



Co-funded by  
the European Union

# Experiential Therapy

## *A brief guide for professionals*



**AddictionSTOP**

*Experiential therapy in addiction treatment\_AddictionSTOP*

2023-1-DE02-KA210-ADU-000151866

*Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.*

## **Contents**

- a) Introduction**
- b) Experiential Therapy**
  - b1. What is experiential therapy? Benefits and Common Misconceptions**
  - b2. Experiential therapy in Greece, Germany & Spain**
- c) Techniques used in experiential therapy**
- d) Experiential therapy and addiction treatment**
- e) Group sessions vs. 1:1 sessions in experiential therapy**
- f) Practical tools and examples: Scenarios based on experiential therapy treatment**

## **Resources**

## Introduction

This educational guide on experiential therapy, which focuses on addiction treatment, was developed with input from, social scientists from the *World Society Builders gUG* (Germany), *the Union of Women's Associations of Heraklion Prefecture* (Greece), and *GESEME* (Spain). It was developed within the AddictionSTOP EU-funded Erasmus+ project (code).

Concerning the methodology used for this educational material, research was conducted by using scientific journals, books and articles. The authors also incorporated data from questionnaires filled out by the target group and the report produced during earlier project activities. This educational guide will be used as a base for the trainings of professionals taking place within the project.

The educational material contained in this guide is addressed to social scientists (psychologists and social workers) who are supporting people dealing with addictions. This document aims to raise awareness and provide useful information to professionals supporting and working with people dealing with addictions, by using experiential therapy techniques. Moreover, through this educational guide, professionals will gain insightful knowledge on experiential therapy treatment targeting people with addictions, both on a theoretical as well as a practical level.

This guide includes theory around what experiential therapy is, as well as different types of experiential therapy and how these can be used to benefit people dealing with addictions. As this guide will be tested by professionals from Greece, Germany, and Spain, contributors have also included a section providing information on the state of experiential therapy sessions in these countries. Apart from a theoretical part, this guide also includes a practical part with experiential therapy sessions scenarios, developed based on different types of experiential therapy and addressed to different forms of addiction. The aim is to provide professionals with practical blueprints that they can use in their therapy sessions.

By consulting and reading this guide, professionals will gain essential skills and knowledge around experiential therapy sessions, different types of experiential therapy techniques, and how these can be used to support people dealing with addictions. Moreover, they will get a thorough understanding of how an experiential therapy session is structured, through the scenario-based examples in the guide. Furthermore, professionals will become capable of adjusting their interventions and sessions to the specific needs of people dealing with addictions, in the framework of experiential therapy. In addition, professionals will contribute to the promotion of experiential therapy, as a type of intervention with immense benefits to people dealing with addictions, leading to breaking down stereotypes and misconceptions around experiential therapy techniques.

## **Experiential Therapy**

### **What is experiential therapy? Benefits and Common Misconceptions**

Experiential therapy is a therapeutic approach that uses expressive tools, engaging activities, and experiences to help individuals explore and process their emotions, behaviors, and relationships. Examples of experiential therapy techniques are role-playing, art therapy, music therapy, adventure therapy and psychodrama.

#### ***Benefits of Experiential Therapy***

Experiential therapy can build important personal and social skills for clients to deal with addiction. It can enhance emotional expression, self-awareness, and self-efficacy and build healthy coping strategies.

Experiential therapy also offers several benefits for therapists. It can be integrated into conventional treatment plans and it is adaptable for diverse populations. Clients' involvement and preferences can be considered in the treatment plan. Experiential therapy can be performed in single sessions or group sessions. Lastly, by building skills and successful coping mechanisms, long-term impacts can be created and relapse can be prevented.

##### **1. Nonverbal emotional expression**

This form of active, engaging therapy may help clients express their emotions, especially those who struggle to verbalize them. Individuals with language barriers, and disabilities profit from nonverbal emotional expression.

##### **2. Enhanced self-awareness**

Activities in experiential therapy may bring out unconscious feelings or unresolved issues. They can be particularly effective in addressing underlying trauma or grief.

##### **3. Self- efficacy**

Clients are challenged to take an active role in their treatment. This fosters a feeling of control and self-efficacy. Clients may learn to trust themselves and others better.

##### **4. Coping strategies**

Clients learn new techniques to deal with stress and other problems related to addiction, which can be adapted to their daily lives.

##### **5. Integration into a broader treatment plan**

Experiential therapy can be used either as a standalone intervention or as a part of a broader treatment plan, depending on individual needs and goals. This way, the

multifaceted nature of addiction can be addressed. There is consensus in Germany, Greece and Spain that experiential therapy should primarily be integrated into a broader treatment plan.

#### 6. Tailoring Approaches for Diverse Populations

It is possible and recommended to tailor experiential therapy for diverse populations, which requires cultural sensitivity and flexibility. Experiential therapy is adaptable to cultural values, developmental stages, and socioeconomic factors. Each country emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment.

#### 7. Professional Training and Competency

High levels of training and competency are essential for incorporating experiential therapy into practice. This includes formal qualifications, ongoing training, and adherence to ethical standards. These aspects should be consistently maintained across cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

#### 8. Client Preferences and Informed Decision-Making

The client's involvement in treatment decisions is crucial, taking into account their personal preferences and needs. There are many different types of experiential therapy modalities to choose from. Clients should be informed and respected in their decisions. This approach enhances therapeutic outcomes and client satisfaction.

#### 9. One-on-one or group therapy

Experiential therapy can easily be adapted to single sessions or group sessions. Group sessions have the advantage of including family members, partners, or friends, which can display relationship or family dynamics. Clients also gain communication skills by engaging in a group.

#### 10. Cost and Accessibility

Cost and accessibility vary across countries. Solutions include government funding, sliding-scale fees, and leveraging technology to reduce costs and enhance accessibility.

#### 11. Professional Training and Competency

High levels of training and competency are essential for incorporating experiential therapy into practice. This includes formal qualifications, ongoing training, and adherence to ethical standards.

#### 12. Combination of Experiential and Traditional Approaches

Combining experiential and traditional therapies can enhance treatment outcomes. Effective integration requires collaboration among professionals and tailoring interventions to individual needs.

#### 13. Long-term impact and relapse prevention

Therapy is especially helpful if it creates a long-term impact and prevents relapse in regard to addiction treatment. Experiential therapy significantly contributes to building resilience

and coping mechanisms essential for sustained recovery. It empowers clients by enhancing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and social support.

### ***Common misconceptions of Experiential Therapy***

#### **1. Special artistic or creative skills are needed**

Clients may be worried they lack special skills to engage in experiential therapy. They can be assured to focus on exploration and expression and not on aesthetics.

#### **2. Lack of evidence**

Clients may fear experiential therapy is less credible than talk therapy. However, research supports its effectiveness, especially when integrated with other therapeutic methods.

#### **3. Lack of seriousness**

Because experiential therapy involves activities like role-playing, art or movement, clients may fear it lacks depth. In reality, these activities provide an accessible and safe way to confront complex emotions and issues.

#### **4. Fear of feeling overwhelmed**

While some clients fear experiential therapy might be overwhelming or too intense, therapists tailor activities to each client's comfort and readiness.

#### **5. Experiential therapy is a standalone approach**

Experiential therapy is not meant to replace talk therapy or traditional therapy but is used in combination with other therapeutic modalities, such as CBT or DBT, to enhance the overall therapeutic process.

### ***Conclusion***

The state of the art in addiction treatment across Greece, Spain, and Germany highlights diverse approaches shaped by cultural, economic, and healthcare system factors. Common challenges include stigma, accessibility, and the integration of comprehensive care models. Each country utilizes a blend of pharmacological, psychosocial, and holistic interventions, reflecting an evolving understanding of addiction as a complex, multifaceted issue. Good practices emphasize the integration of pharmacological and psychosocial interventions, the use of holistic methods, and the importance of public education and professional training. Collaborative efforts and continuous research are essential to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of addiction treatment in these countries.

#### **Final Recommendations:**

- 1. Standardize Training and Evaluation:** Develop standardized training curricula and evaluation tools to ensure consistent quality and effectiveness across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts.
- 2. Enhance Integration:** Foster collaboration between experiential and traditional therapy practitioners to maximize therapeutic benefits.
- 3. Improve Accessibility:** Advocate for public funding, insurance coverage, and sliding-scale fees to make experiential therapy more accessible.

4. **Emphasize Client Involvement:** Ensure clients are actively involved in treatment decisions, with clear and comprehensive information provided to facilitate informed consent.
5. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Tailor therapeutic approaches to respect and accommodate diverse cultural values, beliefs, and communication styles.

