

Polish Association for Gestalt Therapy
member of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy (EAGT)

Code of Ethics

Introduction

This is a new edition of the Code of Ethics for individuals and institutions that are members of the Polish Association for Gestalt Therapy. The purpose of this Code is to demonstrate the core norms and values and to establish standards applicable in professional practice of Gestalt therapists and in Gestalt training centres. In addition, this Code is to become the source of knowledge about Gestalt therapy and serve to protect the interests of those who are clients of Gestalt therapists.

Gestalt therapists are responsible for compliance with the principles contained in the Code of Ethics. They should be perceived, however, rather as a starting point for further development of widely understood rules of good professional practice than a closed set of once and for all formulated requirements.

The Code serves to protect the interests of clients and psychotherapists because it sets standards clearly defining the framework for professional practice and responsibility in the therapeutic process.

The primary purpose of psychotherapy is to work for the improvement of psychophysical and social condition of individuals, social groups in the process of building a psychotherapeutic relationship. The principles of the Code form an interface to solve potential problems and conflicts that may appear in this process between two or more parties. Note that an important value for Gestalt therapists is to solve problems through dialogue and through the exchange of views, and not based on a hierarchical system of rigidly formulated rules and the various resulting consequences.

Part I

Basic ethical assumptions of the Code of Ethics of a Gestalt psychotherapist

1. Every human being is equally valuable for us.
2. We respect the uniqueness, individuality and dignity of an individual.
3. We respect the differences in race, ethnicity, origin, gender, sexual orientation or preferences, disability, age, religion, language, social or economic status and spiritual needs.
4. We recognize the right to independence and self-determination of every person entering the interpersonal relationship.

Part II

Rules of professional practice for a Gestalt therapist

B.1. Professional competence of a Gestalt psychotherapist

B.1.1. A Gestalt psychotherapist holding a valid certificate or in the process of training undertakes to conduct therapy only when he is sure that he has the skills and qualifications required for the exercise or termination of therapy for the benefit of the client.

B.1.2. If a Gestalt therapist finds that the context, structure or scope of the problem reported by the client and his own skills and qualifications render it impossible to carry out an effective therapeutic process, he withdraws from further therapeutic work with this client, directing him to another specialist or he initiates cooperation with another specialist.

B.1.3. In this case it is a responsibility of a Gestalt psychotherapist to renegotiate a contract with the client. A therapist may decide to continue the therapy even though he recognizes the limitations of his competence, but only when at the same time he takes measures to increase his professional skills. A therapist may take up the following steps:

B.1.3.1. Considering carefully if his competence is suitable for the intended direction of work with unconditional focus on the welfare and benefit of the client. If a therapist decides that the context of the work area, its structure, limits and dominant goals are in any way contradictory or too limiting for the development of competence necessary for further work with the client, he withdraws from further activities in a given area.

B.1.3.2. Benefiting from the support of other experienced therapists and seeking explanations of his difficulties in the work with the client .

B.1.3.3. Participating in a group or individual supervision depending what kind of supervision is more suitable to solve his difficulties.

B.1.3.4. Getting in touch with other professionals and institutions (e.g. clinics) in order to carry out and provide necessary diagnosis.

B.1.4.A Gestalt psychotherapist does not undertake tasks or participate in activities (lectures, seminars, interviews, activity in public media) that are not compliant with the professional standards contained in this Code and he protects his work against this kind of activities.

B.1.5. A Gestalt psychotherapist uses his own individual therapy in case of disturbances in his professional practice originating from his personal crises, observed signs of professional burn-out and/or experienced difficulties in maintaining intimacy borders and problems in the area of abuses, such as seduction.

B.1.6. Methods and techniques of work applied in a therapeutic process serve therapeutic objectives and client's development, determined in the contract. A Gestalt psychotherapist is aware that any activities such as acting-out, and expressive and clearing experiments require a precise and careful working out of the problem and return to the client's reality (closing the figure).

B.1.7. In his education, which lasts throughout his working lives, a Gestalt therapist takes care to enhance and deepen his professional and personal skills. A Gestalt therapist always has the welfare of the client in mind, is interested in the development and progress in the fields of science and practices that may affect the process of therapy. This means that the search for a therapist does not focus exclusively on the field of Gestalt therapy, but he also examines achievements of other schools of psychotherapy.

