demonstration of therapeutic work with religious wounding; deconstruction of principles and practices used to do this effectively.

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Focus and clarify your own ground of spirituality as defined by practices, experiences, context and beliefs.
2. Learn ways to work with clients' spirituality using therapeutic processes
3. Understand the points of difference and similarity between spirituality and psychotherapy, and the implications for both fields

#2 THE UNVIRTUES

A NON-SHAMING EXPLORATION OF SELF-INTEREST IN RELATIONSHIP

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

In this workshop participants will be introduced to the concept of the 'unvirtues'. The relationship between ethics and self-interest will be explored, with the task of taking an open minded approach to revealing unacceptable aspects of self.

We will look at the contrast between our goodwill and good intentions, and the more utilitarian 'I-it' aspects of relationship. We aim to bring a deeper level of awareness and ownership to aspects of self which are generally deemed unacceptable.

A key question is how do we situate our unvirtuous self in a non-destructive interpersonal or professional ethic?, And hold ourselves lightly enough so that it becomes possible to laugh at one's foibles rather than hide them.

Whether its personal or professional ethics, a central principle is stepping beyond self-interest: acting in terms of what is good for our partner, friend, colleague or client.

But: do we help people because they need it, or to relieve our discomfort at their dis? Are we generous and patient because those are noble qualities, or because we have simply been socialised that way. Do we really choose the virtuous path, or do such actions merely constitute social habit?

This workshop is about exploring and owning that hidden and slippery part of self that Salamo Friedlander called the *grotesque*; the disowned aspect of our helpful aspirations and high moral ground.

Such explorations are often avoided, even amongst those interested in personal growth. Lip service is given to the shadow, but to bring this dimension of self into dialogue and relationship takes both courage and support.

Why grub around in this uncomfortable territory? Because identification as a caring person is only part of the story of self. By examining our depths, the fabric of both personal and professional relationship becomes richer and more meaningful. Life is filled out by ushering the unvirtuous parts of ourselves into dialogue.

The workshop invites participants to reach down and bring to light their contrary side. This requires support, and a non-shaming attitude towards our less savoury impulses and motivations. We explore these in a way which is not only safe but also humorous.

In striving for the love, care and intimacy, we can neglect the place of the utilitarian in relationship. Paradoxically, by owning our smaller-minded and self-oriented needs – our *unvirtues* - intimacy is augmented. This is the quintessential experience of vibrant authenticity in relationship.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

4. Understand the relationship of virtues to unvirtues
5. Recognise and acknowledge the the less noble side of noble intentions
6. Exercise self humour as an alternative to shame

Seminar schedule

Introductions in the group

The topic will be introduced with a set of self rating scales for participants to complete.

A theoretical overview will be presented, providing a context for the work.

Participants will be invited to identify their own virtues and will be assisted to deconstruct these to discover their unvirtues.

Group discussion will be used to explore these discoveries.

Discussion will also focus around the rating scales, and their ability to reveal levels of identification with virtues and unvirtues.

A demonstration of a 'showing up' dialogue will be conducted, and participants invited to practice this themselves.

Wrap up, checkout

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Investigate the field of the 'Grotesque'
2. Recognise cultural influences which shape ideas of self, relationship, ethics and polarities.
3. Examine the connection between ethics, beliefs, avoidances, and creative adjustments.
4. Learn how to engage in a 'showing up' dialogue
5. Explore self interest as it exists in identified virtues
6. Discover and acknowledge the underbelly of self-identifications

#3 THE UNIVERSAL CHALLENGE OF SHAME IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

Robert Lee suggests: 'there is either shame, or belonging'.

Shame is one of the hard wired emotions. But its different than other emotions, because its 'the emotion about emotions'. That is, it's an essential signal regarding the safety of exposing feelings in the social sphere. Hence its description as a 'social emotion'.

Therapy inevitably exposes feelings and experiences which have often long been tucked away - for good reason: there was not enough support at the time to fully be present with those experiences.

The danger of therapy is that, even with the best of skill and intentions of the therapist, the same feelings of shame can arise.

However, no one wants to feel shame - its generally far too painful. Instead, a range of other behaviour substitute. This is true also of the therapist, who may be caught by surprise at getting caught up in a shame cycle with a client. This happens easily, and not infrequently, but can easily be masked by therapists.