### Techniques used in experiential therapy

As mentioned previously, experiential therapy focuses on present-moment awareness, emotional engagement and techniques that are oriented towards action, steering away from the traditional psychotherapy techniques that mainly use the dialogue element. Experiential therapy is highly relevant in the field of addiction treatment as it focuses on addressing underlying emotions, exploring the emotional and psychological causes of addiction and building coping skills by implementing non-traditional techniques. The most common techniques used will be discussed below. Theoretical and practical information will be provided.

The key techniques used in Experiential Therapy are:

#### Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt therapy is a holistic and humanistic psychotherapy approach that focuses on a person's present life and the current challenges one faces. The main focus of Gestalt is to dive into how a person views the world and based on that perception, the patient is encouraged to reconstruct their life. One of the key principles of Gestalt therapy is that perception is influenced by experience. The focus is always on the present and the context is important. The main interest of Gestalt is to increase one's self-awareness and self-acceptance. To do that, different experiential techniques are used. These techniques focus on the 'here and now', on improving communication and deepening understanding. They are non-traditional communication methods that aid the patients in opening up and sharing their thoughts and feelings. Two of the most common methods used in Gestalt therapy are,

##### *The Empty Chair Technique*

In the empty chair technique, the participant takes part in a dialogue in which they express their feelings toward an absent person or a part of themselves, represented by an empty chair. Engaging in this kind of dialogue helps the participant deal with their inner emotions and conflicts and aids them in achieving better self-awareness. Those inner conflicts are usually what is thought to contribute to the addictive behaviors. The imaginative setting helps participants express their feelings, thoughts and perceptions. The empty chair is used to promote dialogue and as a result the confrontation of unresolved issues or the acceptance of their experiences is achieved.

##### *Dramatization*

Various kinds of acting are also commonly used in the context of Gestalt therapy. Role playing is a technique in which the participant acts out both sides of the conversation between themselves and somebody they have a conflict with. In this way they can see the other person's perspective, as well as externalise their own thoughts and feelings. Reenactment is also used to recreate past trauma, so that the emotions can be experienced again in the present and processed more effectively. In addiction treatment, role-playing allows individuals to act out situations that may trigger their substance use or addictive behaviors. For instance, a person might reenact a situation where they felt pressured to drink or use drugs, allowing them to explore the emotions and thought patterns that arise in that moment.

The techniques help to increase self-awareness, to better understand how one's past influences their present, but they also help in bettering relationships and regulating emotions. In the context of addiction all these are relevant, as they are areas in which the addicted people seem to have problems with. The takeaways of Gestalt therapy are crucial in the recovery of addiction and the principles of the technique apply widely in the addiction field.

### ***Psychodrama-Drama Therapy***

Psychodrama is a method of psychotherapy that encourages the participants to get involved in dramatization, role playing and dramatic self-presentation to unveil some of their deeper struggles and emotions. Psychodrama focuses on imaginary material and encourages cognitive integration through action-insight, verbalization, processing and analysis of the expressed material. Psychodrama tends to look at issues on a deeper level. The inner representations and actual perceptions of the person are untangled and there is an effort to resolve them.

Drama therapy is a method mainly used for exploring emotional issues via dramatic action. It is largely based on improvisation and spontaneous theater and commonly used in group settings. Methods like exercises built on music, movement, mime, physical relaxation, imagery as well as different kinds of props are being used for people to express their deeper emotions and externalize their conflicts. It is common in the drama therapy context for all the group members to associate with an issue presented and to form a story, play or myth that they will all take part in.

Drama therapy tends to be oriented towards creative or expressive learning of roles. On the other hand, psychodrama is oriented towards experiential learning which includes working through emotional, cognitive and behavioral issues. Based on these, the techniques are applied on different occasions and for different issues, the therapist decides which technique is a better fit depending on the problems presented. Although, many therapists tend to intertwine the techniques and often enough drama therapists use psychodramatic techniques as a follow-up and psychodramatic therapists use drama therapy techniques as a warmup.

Some of the techniques most commonly used in drama therapy are,



### *Role Playing and reenacting real-life situations*

In role playing, scenarios are being acted out to uncover emotional responses. The reenactment or recreation of conflictual situations in a safe setting helps release the negative or hidden emotion of an individual. The participants can also practice their refusal skills in high-risk situations.

### *Acting/storytelling*

Acting and storytelling are used to explore emotions and can also be used to practice new and healthier behaviors in an environment that is safe. Emotional regulation and self-awareness are augmented. Creative expression and emotional release are encouraged, whilst individuals are provided with alternative ways of processing thoughts and feelings, enhancing self-awareness and insight into their addiction.

*Projection techniques* use props to represent thoughts or emotions, this makes the exploration of more intimidating topics easier. Finally, *improvisation* builds creativity and helps participants to adapt to unexpected challenges.

### *Psychodrama techniques*

Some core techniques of psychodrama are *soliloquy*, where the person is asked to think out loud and express all their thoughts, feelings and intentions. In *double* the person's auxiliary ego (another participant or a professional) is on the side and expresses the unspoken thoughts and feelings that the protagonist person has. Emotional exploration is achieved, and more hidden feelings are being articulated. In the *mirror* technique the person watches the auxiliary ego (another participant or a professional) playing their role and recreating them by imitating their posture, gestures and words as they have appeared in the dramatization. By watching from an external perspective, greater self-awareness is being achieved. Finally, in *role reversal* the participants reverse with other roles and put themselves in other peoples' shoes, this fosters empathy and helps individuals to see another person's point of view.

### **Mindfulness and Body Awareness Techniques**

Mindfulness is important for managing emotions in addiction recovery, as the main focus is on building a present moment awareness free of judgment. In body awareness techniques the participant tunes into the physical sensations and movements to better understand how the body and emotions are linked. In order to achieve that the participants can engage in the following techniques,

#### *Breathing Exercises*

The participants concentrate on the natural rhythm of breathing, which leads to relaxation and grounding on the present. When in distress this technique is very useful in restoring calmness and reducing impulsivity. It is also useful for managing cravings and related anxiety.

### *Somatic Awareness/ Body Scan Meditation*

In somatic awareness the body parts and physical sensations are being explored by systematically focusing on different parts of the body and taking note of the different sensations. It helps in digging into the stored emotions and noticing how stress impacts the body and aids triggers.

### *Grounding Exercises*

The participants focus on physical sensations like the texture of an object or how a surface feels on their feet etc. When in an overwhelmed or anxious state this technique helps in staying focused on the present.

### *Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)*

In this technique, the participant focuses on tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in order to reduce tension and anxiety.

### *Interoceptive Awareness*

In this technique, the focus is located in internal body sensations, like heartbeat or stomach sensations. By focusing on these sensations, the ability to recognize signs of stress or emotional dysregulation is cultivated. When the person can early on identify triggers, the relapse is less likely to happen.

## **Art Therapy**

Art therapy is another popular form of experiential therapy. In art therapy, creative processes are being used to aid in emotional expression, self-discovery, stress reduction, and empowerment. It has been long employed in addiction recovery environments, where the traditional verbal techniques are not always effective. The techniques most commonly used are,

### *Drawing-painting*

By creating images with the use of paint, markers, pencils and other supplies, the participants are able to express emotions or thoughts that they cannot talk about. Creating abstract or specific pieces of art aids in the release of deep inner emotions and provides an insight into the subconscious brain. Thoughts, feelings and emotions may be expressed using a non-verbal outlet, that in any other case would have remained hidden.

### *Collage making*

In this technique, different kinds of collages are being created using pictures, words, photo,s etc. The participants are free to create in any way they want and to piece together different parts of their lives and recovery. A 'life map' that depicts their road to addiction and recovery can be created, this will help them reflect on their journey.

### *Sculpting-Pottery*

The shaping of clay into different shapes and forms aids in the nonverbal expression of trauma. This hands-on experience helps release tension while creating things that might have a symbolic meaning. Emotions and feelings are expressed by sculpting unique objects.

#### *Mask making*

This very interesting technique can be very useful, as participants may create masks with various expressions that depict different feelings. The masks can represent different aspects of the self and look into the duality of the addicted and not addicted self. This modality provides individuals with alternative ways of processing thoughts and feelings, enhancing self-awareness and insight into their addiction.

### ***Adventure and Action-oriented Therapy***

Adventure therapy includes physical activities in outdoor environments. Action-oriented therapy involves movement-based, hands-on experiences. Confidence and connection are being cultivated through these activities. Self-efficacy and teamwork, reduce stress and improve mood. Emotional blockages are also unlocked. Healthy coping skills are developed and emotional regulation is being enhanced. For individuals with addiction, adventure therapy provides a healthy outlet for risk-taking behaviors and helps them rediscover a sense of accomplishment and purpose.

#### *Outdoor adventure activities*

Hiking, rock climbing, rope courses, and kayaking are all forms of outdoor activities that involve engaging in outdoor activities and challenges. They have been shown to help individuals develop teamwork skills, build self-confidence, and overcome personal barriers.