B.1.8. A Gestalt psychotherapist keeps a detailed record of his therapeutic and diagnostic work and complies with national regulations and norms referring to a required period of keeping those records as well as related safety procedures. This documentation has an appropriate scientific level determined by national provisions. It is objective and clear enough for another psychotherapist to understand.

B.2. Client- therapist relationship

B.2.1 The client/therapist relationship is a professional relationship and the psychotherapist's main objective in the process of its formation is client's welfare.

B.2.2. A Gestalt therapist recognizes the importance of the therapeutic relationship for an effective therapy and is aware of his position in this relationship, his potential influence on the client and the issues of dependency creation as indispensable elements of a therapeutic process. A Gestalt therapist acts in a manner consistent with this recognition and does not exploit or abuse clients financially, sexually, emotionally, politically or ideologically for his own needs or for the advantage of any other person or institution.

B.2.3. A Gestalt therapist is aware that his other relationships or external commitments may conflict with the client's interests. When such a conflict of interests occurs, a Gestalt therapist is obliged to reveal it in the therapeutic process and take necessary action to resolve the issue.

B.2.4. A direct physical contact in the therapeutic process is exclusively orientated to the welfare of the client and meeting his therapeutic objectives and requires a special professional approach and care from the therapist. Such direct physical contact in the therapeutic relationship is permissible only with the consent of the client.

B.2.5. A Gestalt therapist is aware that being an employee, a close friend, relative, neighbour or partner of the client is incompatible with the therapeutic relationship.

B.3. Professional Secret

B.3.1. Everything that happens in a therapeutic relationship is confidential, subject to the reservations described in section 3.7.

B.3.2. The manner of storing personal data of the client as well as other information about the client, including the description of his therapy, is regulated by relevant national provisions.

B.3.3. A Gestalt therapist makes sure that no information allowing identification of the client has been disclosed as a result of overlapping of other relationships requiring discretion on the therapy, such as intervision and supervision.

B.3.4. When a Gestalt therapist wishes to use specific information gained during work with a client in a lecture or publication, the client's permission must be obtained and the therapist must ensure that the client is not identified.

B.3.5. When a Gestalt therapist wishes to publish the description of a therapeutic process or use a specific case material for reports and publications, he must inform his client of this fact and obtain his written permission. He must also ensure that the client remains anonymous.

B.3.6. Making tape recordings or video, taking pictures or filming during a therapy session requires the written consent of the client or his legal representative.

B.3.7. When a Gestalt therapist wishes to obtain relevant data about a client from other professionals or institutions, he shall respect client's rights as regulated by the law. This also applies to the handling of any written data regarding the client.

B.3.8. A Gestalt therapist takes into account the client's right of access to his record as determined in the relevant national legal regulations, but he also makes careful decisions about showing those materials to the client.

B.3.9. When public or private institutions, such as law courts, insurance companies etc., request information about a client, a Gestalt therapist complies with the national regulations. In such case, a Gestalt therapist initiates a conversation with the client about this issue and acts in the manner which is most beneficial to the therapeutic process.

B.3.10. When the client is legally considered a minor, a Gestalt therapist complies with all the above provisions of the Code. In addition, a Gestalt therapist conforms to all national legal and professional regulations on procedures related to informing proper institutions in the case of abuse or other forms of serious abuse or negligence of a child.

B .4. Contract with Client

B.4.1. Any contract concluded between a Gestalt therapist and his client, regardless of whether it was concluded orally or in writing, is applicable to both parties.

B.4.2. When negotiating a therapeutic contract, a Gestalt therapist clearly and openly informs the client about his competence, expertise and experience.

B.4.3. A Gestalt therapist applies recruitment procedures consistent with the rules binding in the place where he practices.

B.4.4. Any recording, filming or another form of observation of a therapeutic sessions must be discussed and become the subject of the contract with the client.

B.4.5. Contracts with clients, whether written or verbal, clearly determine location, fees, payment schedule, breaks and way of cancellation of sessions by the client or therapist. Breaks can occur, for example in connection with holidays, other professional obligations of a therapist, illness, etc. The length of a therapy, a decision to change the therapist and the completion of the therapy are determined by agreement with the client .