The most common way to do this is to 'ask questions', which are the stock in trade of most therapists. However, questions act like a spotlight, exposing the client, and keeping the therapist safely hidden.

Knowledge of the nature of shame, its origins, its manifestations and its dynamics in therapy, is an essential part of professional practice. But this has only come to light in recent years; and many therapists have not dealt extensively with shame in their own personal process, so it can be hard to address successfully in therapy.

This workshop serves as an introduction to a very big topic. We will move gently and respectfully into the fraught territory of working with shame.

The topic will be approached from a Gestalt perspective, so there will be an equal emphasis on application to self as well as clients.

We will look at shame as a regulator of excitement, healthy shame, ground shame, shame cycles and the shame spectrum. We will examine the juxtaposition of the yearning to belong, and the experience of alienation.

Issues of therapeutic management will be addressed, the indicators of shame, and a range of possible responses.

Support is a counter balance to support, so we will look at the relevance and use of support in the therapeutic context.

Equally important, we will use exercises, sharing, and demonstration work to connect the theory with personal experience and insight.

Articles by Lee and Jacobs will be provided, which explore the therapeutic issues related to the topic of shame.

The emphasis in the workshop will be on creating conditions of safety, as we gain insight and explore both experientially this important topic.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

7. Understand the nature and function of shame
8. Understand the issues which arise in the therapeutic management of shame
9. Be able to recognise signs of shame in both self and client
10. Understand how to interrupt shame cycles
11. Attenuate exposure in the therapeutic process in relation to the client's capacity, and be able to employ other therapeutic approaches
12. Utilise support to address shame binds

Seminar schedule

Introductions in the group
Presentation of the frame work of shame
Brainstorming on issues of shame and belonging
Group exercise, discussion
Outline of therapeutic issues in relation to shame
Demonstration of working with shame in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion
Dialogical exercise for participants
Issues arising, discussion.
Further presentation on theory.
Demonstration of working with shame in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion
Dyad exercise
Issues arising, discussion.
Further presentation on theory.
Demonstration of working with shame in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion
Wrap up and checking out

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Gain insight into the topic of shame
2. Be able to identify signs of shame in self and client, and know what to do about it
3. Recognise the value of shame as a social emotion
4. Know how to balance support and exposure in interpersonal relationships of all types

#4 LOVE & POWER

How much power do you exercise in relationship?

How enriching is the connection in your relationship?

This workshop explores how connection and potency can co-exist, for success and excitement in relationship.

Summary of the workshop

Power involves *actioning, standing strong, being in control.*

Love involves *connection, intimacy, closeness, affection, openness.*

Love and Power can be in conflict... bringing hurt and failure, or they can add up to a greater synergy, bringing skill and intimacy together

Transformational questions that will be explored include:

- What is my power style?
- How can I communicate clearly from my empowered place?
- How can I articulate the shadow of my power...and not over-power, or collapse?

Overview of the workshop

We are drawn to relationship because of intimacy - warmth, connection and belonging.

Yet relationship is full of the practicalities of life - achieving goals, getting places on time... and the other person becomes a means to our ends.

We seek love, yet frequently depart from the experience of mutuality, angrily telling the other person what to do, or shutting down because of feeling pushed or manipulated.

We will explore how your personal power style gets in the way of relationship, and you can do about it.

We will examine the question of how love and power can be reconciled successfully in relationship. How can you remain loving in relationship and keep the connection despite your shadowy self waiting to pounce?

This workshop will develop the skills involved in each dimension, and introduce ways to find an integration of love and power.

'But this is the exalted melancholy of our fate, that every Thou in our world must become an It'
-Martin Buber

The content

We will draw on insights and techniques from Gestalt therapy, including Martin Buber's I-thou meeting. By learning the skills of mutuality and connection, we can enhance the experience of intimacy.

We will explore the experience of shame - how it arises, and what can be done to ensure it doesn't become a destructive of connection. By learning about how we move from belonging to isolation, we can understand how dynamics of power in relationship work. We learn how to use support to build a bridge to wholeness, even amidst differences in capacity or authority.

We will learn about 'the unvirtues' - the shadow side of our good intentions, where we can end up being hurtful without realising it. This insight into the dynamics of your power can make a big difference as to whether it enhances connection or destroys it.