#### *Wilderness*

In wilderness therapy skills like fire-building, navigation or foraging are learned. Wilderness therapy facilitates emotional catharsis and cognitive restructuring. It helps individuals to discharge emotionally from overwhelming feelings and put their thoughts in order while building self-reliance. Wilderness therapy facilitates emotional catharsis and cognitive restructuring, as achievable goals are the main focus.

#### *Dance or physical exercises*

Dance, yoga, pilates, and martial arts are being used to release stress and help the relationship with one's body by improving their physical health. When stage performance is included (e.g. dance exhibition) motivation is cultivated among participants through fostering trust and collaboration toward the collective goal of performance excellence.

### ***Play therapy***

This form of therapy, which is usually used in younger ages, but not necessarily, capitalizes on therapeutic play to work through psychological difficulties that may not be expressed

through words. Stress relief, relaxation and skill development are some of the positive outcomes of play therapy. Inner child work is also achieved through play therapy and past childhood trauma can be addressed.

#### *Sand tray technique*

In this technique figures, objects and sand are being used to create scenes and tell stories. The recovery journey or other struggles might be created in a visual and tactile way. This might help individuals externalize their emotions and identify triggers.

#### *Games*

Board games, card games, and any other kind of structured game can be used to explore emotions. Solving problems, being patient and in control of one's emotions are being cultivated through games.

Games that involve movement like dance, charades or active role-playing help in reducing stress, release energy, ameliorate the mood and connect the body and brain.

#### *Music therapy*

Music therapy is beneficial for physical and psychological issues and can create positive changes in behavior. It is a commonly used non-verbal means of therapy and it can have a very impactful outcome for the individual. Music therapy uses the emotional power of music to help individuals express feelings they may not be able to articulate in words. Music can evoke deep emotions, memories, and sensations, allowing individuals to connect with parts of themselves that have been numbed by addiction. It reduces anxiety and impulsivity and helps deal with negative emotions. It has also been proven to lower blood pressure and cause relaxation. Finally, it improves sleep and health issues. There are four different types of music therapy.

##### *Compositional music therapy*

*In this method the individual composes music (lyrics and instruments) with the assistance of a therapist. For example, a person might create a piece of music that represents their journey through addiction and recovery, helping them express complex feelings of loss, hope, and resilience. Creativity, confidence, and self-esteem are improved.*

##### *Improvisation music therapy*

Spontaneous song creation enables the individual to make choices based on their mood and can be an empowering way to process trauma and emotions.

##### *Receptive music therapy*

It involves a therapist playing music for the individual to respond to. This technique is good for relaxation.

##### *Recreative music therapy*

The client recreates music played by a therapist which develops focusing skills and fine tunes motor skills.

### ***Animal-assisted therapy***

Animal-assisted therapy involves interacting with animals. It usually includes animals like dogs or horses (Equine/canine therapy). Horseback riding or caring for therapy animals aids emotional regulation, responsibility, and trust building. Anxiety is decreased and self-esteem and social skills are improved. The non-judgmental nature of animals provides a haven for expressing and healing trauma.

Equine-assisted therapy in particular is another experiential approach that has gained popularity for its unique ability to foster emotional connection and promote healing. Interactions with horses can help individuals develop trust, empathy, and communication skills, making it particularly beneficial for addressing relational issues and trauma underlying addiction. Horses are known for their ability to foster emotional connections with their handlers which makes them an ideal animal to be involved in therapeutic processes. By interacting with them individuals learn to control their behaviors, gain a sense of self-efficacy, demonstrate improved personal responsibility, and develop increased empathy for others. The act of caring for and interacting with a horse can be healing for individuals who may feel isolated or disconnected due to their addiction. Horses require individuals to be fully present in the moment, which helps them practice mindfulness and emotional regulation. Equine-assisted therapy can be particularly effective for individuals who have difficulty connecting with others or expressing their emotions, as the bond with the horse often serves as a gateway to deeper emotional healing.

Interactions with dogs on the other hand, are also known for reducing stress, fatigue and anxiety while instilling a sense of calmness and happiness. They also improve self-esteem, anger management, and communication. The physical interaction and emotional connection enhances mindfulness. Dogs, in particular, become a confidant of the individual and they are the first step in expressing some of their hidden emotions and struggles.

### ***Creative-Expressive writing***

Writing is a widely used therapeutic technique. It is a low-level intervention that is cheap and easily implemented and works for both individual and group settings. It offers a means of processing life and traumatic events, helps with the expression of well-kept thoughts and emotions, and as a result, assists in healing. Writing reduces anxiety and increases general well-being. The relief of disclosure leads to catharsis.

Creative writing is a form of writing that makes use of imagination. The individual creates stories and plots using their real-life experiences. Imaginary characters adopt the issues of the individuals and through this process, a sense of detachment and objectivity is being created. The different perspectives gained lead to new levels of self-empathy and healing. The creation of fiction using real experiences allows individuals to focus on their difficulties in a safe way. This aids in the cognitive processing of trauma and emotional difficulties. Creative writing is a therapy tool that helps recognize unspoken issues and is a means of

analyzing emotions in a clear, safe and detached way. Creative writing works as a safety net and facilitates facing difficult and suppressed emotions and in turn, offers a shift in perspective. Participants gained a deeper sense of control of their personal emotions the more immersed they became in the characters and stories they created. Those emotions are acknowledged, confronted, and worked through.

Expressive writing on the other hand is based on the writing of the experiences as they are. The individual writes down their real-life experiences for themselves implementing the use of first person usually. This can be in the form of *free writing (stream of consciousness)*, where the goal is to write continuously without worrying about grammar, structure or coherence. This leads to an honest expression of their thoughts, cravings and emotions. *Journaling* is also very common, it is a record of thoughts, feelings and experiences and oftentimes works as a diary. It is a structured outlet for reflecting and writing down the emotional states one goes through. *Letter writing* to oneself or to another is also a widely used method. The person can write down everything that goes through their mind. What is also usually implemented is the burning of the letter which leads to a sense of catharsis and closure. Gratitude writing can also be very useful. The individual writes about people, moments or things that they are grateful for. In this way a positive mindset is created and the negative emotions are being combated.

### **Guided imagery**

Guided is a technique that focuses on mental images to evoke specific feelings. Mental visualization promotes relaxation, self-awareness and emotional healing. The imagined visuals of the inner world of emotions and experiences can be processed, and healthier coping strategies can be developed. Some of the most used techniques are,

#### *Relaxation imagery and safe place visualization*

In these techniques, the person visualizes either a relaxing or a safe place. This reduces anxiety, stress, and physical tension. In those places, individuals feel secure and grounded.

#### *Healing imagery and journey or Pathway imagery*

In this technique, the individual visualizes a healing process, or they imagine a symbolic journey representing growth or recovery. This helps them to calm down and it promotes their overall well-being.

To conclude, experiential therapy is not one type of intervention, but a variety of different interventions focusing on experiences, emotional processes, interactions with others, creativity, and reflections of events. Experiential techniques can be carried out individually or alongside other forms of therapy as part of the bigger therapy scheme. They should be integrated into the broader addiction recovery framework.

### **Experiential therapy and addiction treatment**

Addiction is a complex and multifaceted condition that impacts the physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being of individuals. Traditional forms of addiction treatment, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and pharmacological interventions, have proven effective for many individuals. However, these therapies often fall short in addressing the deep-seated emotional and unconscious drivers behind addictive behaviors. Experiential therapy, with its focus on engaging the individual in real-life experiences and emotional processing, offers a unique and powerful tool in the comprehensive treatment of addiction.

Experiential therapy is a therapeutic approach that helps individuals identify and work through unresolved issues, traumas, and emotions that contribute to their addiction. By focusing on experiences, emotions, and behaviors in real-time, experiential therapy provides a dynamic, interactive approach that complements traditional methods. It encourages the individual to connect with emotions, bodily sensations, and memories in a way that talking therapies sometimes cannot reach.

This approach includes various techniques, as mentioned above, such as role-playing, art therapy, music therapy, animal-assisted therapy, and adventure therapy, among others. These methods help clients gain insight into their emotions, reconnect with their inner selves, and develop healthier ways of coping with life's challenges.

### ***Core Principles of Experiential Therapy***

Experiential therapy is grounded in several key principles, which distinguish it from more traditional forms of therapy:

1. **Here-and-Now Focus:** Unlike approaches that focus on past events or future outcomes, experiential therapy emphasizes the importance of being fully present in the moment. Clients are encouraged to experience their emotions and thoughts as they arise, providing a deeper connection to the immediate impact of their addiction.
2. **Action-Oriented:** This therapy actively engages clients in experiential exercises that require them to confront and process emotions, rather than discussing their issues from a detached perspective. This can include creative or physical activities that bring awareness to unconscious drives and behaviors.
3. **Body-Mind Connection:** Experiential therapy pays attention to how emotions are stored in the body. The therapy often emphasizes bodily awareness, recognizing



that trauma and unresolved emotional pain can manifest physically, contributing to addiction.