B.4.6. In the event of a personal crisis or serious long illness, a Gestalt therapist takes measures to protect the client's welfare.

B.4.7. A Gestalt therapist gives a guarantee to his client that his therapeutic process will not be influenced by other people, external principles or assessments. The therapist also ensures that no assessments or interests of other people related to the client will be taken into account, regardless of their degree of involvement in the relationship.

B.4.8. Any changes of therapy conditions require the re-negotiation of the original contract.

B.5. Advertising of therapeutic services

Advertising of the therapist's work is limited to the description of the services and qualifications of the person providing them. Advertising may not contain any references. It cannot also contain comparisons or in any way imply that the proposed services are more effective than those offered by other therapists, other schools of psychotherapy or other organizations. Advertising is governed by the national regulations.

B.6. Safety

B.6.1. Taking appropriate measures, a Gestalt therapist ensures that during the therapy sessions the client suffers neither physical nor psychological harm in the location where the therapy takes place.

B.6.2. A Gestalt therapist provides such conditions for therapy sessions that his client cannot be recorded, overheard or observed.

B.6.3. Gestalt therapists who work individually and in therapeutic centers ensure that their professional work is covered by civil liability insurance for psychotherapeutic practice.

B.7. Exceptional cases and circumstances

B.7.1. In a therapeutic process there may be circumstances when a Gestalt therapist will need to take additional measures to protect the client and his environment. These measures may be taken by a therapist when he decides that his client has lost the ability to self-control. In such circumstances a therapist should attempt to inform the client about changes in the area of compliance with maintaining confidentiality by the therapist that must occur in relation to the original contract and to obtain his consent to it.

B.7.2. Establishing contact with the client in the life of whom there may be exceptional circumstances limiting his responsibility for himself, a Gestalt therapist will ask the client to indicate another person to whom he will be able to turn to in a crisis situation. In this case, the principle of maintaining confidentiality in the therapeutic process will be limited, with the proviso that this restriction will last for only a certain period of time and will only apply to such a range of activities that will provide the necessary minimum for the customer to resume responsibility for his actions.

B.7.3. In the event of a crisis relating both to an individual and the larger community (for example: the threat of life of the individual or group, civil unrest, wars, natural disasters), if only conditions allow, a Gestalt therapist will take into account the specific nature of the work and ensure the autonomy of the client and professional discretion.

B.7.4. A Gestalt therapist is obliged to protect the autonomy of the client and guarantee his professional discretion also in those cases where the therapeutic process is a part of broader therapeutic actions taken towards the client. This is particularly the case where therapeutic work has been initiated on request or as a result of application of standard procedures of other national institutions or organizations (e.g. hospital), or in cooperation with other health care organizations. In such a situation, a Gestalt therapist clearly determines principles of this contract at the initial stage of the contract with his client and will contact third parties only when permitted by the client.

B.8. Therapist's role in the society

B.8.1 A Gestalt therapist knows applicable laws related to his professional practice and attaches particular importance to respecting the rules arising from them.

B.8.2. A Gestalt therapist is open to co-operate in the area of research that promotes further development in professional therapeutic and diagnostic work, contributes to the research and makes the results of his work available to the therapeutic community.

B.8.3. In his research, a Gestalt therapist respects his work of his colleagues, particularly their copyrights.

B.8.4. A Gestalt therapist is accountable for his work to his co-workers and employers, always taking into account the priority needs of his client, his right to privacy and autonomy.

B.8.5. In his public presentations or during private meetings, a Gestalt therapist abstains from promoting his services, advertising his education and professional skills.

B.8.6. A Gestalt therapist complies with the local regulations on informing of his practice with the help of door plates, advertisements in newspapers, telephone directories or in the Internet.

B.8.7. A Gestalt therapist does not mislead his potential clients, advertising the services that he in fact does not render or qualifications that he does not have since this type of activity may prevent clients from seeking help in other places.

B.8.8. A Gestalt therapist does not hide from clients information about the professional help offered by other therapists or other institutions.

B.8.9. Also in his public statements, a Gestalt therapist treats the work of other therapist with respect and abstains from critical comments on other theories forming the base of therapeutic practice, alternative schools of psychotherapy or other therapists and their work.