We will look at how you can repair conflict in ways which allow you to stay connected. Being able to read and articulate difficult emotional states gives you the skills to build bridges.

We will find how 'existential responsibility' can help free you from the blame game, both ways. By acknowledging 'what is', we can bring awareness and healing to the places where power can hurt.

We will use creative processes - art and psychodrama - to explore and understand how to can make a difference, and bring together love and power in our hearts, our relationships, and the day to day practicalities of relationship.

INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY CONSTELLATIONS

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

The Constellation Approach originates from the methodology of systemic therapy which looks at life as a whole versus isolated incidents of pain. By viewing family situations with a wider lens, we gain insights into the deeper reasons things occur.

Out of love and loyalty, we often unconsciously carry the traumas and destructive patterns of our ancestors, which may manifest in our daily lives as unresolvable personal problems and relationship issues.

Systemic Constellations are a method for revealing and re-aligning hidden loyalties in family, business, or other kinds of tightly bonded groups. People have taken on, often without being aware of it, “assignments” to function in a certain way in the groups they belong to—especially in the family. Yet often these assignments are in conflict with their personal health or fulfillment. They serve as anchors — unseen sticking points — that prevent positive change. Constellations make these anchors visible.

The approach was originally developed by Bert Hellinger in the 1970’s, and combines a number of influences:

- Field theory
- Phenomenology
- Psychodrama
- Spirituality
- Structural family therapy

Field theory is a way of understanding individual experiences as being part of an large interconnected whole. So the problems an individual faces can be seen in the context of not only their experiences growing up, but also dynamics which occurred with their grandparents or even further back in the family.

Phenomenology involves attention to the obvious rather than the abstract and theoretical. This entails investigating direct experience – sensory perception and internal body sensations, rather than making sense of things by interpretation and abstract meaning making.

Psychodrama refers to the embodied expression of stuck situations; the focus is on gaining insight in a dynamic way rather than through explanation and once-removed description.

Spirituality comes into constellation work in the appreciation of subtle forces which lead us to growth and development, and discovering that which allows love to flow in families.

Structural family therapy is interested in where people are placed in the family, and how that is helpful or unhelpful to the growth and development of individual members.

A typical session starts with a participant:

- naming their issue and the basic facts about their family
- selecting other workshop members to represent people in their family
- placing those people in relation to each other in the room

The facilitator then

- asks representatives about their experience
- follows where the energy of the family and individuals seems to be moving
- asks representatives to repeat short sentences which essentially acknowledge basic truths about the family
- moves representatives into a more functional structure where possible
- invites the person whose issue it was to step into their place in the reformed constellation

The effect of participating in and witnessing this type of work is very powerful. With a minimum of dialogue, significant transformations can occur, and these can be long lasting.

The workshop will be conducted using experiential demonstration work, interspersed with an overview of the theory, with connections drawn to each individual piece.

The theory and practice of a systemic orientation will be elucidated and the points of connection to field theory and other systemic modalities will be highlighted.

Discussion will be facilitated with participants as to applications to a range of therapeutic situations

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

5. Understand the systemic approach of Family Constellations to uncovering and working with hidden family loyalties
6. Understand how to work with structural issues in family dynamics
7. Understand the systemic principles at work behind a range of individual symptoms
8. Apply a contextual perspective to a client's presenting issues
9. Understand the therapeutic use of conversation-as-ritual
10. Understand working with social trauma and its impact on individuals

Seminar schedule

Contextual background to the theory and practice of constellations

Outline of the procedure

Cycles of:

 Experiential demonstration work in the group

 Deconstruction, questions, discussion

Wrap up, check out

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Learn to recognise hidden family entanglements
2. Gain insight into the contextual dimensions of individual problems
3. Understand the way family loyalties shape client's symptomatology
4. Learn about a way to work with complex intergenerational family dynamics

#6 AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY: A GESTALT APPROACH

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

Martin Buber proposed some profound perspectives on human relationships. His enumeration of the 'I-Thou' provided inspiration for domains as varied as politics, religion and psychotherapy.

Gestalt therapy has adopted this as a core reference point in the methodology of building an effective therapeutic alliance.

It is well established in the literature that the therapeutic relationship is the single most important factor in therapeutic success, across all modalities.