4. **Holistic Perspective:** This form of therapy acknowledges that addiction is not only a psychological issue but involves the body, mind, and spirit. Experiential therapy often incorporates holistic healing practices that work with the individual on all levels.
5. **Focus on Internal Resources:** Experiential therapists believe that individuals possess the resources necessary for healing. The therapeutic process helps the client access these internal resources, fostering self-empowerment and personal growth.

### *How Experiential Therapy Addresses the Underlying Causes of Addiction*

One of the reasons experiential therapy is so effective in treating addiction is that it helps address the underlying emotional, psychological, and relational issues that often drive addictive behaviors. Addiction is rarely just about the substance or behavior itself; it is often a coping mechanism for dealing with unresolved trauma, emotional pain, or unmet needs.

Experiential therapy provides a safe and supportive environment where individuals can confront these deeper issues and begin to heal. By actively engaging in experiential exercises, clients can bypass their defenses and access emotions that may have been buried for years. This process of emotional release and healing is crucial for long-term recovery, as it helps individuals develop healthier ways of coping with life's challenges.

For example, many individuals struggling with addiction have a history of trauma, whether it is childhood abuse, neglect, or other forms of emotional or physical harm. This trauma often leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness, which fuel the cycle of addiction. Experiential therapy helps individuals process these feelings and reframe their experiences, allowing them to develop a healthier sense of self-worth and resilience.

By focusing on the present moment and engaging the body and mind, experiential therapy helps individuals develop new, healthier ways of being in the world. It encourages emotional awareness, self-expression, and connection with others, all of which are essential for lasting recovery.

### *The Underlying Causes of Addiction*

Addiction is rarely a standalone condition; it is often a symptom of deeper psychological or emotional struggles. These struggles can take the form of unresolved trauma, emotional



pain, low self-esteem, unhealthy relationships, and difficulties with emotional regulation. Understanding these underlying causes is critical to effective addiction treatment.

### ***Trauma and Unresolved Emotional Pain***

Many individuals who develop addictions have histories of trauma, whether in the form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or significant losses early in life. Trauma creates emotional wounds that, if not resolved, can continue to influence a person's behavior and mental health. These unresolved emotions can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety, which individuals may attempt to numb or escape through substance use.

Many individuals with addiction carry physical tension in their bodies as a result of trauma, stress, or emotional pain. This tension can manifest as chronic pain, headaches, or other physical symptoms, which individuals may try to numb with substances. Experiential therapy helps individuals become more aware of how their emotions are stored in their bodies and offers tools for releasing this tension.

**Somatic experiencing**, a body-focused form of experiential therapy, is particularly effective in helping individuals release trauma stored in the body. Through techniques such as body scanning, breathwork, and gentle movement, clients learn to identify areas of tension or discomfort in their bodies and release these physical manifestations of emotional pain. This process of somatic release can be incredibly healing, as it allows individuals to free themselves from the physical grip of trauma and develop a greater sense of bodily awareness.

Similarly, **yoga** and other mindfulness-based practices incorporated into experiential therapy promote relaxation and body awareness, helping individuals reconnect with their bodies and release the tension that may contribute to their addiction.

For many individuals with addiction, unresolved trauma plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of their substance use disorder. Trauma can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness, which in turn drive addictive behaviors. Experiential therapy provides a powerful way to address and heal trauma, allowing individuals to confront their traumatic experiences in a controlled, supportive environment.

**Equine-assisted therapy** is one modality that has proven particularly effective in helping individuals with trauma-related addiction. Horses are highly sensitive to human emotions

and can mirror the emotional state of the person working with them. This non-verbal feedback helps clients become more aware of their emotions and how they are projecting them onto others. Through their interactions with the horse, clients learn to build trust, develop emotional awareness, and practice emotional regulation.

### ***Emotional Dysregulation***

Emotional dysregulation refers to the inability to manage or cope with emotional states, especially negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear. For individuals with emotional dysregulation, addictive substances or behaviors can provide temporary relief or a way to avoid dealing with difficult emotions. The addiction then becomes a maladaptive coping mechanism that provides short-term relief but exacerbates long-term emotional issues.

One of the core principles of experiential therapy is that emotions, particularly those related to trauma and unresolved pain, are stored in the body and can influence behavior if left unprocessed. Addiction often develops as a way to cope with these unaddressed emotions. Experiential therapy helps individuals release these stored emotions in a safe, supportive environment, allowing them to process the pain that may be driving their addiction.

**Psychodrama** is one specific modality of experiential therapy that is particularly effective in facilitating emotional release. In psychodrama, clients reenact scenes from their lives, often those that involve significant trauma or emotional pain. By reliving these experiences in a therapeutic setting, individuals can access emotions they may have suppressed or avoided. The physical reenactment of these scenes allows clients to engage with their emotions in a more embodied way, which can lead to deeper emotional processing and healing.

For example, a client who experienced childhood abuse may reenact a scene from their past in which they felt powerless or frightened. Through the process of reenactment, they can confront these emotions, express them, and release them, often for the first time. This emotional release is a critical step in breaking the cycle of addiction, as it helps to alleviate the emotional pain that the individual has been numbing with substances or behaviors.

### ***Insecure Attachment and Relationship Issues***

Attachment theory posits that early childhood relationships with caregivers shape an individual's ability to form secure, healthy relationships later in life. Many individuals with addiction have insecure attachment styles, which manifest as difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and

worthlessness—emotional states that may drive substance use as a form of self-medication.

Insecure attachment styles are common among individuals with addiction, often leading to difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships. Experiential therapy helps individuals work through these attachment issues by creating opportunities for safe, supportive relationships within the therapeutic context.

**Family sculpting**, a form of experiential therapy that is commonly used in addiction treatment, involves creating physical representations of family dynamics using objects or people. This allows clients to explore and understand their family relationships from a new perspective, often uncovering patterns of dysfunction or unmet emotional needs. By gaining insight into these relational patterns, clients can begin to develop healthier ways of relating to others, both within and outside their family.

**Group experiential therapy** can also be beneficial in addressing attachment issues. In a group setting, individuals have the opportunity to practice new ways of interacting with others in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. This can help them develop healthier relational patterns, build empathy, and improve their communication skills, all of which are essential for long-term recovery.

### ***Low Self-Esteem and Identity Issues***

Addiction often takes root in individuals who struggle with a poor sense of self-worth and identity. These individuals may use substances or engage in addictive behaviors to temporarily boost their self-esteem or avoid feelings of inadequacy. The addiction, in turn, worsens their self-image, creating a vicious cycle.

Addiction often stems from a lack of self-worth or an unstable sense of identity. Individuals may use substances to fill a void or compensate for feelings of inadequacy. Experiential therapy helps individuals reconnect with themselves, discover their strengths, and build a more positive sense of identity.

**Art therapy** is particularly effective in fostering self-discovery and self-expression. In art therapy, individuals use creative expression to explore their emotions, thoughts, and experiences. The process of creating art allows clients to externalize their internal struggles, giving them a tangible way to reflect on and understand their emotions. Art therapy also fosters a sense of accomplishment and self-worth, as individuals can take pride in the artwork they create.

**Music therapy** offers another avenue for self-discovery and emotional expression. Through playing instruments, composing music, or simply listening to meaningful songs, individuals can access and express emotions that may be difficult to articulate in words. Music therapy also promotes relaxation and stress relief, which are essential for individuals in recovery as they work to develop healthier ways of coping with life's challenges.

### *Unconscious Drives and Psychological Defenses*

Many of the underlying emotional and psychological factors contributing to addiction operate unconsciously. People may not fully understand why they turn to substances or addictive behaviors; they may simply feel driven to use despite knowing the harm it causes. Psychological defenses such as denial, repression, and dissociation often play a role in perpetuating addiction, as they prevent individuals from confronting the emotions and traumas that fuel their substance use.

Experiential therapy also helps individuals develop healthier emotional and behavioral responses to triggers and stressors that may have previously led them to use substances. Through role-playing, adventure therapy, or guided imagery, clients can experiment with new ways of responding to difficult emotions or situations, giving them the opportunity to practice healthier coping mechanisms.

For example, in **adventure therapy**, individuals engage in physically challenging activities such as rock climbing, hiking, or team-building exercises. These activities create real-life stressors and challenges that can evoke emotional responses similar to those triggered by everyday life. However, in the therapeutic setting, clients are supported in confronting and overcoming these challenges without turning to substances. This practice helps them develop resilience and confidence in their ability to handle difficult situations without relying on addictive behaviors.