B.8.10. A Gestalt therapist will not accept a task in which another therapist has already been involved, particularly when a therapeutic contract exists between a client and that therapist. In case of doubt, a Gestalt therapist gets in touch with the therapist, having obtained the client's consent.

B.8.11. A Gestalt therapist will not accept financial or personal benefits for referring clients to other therapists or centres.

B.8.12. Knowing the behaviour of a colleague that could bring discredit on the environment of psychotherapists and lower the prestige of psychotherapy as a field, a Gestalt therapist is obliged to inform the Ethics Committee of the PTPG of this behaviour.

B.8.13. A Gestalt therapist shall refrain from any public or private actions that could harm his professional reputation, are incompliant with professional ethics and could adversely affect the position and reputation of psychotherapists, as well as other modalities.

B.8.14. A Gestalt therapist is aware of social and political implications of his work and of social and political conditions influencing the lives of his clients.

C. Education of Gestalt therapists

C.1.1. The task of education in the field of psychotherapy is to provide trainees with an objective and comprehensive knowledge of psychotherapy in general and Gestalt therapy in particular. This knowledge should cover the theory, methodology and techniques applied in psychotherapy. Personal views of teachers should be presented only as such. Trainees should not be misled as far as official recognition of their education by the national institutions and professional organizations as the education meeting the requirements of legal acts regulating issues of psychotherapists' education. Similarly, with regard to permission to use the title "psychotherapist" and the possibility of covering the costs of psychotherapy by institutions providing health services and insurers.

C.1.2. Gestalt therapy centres training future therapists assess the qualifications, preparation and psycho-physical suitability of candidates to the profession of psychotherapist as well as provide comprehensive and clear information about the training program and the internal rules governing the process of education.

C.1.3. Gestalt therapy centres care about high quality of education, both in terms of the competence of teachers and supervisors, as well as professional coherence of the curricula. The centers use methods of internal control of effects of education and constantly improve the quality and modernize teaching methods.

C.1.4. Relationships between teachers and students and among institutes are transparent. Gestalt therapy teachers are aware of the specific nature of the relationship between those teaching and those learning and do not misuse this relationship for their own advantage. Gestalt therapy teachers are particularly aware of the existence of dependence issue in the relationship, emergence of idealization processes and occurrence of problems in the assessment process. Training centres set out principles guiding the teacher-trainee relationship, formulate rules and ensure to create a forum where potential problems can be resolved.

C.1.5. Through appropriate and transparent procedures, Gestalt therapy centres periodically check that a trainee achieves a satisfactory level of knowledge and skills.

C.1.6. Ethical principles that govern the client-therapist relationship and determine the therapist's role in the society equally apply to the process of teaching and training of therapists and to trainees and teachers (in the context of competence, trust, relationship-related issues, contract and safety).

C.1.7. Gestalt therapy teaching of a trainee should be protected against possible disruptions resulting from the confusion of roles on the part of the teaching therapist in his double role as a therapist and teacher. It will be possible when a therapist of a trainee does not take part in the official assessment procedure designed to evaluate the progress and suitability of the trainee for the profession.

C.1.8. A training therapist is a person who holds a valid certificate of Gestalt psychotherapist and remains under constant Gestalt supervision. PTPG provides access to information that contains an updated list of names of Gestalt therapists and supervisors.

C.1.9. Gestalt therapy centres ensure an appropriate human resources, didactic, clinical and scientific level of the members of their training teams. Possibility of an exchange of professional experience between teaching therapists, necessary supervision, and gradual training and development should be ensured.

C1.10.

C1.11. If the Gestalt therapist feels that he has to deal with the conflict of different ethical attitudes or values and is not able to resolve this conflict in the process of supervision, he should turn to the Ethics Committee of the PTPG on order to obtain appropriate advice.

C.2. Relationships with former clients

C.2.1 A Gestalt therapist takes full responsibility for relationships with former clients and current trainees.

C 3. Legal proceedings

Every Gestalt therapist who is a member of the PTPG and has been convicted in a court of law for any criminal offence or is the subject of a civil action brought by a client shall inform the Board of Executives of the PTPG of this fact.