Yet detailed knowledge and skill in achieving a highly productive therapeutic relationship are not necessarily widely developed in the field.

The Gestalt approach offers some very specific approaches, providing a clear framing theory, and practical principles which can be employed in the therapeutic process.

The important distinction here though is that this approach does not use particular techniques. Therapeutic interventions necessarily start with a knowledge of self, and an ability to bring that into the therapeutic dialogue.

This puts the spotlight of awareness back on the therapist, and suggests using statements more than the standard questions-based approach.

The therapeutic relationship is seen as something substantive, and a real life laboratory for experience, rather than 'just' a preparation for the outside world.

To quote Buber 'all living is meeting'. Gestalt explores the nature of that meeting, described as contact. What is of interest is the capacity to see the other as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end; this is the core idea of the I-thou encounter.

This attitude allows us to move out of the roles of therapist/expert - client/layperson. A type of horizontal meeting becomes possible, that is about two human beings, learning together.

This is hard to teach, or prescribe. It is more the nature of a genuine gift, in the moment, and engenders real intimacy.

This can be seen as a contrast with an at-a-distance orientation to therapy, which frames it in purely instrumental and professional terms. Rapport becomes a 'skill' rather than noticing what emerges from the ground of relationship.

This differs from the Rogerian 'unconditional positive regard', as it takes whatever is happening in the relationship, and finds a way to explore the nature of the contact, as grist for the therapeutic mill.

It is through profound contact with another person that we can more fully know ourselves. We are interested in what helps develop this quality of contact in relationships, so that we can find the growing edge of discovery between togetherness and separateness.

In togetherness, sameness, and symbiosis, lies a sense of safety. But relationship is rarely like that for very long.

So an integral part of deepening contact is the exploration of differences. As threatening as this can be, it provides a clear edge to the contact boundary, supporting definition of self - something many clients lack.

Overall, this approach requires a process of renewed willingness on the part of the therapist to share the risk of self revelation. This builds a quality of therapeutic ground which greatly enhances any interventions, and in some way reduces the importance and emphasis on therapeutic interventions.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

5. Understand contact in terms of similarity and difference, and be able to work therapeutically with difference.
6. Understand the basics of the I-thou approach to therapeutic relationship
7. Understand some of phenomena that occur at the contact boundary, and disrupts the quality of relationship
8. Understand the use of self as a key part of the therapeutic encounter
9. Understand the core differences between *presence* and *inclusion* as modes of relational therapeutic dialogue.
10. Understand how to conduct a therapeutic process without the use of questions

Seminar schedule

Introductions in the group

Presentation of the framework of dialogue

Demonstration of working with dialogue in the therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Dialogue exercise

Demonstration of the difference between an inclusion orientation and a presence orientation

Deconstruction

Issues arising, discussion

Presence exercise, discussion

Demonstration of the I-thou

Deconstruction

Issues arising, discussion

I-thou practice, discussion

Outline of application of dialogical orientation, discussion

Wrap up, checkout

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Learn a contemporary approach to bringing authenticity into the therapeutic relationship
2. Understand the application of an I-thou orientation in psychotherapy
3. Learn the process of including self as part of a therapeutic encounter

#7 A PROCESS ORIENTED MODEL TO WORKING WITH COUPLES AND FAMILIES

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

Joseph Zinker and Sonia Nevis have developed a model of working with couples, based on a Gestalt approach, and incorporating systemic principles.

The model is elegant, effective, and relatively easy to learn. It can be applied immediately by professionals experienced in the field of couples and family work.

A number of general themes and approaches underlie the model:

- Phenomenological observation
- I-thou dialogue
- Styles of contact
- Working with resistance
- Paradoxical Theory of Change
- Field theory
- The cycle of awareness
- Organismic self regulation
- Working at the boundary of the system
- Tailored therapeutic experiments
- Enhancing awareness
- Orientation to process over content
- Aesthetic appreciation of systemic dynamics
- Existential approach to therapy
- Working with support
- Polarities

The model itself involves five steps and three stages of interventions. It utilises a positive psychology approach, and begins in a way which is competency-based, and de-shaming of the couple/family system.

This approach requires a skilful mindset, and a willingness and ability to look for functionality in the midst of dysfunction.

The careful attention to boundaries of the couples/family system is reminiscent of the one-way mirror model, though this is achieved without a team/supervisor providing support for staying at the boundary of the system.