Similarly, **role-playing** in therapy allows individuals to practice responding to situations that may trigger substance use. For example, a client might role-play a scenario in which they are offered drugs at a social event. By practicing saying no and managing the emotions that arise in this scenario, the client can develop new, healthier responses to real-life triggers.

Experiential therapy offers a powerful and effective approach to addressing the underlying causes of addiction, particularly those related to trauma, emotional pain, relational issues, and unconscious drives. By engaging individuals in immersive, action-based activities, experiential therapy allows them to process and release emotions that may not be fully accessible through traditional talk therapy. This hands-on approach helps individuals confront and heal from the deep emotional wounds that often fuel addictive behaviors, promoting long-term recovery and emotional resilience.

Whether through role-playing, art therapy, psychodrama, or equine-assisted therapy, experiential therapy provides individuals with the tools they need to build healthier emotional and behavioral responses, develop a stronger sense of self, and cultivate more fulfilling relationships. When combined with traditional addiction treatment modalities, experiential therapy offers a holistic approach that addresses both the psychological and emotional aspects of addiction, providing a comprehensive path to recovery.

### ***The Effectiveness of Experiential Therapy in Addiction Treatment***

Addiction is a chronic, relapsing condition characterized by compulsive drug use or engagement in addictive behaviors, despite harmful consequences. While traditional therapeutic modalities like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing (MI), and pharmacotherapy have been integral in addiction treatment, these methods may not address all underlying causes of addictive behaviors. Experiential therapy, a dynamic and action-based approach, has emerged as a complementary method in addiction recovery, particularly effective in addressing the emotional, relational, and unconscious factors that drive substance abuse.

Experiential therapy involves engaging individuals in hands-on, immersive activities that allow them to confront their emotions, memories, and experiences in a safe, therapeutic setting. This approach is rooted in the idea that individuals often struggle to process their feelings through verbal expression alone and may need more direct, interactive experiences to foster emotional healing and behavioral change. Experiential therapy can include techniques such as role-playing, guided imagery, equine-assisted therapy, art therapy, and adventure therapy, among others.

### ***The Mechanisms of Experiential Therapy in Addiction Treatment***

Experiential therapy offers several unique mechanisms that contribute to its effectiveness in addiction treatment. These mechanisms are particularly beneficial for individuals who struggle to access or express their emotions through traditional talk therapy.

1. **Emotional Engagement:** Experiential therapy encourages individuals to engage with their emotions in real-time, often bypassing cognitive defenses that can block emotional processing. By participating in hands-on activities, individuals are able to access emotions that may have been repressed or avoided, allowing them to confront the underlying issues driving their addiction.

For example, someone with a history of trauma may have difficulty discussing their feelings in a traditional therapy setting. However, through art therapy or role-playing, they may be able to express these emotions in a more accessible way, facilitating emotional release and healing. Emotional engagement is crucial for individuals with addiction, as unresolved emotional pain is often a key factor in substance use and relapse.

2. **Non-Verbal Expression:** Addiction often involves shame, guilt, and fear, which can make it difficult for individuals to verbalize their feelings. Experiential therapy provides alternative ways for individuals to express themselves, particularly through creative or physical activities. This non-verbal expression allows individuals to communicate their emotions and experiences in ways that may feel safer or less threatening than talking about them directly.

For instance, art therapy allows individuals to externalize their emotions through painting, drawing, or sculpture, creating a tangible representation of their inner world. This can be particularly helpful for those who struggle to find the words to describe their experiences, giving them a new avenue for emotional exploration and healing.

3. **Mind-Body Integration:** Experiential therapy emphasizes the connection between the mind and body, helping individuals become more aware of how their emotions are experienced physically. Addiction often involves a disconnection from the body, as individuals use substances to numb physical sensations or cope with discomfort. Experiential therapy helps individuals reconnect with their bodies and develop a greater awareness of how emotions manifest physically.

Techniques such as somatic experiencing, yoga, and adventure therapy encourage individuals to tune into their bodily sensations and emotions, fostering a sense of embodiment and mindfulness. This mind-body integration is essential for long-term

recovery, as it helps individuals become more attuned to their physical and emotional needs, reducing the likelihood of using substances to cope with discomfort.

4. **Trauma Processing:** Many individuals with addiction have experienced trauma, which can contribute to the development and maintenance of substance use disorders. Experiential therapy provides a safe and supportive environment for individuals to process traumatic memories and emotions that may be driving their addiction.

Techniques such as psychodrama, guided imagery, and equine-assisted therapy allow individuals to revisit and reprocess traumatic experiences in a controlled, therapeutic setting. By confronting and working through these traumas, individuals can reduce the emotional pain and distress that often fuel addictive behaviors, promoting long-term healing and recovery.

5. **Fostering Personal Responsibility:** Experiential therapy encourages individuals to take an active role in their healing process. Unlike traditional therapy, where the therapist may guide the session, experiential therapy often requires individuals to engage directly with the therapeutic activities. This active participation fosters a sense of personal responsibility and empowerment, which is crucial for individuals in recovery.

For example, in adventure therapy or equine-assisted therapy, individuals must engage with the activity and make decisions that affect the outcome of the session. This can help individuals develop a sense of agency and control over their recovery process, promoting self-efficacy and reducing feelings of helplessness or victimization that often accompany addiction.

### ***The Complementary Role of Experiential Therapy in Addiction Treatment***

Experiential therapy is not intended to replace traditional addiction treatment modalities but rather to complement them. Many addiction treatment programs combine experiential therapy with evidence-based approaches such as CBT, MI, and 12-step programs to create a comprehensive, holistic treatment plan.

By addressing the emotional and unconscious factors driving addiction, experiential therapy enhances the effectiveness of traditional treatments. For example, while CBT helps individuals identify and change negative thought patterns, experiential therapy allows them to process the emotions underlying these thoughts. This combination of cognitive and emotional work is essential for lasting recovery, as it addresses both the psychological and emotional aspects of addiction.

Experiential therapy offers a powerful and effective approach to addiction treatment by engaging individuals in hands-on, immersive activities that promote emotional healing, personal growth, and behavioral change. Through modalities such as art therapy, music therapy, adventure therapy, and equine-assisted therapy, individuals are able to access and process emotions, memories, and experiences that may be driving their addiction.

By fostering emotional engagement, non-verbal expression, mind-body integration, trauma processing, and personal responsibility, experiential therapy addresses the underlying causes of addiction and provides individuals with the tools they need for long-term recovery. When combined with traditional addiction treatments, experiential therapy offers a comprehensive, holistic approach that addresses the psychological, emotional, and physical aspects of addiction, promoting lasting healing and resilience.

### **Group sessions vs. 1:1 sessions in experiential therapy**

#### ***The Importance and Characteristics of Group Sessions in Experiential Therapy for Addiction Treatment***

Group therapy has long been a cornerstone of addiction treatment. It provides individuals struggling with addiction the opportunity to connect, share experiences, and receive support from others who are dealing with similar issues. While traditional talk-based group therapy has been an essential component of addiction treatment, experiential therapy group sessions take this therapeutic modality a step further. In experiential therapy, individuals engage in action-based activities within a group context, fostering a deeper connection to emotions, behaviors, and interpersonal dynamics.

Experiential therapy group sessions combine the power of group dynamics with immersive, hands-on activities. These activities can range from role-playing and psychodrama to art, music, or adventure-based therapies. The goal is to create real-time emotional experiences that allow participants to explore underlying emotional pain, unresolved trauma, and dysfunctional relational patterns. Group experiential therapy offers a unique platform for self-expression, emotional release, and healing in a shared, supportive environment.

Group therapy is widely recognized as an effective approach to addiction treatment for several key reasons. The shared environment allows individuals to connect with others who are experiencing similar struggles, creating a sense of community and reducing feelings of



isolation. Group members can learn from one another's experiences, offer support, and hold each other accountable in their recovery journey.

### **1. Peer Support and Accountability**

One of the most significant benefits of group therapy is the opportunity for peer support. Addiction often leads to isolation and loneliness, and many individuals struggling with addiction feel disconnected from others. Group therapy provides a space where individuals can form connections with people who understand what they are going through. These connections are essential for fostering a sense of belonging and emotional support during recovery.

In group therapy, participants can share their experiences, challenges, and successes with others who have similar experiences. This exchange of stories and emotions helps individuals feel less alone in their struggles, which can be particularly healing. It also fosters a sense of accountability, as group members can offer encouragement and hold each other responsible for maintaining their commitment to sobriety.

### **2. Shared Learning and Insight**

Another important aspect of group therapy is the opportunity for shared learning. Group members can gain insight from the experiences of others, learning new strategies for coping with triggers, managing cravings, and navigating the challenges of recovery. Hearing how others have overcome obstacles can provide motivation and inspiration for individuals who may feel stuck or hopeless in their own recovery journey.