The interventions dovetail into each other in a way which adds power to the behavioural component of the process.

One of the components of working successfully with systems is the balance between strong intervention, and lack of therapist investment in the outcome. To be able to reject the role of change agent - although that is the premise of the couple or family - is an important attitude and skill which will be addressed.

Another capacity required is to see the system *itself*, rather than the individuals in it. This requires both a mindset and a particular type of therapeutic skill.

A range of Gestalt theory underpins the model, and will be articulated. This includes the Awareness Cycle, a way of tracking the arising of themes in a couple/family system, and their movement into successful completion. It is in the places where this movement is blocked that the system needs support, and the therapist can intervene. The identified stages of the cycle are sensation/awareness-figure formation/mobilisation of energy/choice/action/contact/satisfaction-fulfilment/withdrawal.

Other areas which will be covered include

- Complementarity and the Middle Ground
- Ways to diagnose the system in process terms
- Therapist as relational instrument
- The conversion of theme into experiment

As time permits, and questions arise, other aspects of theory will also be addressed.

The seminar is oriented towards a skill based learning of the model, and participants can expect to come away with the ground to apply the model in their work.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

4. Understand the Zinker-Nevis model of systemic intervention
5. Utilise a number of the skills required by the model
6. Understand the principles underlying the model
7. Focus on the process rather than content of the family/couple system
8. Be able to see and work with the 'between'
9. Apply the model to their own work

Seminar schedule

Introductions in the group

Presentation of the framework of the model

Questions, discussion

Demonstration of working with the model

Deconstruction, discussion

Participants practice with the model

Supervisory feedback

Discussion

Introduction and explanation of other theoretical underpinnings to the model

Participants practice with the model

Supervisory feedback

Discussion, theory relevance

Wrap up, checkout

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Gain knowledge of a process-oriented model of working with couples/families
2. Gain some skills associated with the model
3. Learn a number of theoretical underpinnings to the Gestalt approach to working with couples/families
4. Understand how to work at the boundary of a couple/family system

#8 PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE THERAPEUTIC USE OF AWARENESS:

AN EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH TO SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

Before post-structuralism was post-modernism...and before that was existentialism...and before that was phenomenology. In the face of the sweeping success of the march of objective science in the 19th Century, Edmund Husserl offered a radical and alternative view.

This approach - known as the *science of subjectivity* - is just as relevant today, as the psychology industry takes shelter the legitimacy of objective science. Phenomenology offers not only an alternative narrative, through applications in Gestalt therapy it becomes a therapeutic methodology that is startlingly effective.

This approach is contrasted with the interpretive therapies, which offer authoritative interventions based on codified knowledge.

In essence, it involves a kind of anthropological investigation into the clients experience, with the therapist carefully constructing meaning that stays true to the client's world.

This requires temporarily suspending our knowledge, and even experience, and being able to approach each situation, each client, from a fresh perspective.

This spirit of enquiry is a potent force, allowing us to enter right into the heart of the client's reality, and understand it from the inside.

Clients feel known and met in this process, yet it involves a remarkably simple approach. By staying with description and observation, the client themselves volunteers their deeper experiences and motivations.

A central tool in this process is the use of awareness, especially sensory and somatic, as these are not caught up in the complex web of explanations which clients often carry, and use to rationalise their problems.

We can track the development of awareness, and note where the unfolding process gets stuck. This is described in Gestalt as the Cycle of Awareness, and it is a very useful tool, both explanatory as well as indicative for interventions.

Existentialism, drawing its roots from Phenomenology, adds certain themes that are useful to therapy. An ability to work with the 'what is', allows for a particular mechanism of change - one diametrically different than planned goal setting. In Gestalt this is described as the 'paradoxical theory of change', and it flows from the observation that the more change is pushed for, the greater the resistance.

The important endpoint is clinical application. These philosophical perspectives have immediate application to the work of therapy, and provide simple and effective tools for working with clients.

We will explore these tools, and show how easily they can be used.

Important articles by Spinelli and Yontef will be included in the resources.