For example, someone in the early stages of recovery may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of maintaining sobriety in social settings. By listening to others who have successfully navigated similar challenges, they can learn new approaches and develop confidence in their ability to handle similar situations.

### **3. Safe Space for Vulnerability**

Addiction is often associated with shame, guilt, and fear, which can make it difficult for individuals to open up about their struggles. Group therapy creates a safe, supportive environment where individuals can be vulnerable without fear of judgment. This shared vulnerability is a powerful catalyst for healing, as it allows individuals to express emotions they may have been hiding or suppressing.

When individuals witness others being vulnerable, it can help them feel more comfortable sharing their own emotions and experiences. This mutual sharing fosters a sense of trust and emotional connection within the group, which is essential for the therapeutic process. The act of expressing emotions and receiving support from others can be deeply healing

and can help individuals release feelings of shame and guilt that may be fueling their addiction.

#### **4. Addressing Relational Dynamics**

Many individuals with addiction struggle with unhealthy relational dynamics, whether in their families, friendships, or romantic relationships. These dysfunctional relationships can contribute to the development and maintenance of addiction, as individuals may use substances to cope with feelings of rejection, abandonment, or conflict.

Group therapy provides a unique opportunity to explore and address these relational dynamics within a supportive environment. The interactions that occur within the group often mirror the relational patterns that individuals experience in their outside lives. For example, someone who struggles with assertiveness in their personal relationships may also struggle to express their needs or boundaries within the group. By working through these dynamics in therapy, individuals can develop healthier ways of relating to others, which can be crucial for maintaining long-term sobriety.

#### ***The Role of Experiential Therapy in Group Sessions for Addiction Treatment***

While traditional group therapy is valuable in addiction treatment, experiential therapy offers additional benefits by engaging individuals in hands-on, action-based activities. These activities provide a more direct, embodied experience of emotions, behaviors, and relational dynamics, making it easier for individuals to access and process underlying issues that may be driving their addiction.

Experiential therapy in a group context offers a number of unique benefits that complement and enhance the therapeutic process. Some of these benefits include increased emotional engagement, shared vulnerability, and the opportunity to practice new behaviors in a real-time setting.

##### **1. Emotional Engagement in a Group Setting**

Experiential therapy is designed to create real-time emotional experiences that allow individuals to access and process emotions that may be difficult to reach through verbal discussion alone. In a group setting, these emotional experiences are often amplified by the presence of others, creating a powerful dynamic that facilitates emotional release and healing.

For example, in **psychodrama**, individuals reenact significant life events or relational conflicts in front of the group. The act of physically embodying these experiences helps

individuals access emotions that may have been suppressed or avoided. The group provides a supportive, non-judgmental audience, allowing the individual to fully express their emotions and receive validation from others.

This level of emotional engagement is often more intense and transformative than what can be achieved in traditional talk therapy. By engaging in these emotional experiences within a group, individuals can feel more connected to their emotions and develop a deeper understanding of the emotional pain that may be driving their addiction.

## **2. Shared Vulnerability and Emotional Connection**

Experiential therapy fosters a sense of shared vulnerability within the group, which is essential for creating emotional connections and building trust. In traditional group therapy, individuals may share their experiences and emotions verbally, but in experiential therapy, the sharing happens on a deeper, more visceral level. The action-based activities create opportunities for individuals to be vulnerable in ways that go beyond words.

For example, in **art therapy**, individuals may create visual representations of their emotions or experiences, which they then share with the group. This process of externalizing emotions through creative expression can be deeply vulnerable, as it allows individuals to share parts of themselves that they may not be able to express verbally. The act of sharing their artwork with the group fosters emotional connection and empathy, as group members can relate to the emotions being expressed and offer support.

Similarly, in **adventure therapy**, individuals engage in physically challenging activities that often evoke feelings of fear, vulnerability, or uncertainty. The shared experience of overcoming these challenges together fosters a sense of camaraderie and emotional connection within the group. This shared vulnerability helps to build trust and create a safe space where individuals feel comfortable expressing their emotions and working through difficult issues.

## **3. Experiential Learning and Behavior Change**

One of the key principles of experiential therapy is that individuals learn through direct experience. In the context of addiction treatment, this means that individuals have the opportunity to practice new behaviors and coping strategies in real-time, within the safety of the group. This experiential learning is crucial for individuals in recovery, as it allows them to develop and reinforce healthier ways of responding to emotions, stressors, and relational dynamics.

For example, in **role-playing exercises**, individuals can practice responding to situations that may trigger substance use or addictive behaviors. By acting out these scenarios in a

supportive group setting, individuals can experiment with new ways of handling these situations and receive feedback from both the therapist and their peers. This practice helps to reinforce healthier behaviors and build confidence in the individual's ability to manage triggers in real life.

Similarly, in **equine-assisted therapy**, individuals learn to manage their emotions and behaviors through their interactions with horses. Horses are highly sensitive animals that mirror the emotional state of the person working with them. If an individual is feeling anxious, angry, or disconnected, the horse will reflect these emotions through its behavior. This immediate feedback helps individuals become more aware of their emotional state and practice emotional regulation in real-time. The group context allows individuals to share their experiences with others and receive support and encouragement as they practice these new skills.

#### **4. Group Cohesion and Social Support**

Group cohesion is a critical factor in the success of group therapy, and experiential therapy activities are particularly effective at fostering a sense of cohesion and social support within the group. The shared experiences that occur during experiential activities create a sense of camaraderie and mutual support, which can be incredibly healing for individuals in recovery.

For example, in **team-building exercises** that are often used in adventure therapy, individuals must work together to overcome challenges or achieve a common goal. These activities require communication, collaboration, and trust, which help to strengthen the bonds between group members. The shared experience of working together to overcome obstacles fosters a sense of belonging and support, which is essential for individuals who may feel isolated or disconnected due to their addiction.

The social support provided by the group is particularly important for individuals in recovery, as it helps to counteract feelings of loneliness and isolation that often accompany addiction. By developing strong, supportive relationships within the group, individuals can build a network of emotional support that extends beyond the therapy sessions and into their everyday lives.

#### **5. Addressing Relational Dynamics in Real-Time**

Many individuals with addiction struggle with dysfunctional relational patterns, whether due to insecure attachment, past trauma, or unhealthy coping mechanisms. Experiential therapy group sessions provide a unique opportunity to address these relational dynamics in real-time, within the safety of the group setting.

For example, in **family sculpting**, individuals create physical representations of their family dynamics using objects or people within the group. This process allows individuals to explore and understand their relational patterns from a new perspective, often uncovering hidden dynamics or unmet emotional needs. The group provides a supportive environment where individuals can work through these relational issues and practice new, healthier ways of relating to others.

Similarly, in **group role-playing exercises**, individuals can practice setting boundaries, expressing their needs, or resolving conflicts in a safe, controlled environment. These exercises allow individuals to experiment with new relational behaviors and receive feedback from both the therapist and their peers. The group context provides a valuable opportunity for individuals to practice these new behaviors in real-time, helping them develop healthier relational patterns that can be applied in their outside lives.

### ***The Characteristics of Effective Experiential Therapy Group Sessions***

The effectiveness of experiential therapy group sessions in addiction treatment depends on several key characteristics. These characteristics create the foundation for a safe, supportive, and transformative group experience.

#### **1. A Safe and Non-Judgmental Environment**

One of the most important characteristics of experiential therapy group sessions is the creation of a safe and non-judgmental environment. Individuals in recovery are often dealing with deep feelings of shame, guilt, and fear, which can make it difficult for them to open up and engage in the therapeutic process. The therapist plays a crucial role in creating a supportive atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable being vulnerable and expressing their emotions.

A safe environment is particularly important in experiential therapy, as the hands-on activities often evoke intense emotions and require individuals to confront difficult issues. The therapist must create a space where individuals feel supported and validated, allowing them to fully engage in the therapeutic process without fear of judgment or criticism.

#### **2. Skilled and Compassionate Facilitation**

The role of the therapist in experiential therapy group sessions is to facilitate the therapeutic process in a way that supports emotional engagement, self-expression, and healing. This requires a high level of skill and compassion, as the therapist must be able to guide individuals through emotionally challenging experiences while maintaining a sense of safety and support within the group.

The therapist must also be attuned to the group dynamics, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to participate and express themselves. This may involve balancing the needs of more vocal group members with those who may be quieter or more reserved, ensuring that everyone feels included and valued.

### **3. Clear Structure and Boundaries**

While experiential therapy is often more fluid and dynamic than traditional talk therapy, it is essential that group sessions have a clear structure and set of boundaries. This structure provides a sense of safety and containment for individuals, allowing them to engage in the therapeutic process without feeling overwhelmed or out of control.

The therapist should establish clear expectations and guidelines for the group, including confidentiality, respect for others' experiences, and the importance of active participation. These boundaries help to create a safe and supportive environment where individuals can feel comfortable engaging in the experiential activities.

### **4. Opportunities for Reflection and Insight**

While the primary focus of experiential therapy is on action and experience, it is essential that group sessions also include opportunities for reflection and insight. After engaging in an experiential activity, individuals should have the opportunity to process their experiences and explore the emotions, thoughts, and insights that arose during the activity.

This reflection can take the form of group discussions, journaling, or individual check-ins with the therapist. The goal is to help individuals make sense of their experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the underlying issues that may be driving their addiction. This combination of action and reflection is what makes experiential therapy so effective in promoting emotional healing and behavioral change.

## **Conclusion**

Group sessions in experiential therapy offer a powerful and transformative approach to addiction treatment. By combining the principles of group dynamics with hands-on, action-based activities, experiential therapy provides individuals with the opportunity to engage with their emotions, behaviors, and relational patterns in real-time. This immersive approach allows individuals to process and release emotions that may be driving their addiction, develop healthier ways of relating to others, and build a strong sense of social support and accountability.

The characteristics of effective experiential therapy group sessions, including a safe and non-judgmental environment, skilled facilitation, clear structure, and opportunities for

reflection, create the foundation for a healing and transformative group experience. When incorporated into a comprehensive addiction treatment program, experiential therapy group sessions can play a crucial role in helping individuals achieve lasting recovery and emotional resilience.

### ***The Importance and Characteristics of One-to-One Sessions in Experiential Therapy for Addiction Treatment***

Addiction is a multifaceted condition that impacts individuals on emotional, psychological, physical, and relational levels. Treating addiction requires a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the substance use or compulsive behavior but also the underlying emotional pain, trauma, and dysfunctional thought patterns that contribute to it. While group therapy and support groups are essential in fostering a sense of community and accountability, individual therapy remains a critical component of addiction treatment, particularly when it incorporates experiential methods.

Experiential therapy in a one-to-one setting engages the individual in hands-on, action-oriented therapeutic activities that help them access emotions, memories, and unconscious processes that are often inaccessible through traditional talk therapy. It provides a safe and intimate space for individuals to explore their inner world, confront unresolved emotional pain, and develop healthier ways of coping with life's challenges. Individual sessions in experiential therapy allow for deeper emotional processing, a personalized therapeutic approach, and a focus on the specific needs of the client.

Individual therapy, or one-to-one therapy, plays an integral role in the treatment of addiction. These sessions offer several unique benefits that contribute to the overall effectiveness of addiction treatment programs. Individual therapy allows for a tailored approach, enabling the therapist to address the specific needs, history, and experiences of the client. Experiential therapy, when delivered in an individual format, further enhances this personalized approach by engaging the client in activities that promote self-awareness, emotional release, and healing.

#### **1. Addressing the Root Causes of Addiction**

Addiction is often a symptom of deeper emotional and psychological struggles, such as unresolved trauma, emotional pain, low self-esteem, and difficulties with emotional

regulation. In many cases, individuals use substances or engage in addictive behaviors as a way to cope with these underlying issues. One-to-one sessions in experiential therapy are uniquely suited to addressing the root causes of addiction by creating a safe and supportive environment where clients can explore and process their emotions, memories, and experiences.

Traditional talk therapy often relies on verbal communication to address these issues, but many individuals with addiction find it difficult to articulate their emotions or trauma through words alone. Experiential therapy offers alternative ways to access and process these underlying issues. Techniques such as psychodrama, art therapy, or guided imagery allow clients to bypass cognitive defenses and engage with their emotions on a deeper, more embodied level. In an individual session, the therapist can tailor these experiential activities to the specific needs of the client, ensuring that they are addressing the issues that are most relevant to their recovery.

For example, a client who has experienced childhood trauma may find it difficult to discuss their past in a traditional therapy setting. However, through role-playing or guided imagery, they may be able to access and process the emotions associated with their trauma in a more indirect and less threatening way. This emotional processing is critical for long-term recovery, as unresolved trauma and emotional pain are often significant drivers of addictive behavior.

## **2. Personalized Treatment Approach**

One of the primary advantages of individual therapy is that it allows for a personalized treatment approach. In a group setting, the therapist must balance the needs of multiple participants, which can limit the amount of time and attention each individual receives. In contrast, one-to-one sessions provide the therapist with the opportunity to focus entirely on the specific needs, history, and goals of the individual client.

This personalized approach is particularly important in experiential therapy, as the therapist can tailor the experiential activities to the unique emotional and psychological needs of the client. For example, a client who struggles with emotional regulation may benefit from somatic techniques that focus on increasing bodily awareness and learning to identify and manage physical sensations associated with stress or anxiety. Another client who has difficulty expressing their emotions may benefit from creative modalities such as art therapy, where they can externalize their feelings through artistic expression.

In a one-to-one setting, the therapist can also adapt the pace of the therapy to the client's needs. Some individuals may require more time to build trust and feel comfortable



engaging in experiential activities, while others may be ready to dive into deeper emotional work more quickly. The flexibility of individual sessions allows the therapist to adjust the therapy to the client's comfort level, ensuring that they feel supported and empowered throughout the process.

### **3. Building a Strong Therapeutic Alliance**

The therapeutic alliance, or the relationship between the therapist and the client, is a critical factor in the success of any therapeutic intervention. Research has consistently shown that a strong therapeutic alliance is one of the most significant predictors of positive treatment outcomes, particularly in addiction treatment. Individual therapy provides an ideal setting for building this alliance, as it allows the therapist and client to develop a trusting and collaborative relationship.

In experiential therapy, the therapeutic alliance is especially important, as the nature of the therapy often involves engaging in emotionally vulnerable and sometimes challenging activities. The client must feel safe and supported by the therapist in order to fully engage in the experiential process. The therapist's role is to create a safe, non-judgmental space where the client feels comfortable exploring difficult emotions and confronting painful experiences.

A strong therapeutic alliance also fosters a sense of trust and collaboration, which is essential for the success of experiential therapy. Many experiential techniques, such as role-playing or psychodrama, require the client to step outside their comfort zone and engage in activities that may evoke strong emotions. The therapist must be attuned to the client's emotional state and provide the necessary support and guidance to help them navigate these experiences safely.

In an individual setting, the therapist has the opportunity to build this alliance over time, developing a deep understanding of the client's needs, strengths, and challenges. This understanding allows the therapist to tailor the experiential activities to the client's unique emotional landscape, creating a more effective and personalized therapeutic experience.

### **4. Emotional Safety and Vulnerability**

Experiential therapy often involves engaging with emotions in a direct and embodied way, which can be emotionally intense for the client. One-to-one sessions provide a safe and contained environment where clients can explore these emotions without fear of judgment or exposure to others. This sense of emotional safety is crucial for individuals in addiction treatment, as many have experienced significant trauma, shame, or guilt related to their substance use.

In a group setting, individuals may feel hesitant to fully express their emotions or engage in experiential activities due to concerns about being judged by others. In contrast, individual therapy allows for a more intimate and private exploration of emotions, where the client can feel secure in knowing that their experiences will be met with empathy and understanding from the therapist.

The emotional safety provided by one-to-one sessions also allows for a deeper level of vulnerability. Many individuals with addiction have learned to protect themselves from emotional pain by numbing their feelings or avoiding difficult emotions. In experiential therapy, the therapist gently guides the client toward experiencing and processing these emotions in a safe and supportive environment. This emotional vulnerability is essential for healing, as it allows the client to confront the underlying pain that may be driving their addiction.

For example, a client who has experienced significant loss may have avoided processing their grief by turning to substances as a way to numb the pain. In an individual experiential therapy session, the therapist may use techniques such as guided imagery or role-playing to help the client access and express their grief in a safe and controlled way. This emotional release is a critical step in the healing process, as it allows the client to move through their pain rather than continuing to numb it with substances.

### **5. Developing Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation**

One of the primary goals of addiction treatment is to help individuals develop greater self-awareness and emotional regulation. Many individuals with addiction struggle with emotional dysregulation, meaning they have difficulty managing and coping with intense emotions. As a result, they may turn to substances or addictive behaviors as a way to escape or numb their emotions.

Experiential therapy is particularly effective in helping individuals develop self-awareness and emotional regulation because it engages the client in real-time emotional experiences. In a one-to-one setting, the therapist can guide the client through these experiences, helping them identify and process their emotions in a more conscious and controlled way.

For example, somatic techniques, such as body scanning or breathwork, can help clients become more aware of the physical sensations associated with their emotions. By learning to recognize these sensations, clients can develop greater emotional awareness and begin to regulate their emotional responses more effectively. The therapist can tailor these techniques to the specific needs of the client, ensuring that they are learning the skills necessary to manage their emotions in a healthy way.