We cover methods of implementation, use exercises and experiential demonstration work in the group to provide examples of application of the principles.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

5. Understand the theoretical framework of Phenomenology
6. Understand the use of awareness as a tool for therapeutic intervention
7. Work with the 3 zones of awareness
8. Understand the methodology of working with phenomenology
9. Understand the difference between description and explanation in therapeutic interventions
10. Understand the process of working with 'the obvious' as a tool for change
11. Understand the nature of working with the 'what is' as a tool for change

Seminar schedule

Introductions in the group

Presentation of the framework of phenomenology

Awareness exercise, discussion

Demonstration of working with awareness in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Somatic awareness exercise

Demonstration of working with phenomenological method in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Issues arising, discussion

Bracketing exercise, discussion

Demonstration of working with bracketing in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Issues arising, discussion

Demonstration of working with 'what is' in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Introduction of awareness cycle

Demonstration of working with 'cycle' in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Wrap up, checkout

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Learn the therapeutic use of non-directed awareness
2. Learn a non-interpretive orientation to therapeutic intervention
3. Understand the practical application of an existential approach to psychotherapy
4. Learn an alternative framework for working with therapeutic change which is present-centred and doesn't use goal setting

#9 FIELD THEORY AS A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

*When we try to pick up anything by itself
we find it is attached to everything in the universe.
-- John Muir*

Field theory has been described as 'the theory of everything. The assumption that an individual is limited to an independent, inherent existence is part of a linear and mechanistic perspective, and is true only within a limited frame of reference.

Field theory expands our view of experience, behaviours and problems to understand them in terms of context. There are multiple layers to this context, which can also be described as nested systems. The further out we go, the greater perspective we have, but the harder to apply it to the specifics at hand. At the base, everything is interconnected.

This provides what has been referred to as a holistic orientation, and draws on traditions such as Gestalt psychology, Jan Smut's evolutionary ideas, and especially the work of Kurt Lewin. He is known as the father of group dynamics, and originally proposed a model of what he referred to as 'topographical psychology'.

These grand ideas and perspectives have informed the development of systemic therapies, specifically couples and family therapy. They find practical application in the range of approaches and interventions which have proved an effective alternative to individually oriented, intra-psychically focused therapy.

However, the principles of field theory can be applied equally effectively in individual psychotherapy.

In this seminar we will examine the theoretical underpinnings of this approach, and the ways in which it can be applied in therapy.

We will explore an understanding of the co-created field, which brings a relational perspective to the therapeutic dyad.

The topic of figural vs ground focus will be addressed, bringing up the question of what issue is being addressed in the therapy.

Links will be made to various other therapeutic approaches, such as development theory and related therapies.

The seminar will show how field theory can be applied in a variety of circumstances and issues, and a few techniques will be introduced.

Most fundamentally the application of field theory requires a profound shift of perspective. Although some therapies incorporate this approach, many aspects of the therapeutic world operate from a narrower focus on the individual.

Field theory also provides a relational understanding of psychopathology. Instead of something being 'wrong' with the person, we can look for what's wrong with the context. This provides a different focus for therapeutic interventions, and connects present experience with elements that initially may seem unrelated. Family Constellation work is a good example of this, demonstrating links between current problems and intergenerational loyalties.

Field theory is a large topic, which we will take an initial look at in this seminar.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

5. Understand the contrast between a field theory approach to psychotherapy, and an intra-psychic one.
6. Recognise the opportunities in a therapeutic interaction for using a field-based intervention
7. Understand the nature of the interconnectedness of phenomena
8. Recognise the cocreated aspects of the therapeutic relationship
9. Understand the application of multiple causality to the therapeutic process
10. See an interaction in terms of its systemic context

Seminar schedule

Introductions in the group

Presentation of the framework of field theory

Field theory exercise, discussion

Demonstration of working with field theory in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Exercise no 2

Demonstration of working with field theory in therapeutic process

Deconstruction, discussion

Issues arising, discussion

Exercise no 3

discussion

Demonstration of working with field theory in group process

Deconstruction

Issues arising, discussion

Wrap up, checkout

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Gain an understanding of Field theory and its application in psychotherapy
2. Learn about the shift from individual experience to a interconnected view of presenting issues
3. Learn to embrace complexity, messiness and chaos as a precursor to gaining clarity in a system
4. Gain an understanding of the relationship between meaning and context

#10 CONTEMPORARY GESTALT THERAPY

Content of the activity and a detailed outline of the event

The Gestalt approach is:

1. Existential, because
 - a. It is grounded in the here and now
 - b. It emphasizes that each person is responsible for his or her own destiny
 - c. The client feels contacted by the therapist in the immediacy of the session, resulting in the experience of being seen, recognised and affirmed
2. Phenomenological, because
 - a. It focuses on the client's perception of reality
 - b. Utilises and develops client awareness as a transformative tool
 - c. It is oriented towards experience rather than interpretation or abstract categorisation
3. Experiential, because
 - a. Clients come to grips with what and how they are thinking, feeling and doing through interaction with the therapist
 - b. It helps the client make contact with their own personal experiences with vividness and embodiment, rather than just 'talk about' them
 - c. The client and therapist co-create new ways of addressing the world that allow the client to experiment with being different, and acting differently
4. Relational, because
 - a. It takes an "I/Thou" approach to the client/therapist relationship
 - b. 'Resistance' is conceived in interactive terms, not as client pathology
 - c. It emphasises the interpersonal rather than intra-psychic, and thus is a systemic therapy

The workshop will explore a contemporary understanding of Gestalt therapy and its applications, both as an approach to living, as well as a therapeutic modality.

We will start with a theoretical overview, covering the 4 Pillars of Gestalt:

- Phenomenology: the science of awareness
- Dialogue: I-Thou relating
- Field Theory: Holism
- Experiment: risking the new

Overview

The workshop will provide an introduction to each of these areas, and then follow through with exercises and experiential demonstration work. The emphasis will be twofold - personal integration, and professional practice.

The Gestalt view is that the basis for understanding the client is a deeper understanding of oneself. This is the underlying characteristic of a dialogical therapy, and it is embedded both in learning and practicing Gestalt.

Although many facets of Gestalt have now become familiar and integrated into the world of psychotherapy, it still retains a characteristic focus on authenticity. In the 1960's this tended to have a sharp confrontative edge. In current times, the Gestalt approach has widened to incorporate an understanding of many other complexities of relational work, including the impact of shame and the importance of context.

One of the many dimensions Gestalt drew on was psychodrama, and this was incorporated as the colourful and creative approach embedded in the 'Gestalt Experiment'. The best known example of this is the 'two chair' process. Unfortunately, this one component of Gestalt became magnified and identified as Gestalt practice. In current times, the creative component of Gestalt has been retained, and is now more fully integrated into the process and relational orientation, moving it out of 'technique' and into a more fluid way of working.

This workshop will address these contemporary understandings, and demonstrate how they are applied in relational Gestalt therapy.

Learning outcomes

By the conclusion of this seminar participants will be able to:

1. Understand the core theoretical frames of Gestalt therapy
2. Understand the application of Field theory in Gestalt process
3. Understand the use of awareness, and the phenomenological approach
4. Understand the core elements of dialogical therapy
5. Understand the way creative experimentation can be used in therapy, in service of both awareness and behavioural change.
6. Understand ways in which an existential approach to psychotherapy can be integrated with relational and attachment based approaches.
7. Enter more fully into authentic dialogue.

Seminar schedule

Day 1

Introductions in the group
Overview of the Gestalt model

Topic 1: awareness

Outline of the phenomenological approach
Awareness exercise, discussion
Demonstration of application of phenomenological principles in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion

Topic 2: Introduction to field theory - presentation of core principles

Group exercise
Demonstration of application of field theory in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion

Topic 3: Introduction to the dialogical approach - presentation of core principles

Demonstration of application of the dialogical approach in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion
Exercise
Reflection and discussion
Wrap up and checkout

Day 2

Checking in
Questions and issues arising
Authentic contact - exercise in the group
Discussion and implications

Topic 4: Introduction to the Gestalt experiment - presentation of core principles

Demonstration of application of experiment in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion
Exercise, discussion
Issues arising
Demonstration of an I-thou approach in therapeutic process
Deconstruction, discussion
I-thou exercise, discussion
Issues arising
Some interactive-group Gestalt work
Final Q&A
Checking out

How will participants benefit from attending this seminar?

1. Learn the core framework of the Gestalt approach
2. Gain both personal and professional understanding of the process of authentic dialogue
3. Understand the transformative power and methodology of an existential orientation to change
4. Learn the Gestalt approach to tailored, creative experiments as an embodied approach to getting unstuck