In addition to somatic techniques, creative modalities such as art therapy or music therapy can help clients externalize their emotions and gain insight into their emotional landscape. By engaging in creative expression, clients can develop a deeper understanding of their emotions and learn healthier ways of coping with stress, anxiety, or other emotional triggers.

### ***The Characteristics of Effective One-to-One Sessions in Experiential Therapy***

The effectiveness of one-to-one sessions in experiential therapy for addiction treatment depends on several key characteristics. These characteristics ensure that the therapy is tailored to the individual's needs, fosters emotional safety, and promotes deep emotional processing and healing.

#### **1. A Personalized and Client-Centered Approach**

One of the defining characteristics of effective one-to-one experiential therapy is the personalized and client-centered approach. In individual therapy, the focus is entirely on the client's unique experiences, needs, and goals. This allows the therapist to tailor the therapeutic activities to the specific emotional and psychological issues that are most relevant to the client's recovery.

The therapist must take the time to get to know the client on a deep level, understanding their history, emotional triggers, and patterns of behavior. This understanding allows the therapist to choose the most appropriate experiential techniques for the client and adapt the therapy as needed throughout the course of treatment.

For example, a client who has experienced significant trauma may benefit from somatic techniques that focus on releasing tension and trauma stored in the body. Another client who struggles with expressing their emotions may benefit from creative modalities such as art or music therapy. The therapist must be flexible and attuned to the client's needs, ensuring that the therapy is tailored to their individual healing process.

#### **2. A Strong Therapeutic Alliance**

As mentioned earlier, the therapeutic alliance is a critical factor in the success of individual therapy, particularly in experiential therapy. The therapist must build a strong, trusting relationship with the client in order to create a safe space for emotional exploration and healing. This alliance is based on mutual respect, empathy, and collaboration.

The therapist must be attuned to the client's emotional state and provide the necessary support and guidance to help them navigate the experiential activities safely. This requires a high level of emotional intelligence and sensitivity on the part of the therapist, as they

must be able to recognize when the client is feeling overwhelmed or triggered and adjust the therapy accordingly.

The therapeutic alliance also fosters a sense of collaboration, where the client feels empowered to take an active role in their healing process. In experiential therapy, the therapist and client work together to explore the client's emotions, memories, and experiences, creating a sense of partnership in the therapeutic journey.

### **3. Emotional Safety and Containment**

Emotional safety is one of the most important characteristics of effective one-to-one experiential therapy. The therapist must create a safe and supportive environment where the client feels comfortable expressing their emotions and engaging in the experiential activities. This sense of safety is particularly important in addiction treatment, as many individuals with addiction have experienced significant emotional pain, trauma, or shame.

The therapist must provide a sense of emotional containment, meaning they create a structured and supportive space where the client can explore their emotions without feeling overwhelmed or out of control. This containment allows the client to engage in emotionally intense activities, such as role-playing or guided imagery, in a way that feels safe and manageable.

For example, if a client becomes emotionally overwhelmed during a psychodrama exercise, the therapist can provide grounding techniques or take a step back to help the client regain a sense of control. This emotional containment is essential for helping clients process difficult emotions in a way that feels safe and supported.

### **4. Flexibility and Adaptability**

Effective one-to-one experiential therapy requires flexibility and adaptability on the part of the therapist. Each client's emotional landscape is unique, and the therapist must be able to adjust the therapy to meet the client's needs in the moment. This may involve adapting the experiential activities, adjusting the pace of the therapy, or providing additional support when the client is feeling emotionally vulnerable.

The therapist must also be flexible in their approach to the therapy, recognizing that what works for one client may not work for another. For example, a client who is more comfortable with creative expression may benefit from art therapy, while a client who prefers physical activities may respond better to somatic techniques or adventure therapy. The therapist must be attuned to the client's preferences and needs, ensuring that the therapy is both effective and comfortable for the client.

### **5. Opportunities for Reflection and Insight**

While experiential therapy is action-oriented, it is also important to provide opportunities for reflection and insight. After engaging in an experiential activity, the therapist should guide the client in processing their experience and exploring the emotions, thoughts, and insights that arose during the activity.

This reflection can take the form of discussion, journaling, or creative expression, depending on the client's preferences. The goal is to help the client make sense of their experience and develop a deeper understanding of the underlying emotional and psychological issues that may be driving their addiction. This combination of action and reflection is what makes experiential therapy so effective in promoting emotional healing and behavioral change.

## **Conclusion**

One-to-one sessions in experiential therapy offer a powerful and transformative approach to addiction treatment. By combining the principles of experiential therapy with the personalized and focused nature of individual therapy, these sessions provide a safe and supportive space for clients to explore their emotions, confront unresolved trauma, and develop healthier ways of coping with life's challenges.

The importance of one-to-one sessions in addiction treatment lies in their ability to address the root causes of addiction, provide a personalized treatment approach, build a strong therapeutic alliance, and create a safe space for emotional vulnerability. These sessions allow for deeper emotional processing, greater self-awareness, and the development of emotional regulation skills that are essential for long-term recovery.

The characteristics of effective one-to-one experiential therapy, including a client-centered approach, emotional safety, flexibility, and opportunities for reflection, ensure that the therapy is tailored to the unique needs of the client and promotes lasting emotional healing and behavioral change. When incorporated into a comprehensive addiction treatment program, one-to-one experiential therapy sessions can play a crucial role in helping individuals achieve lasting recovery and emotional resilience.

## ***Comparison of the Importance and Characteristics of Group Sessions and One-to-One Sessions in Experiential Therapy for Addiction Treatment***

In addiction treatment, both group sessions and one-to-one (individual) sessions in experiential therapy serve vital yet distinct roles. While both approaches are essential components of a comprehensive treatment plan, they offer different dynamics and therapeutic benefits. Group sessions emphasize social connection, shared experiences, and peer support, whereas one-to-one sessions focus on personalized care, emotional depth, and tailored interventions. Understanding the importance and characteristics of each can help in creating a balanced and effective treatment strategy for individuals struggling with addiction.

### ***Importance of Group Sessions in Experiential Therapy***

#### **1. Peer Support and Shared Experiences**

One of the most significant benefits of group sessions is the opportunity for peer support. Addiction often leads to isolation, and group therapy helps individuals reconnect with others who understand their struggles. The shared experiences within a group create a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of loneliness and fostering an environment where individuals can learn from each other's successes and challenges.

#### **2. Social Learning and Accountability**

Group therapy provides opportunities for social learning. Individuals in recovery can observe how others deal with similar issues, which can lead to the development of new coping strategies and insights. Additionally, group members often hold one another accountable, which can be highly motivating. The presence of peers encourages adherence to recovery goals and fosters a collective sense of responsibility.

#### **3. Emotional Engagement and Shared Vulnerability**

In experiential therapy, group dynamics often heighten emotional experiences. Whether through psychodrama, role-playing, or adventure therapy, the presence of others can amplify emotional engagement and shared vulnerability. When group members express their emotions or confront their fears in front of others, it creates a powerful sense of mutual support and emotional connection, which can be deeply healing.

### ***Importance of One-to-One Sessions in Experiential Therapy***

#### **1. Personalized and Individualized Care**

One of the primary advantages of one-to-one sessions is the ability to provide highly personalized treatment. Individual sessions allow the therapist to tailor the experiential activities to the specific needs, history, and emotional landscape of the client. This personalized approach ensures that the therapeutic interventions are aligned with the client's unique challenges and recovery goals.

## **2. Deep Emotional Processing**

Individual sessions create a safe, intimate environment where clients can delve deeper into their emotions and past experiences. Experiential therapy techniques such as guided imagery, somatic work, and art therapy can be adapted to focus on the specific traumas or emotional pain that the individual is struggling with. The therapist can provide focused attention and support, helping the client work through difficult emotions and process unresolved trauma in a controlled and safe space.

## **3. Building Trust and Therapeutic Alliance**

The therapeutic alliance between the client and therapist is crucial in one-to-one sessions. With individual attention, the therapist can build a strong, trusting relationship with the client, fostering a sense of emotional safety. This bond is particularly important in experiential therapy, where clients often engage in emotionally vulnerable activities that require a high level of trust in the therapist.

## ***Comparison of Key Characteristics of Group and One-to-One Sessions***

### **1. Emotional Expression and Vulnerability**

- **Group Sessions:** In a group setting, emotional expression and vulnerability are shared with peers. This creates a collective experience where individuals can witness others expressing emotions, which can inspire their own emotional release. The group context also helps normalize feelings of shame, guilt, or fear, as individuals realize that they are not alone in their struggles.
- **One-to-One Sessions:** In individual therapy, emotional expression is more private and intimate. Clients may feel more comfortable exploring deeply personal or traumatic issues without the presence of others. This setting allows for a deeper level of vulnerability, as the therapist can provide a highly attuned, non-judgmental space for emotional exploration.

### **2. Social Interaction and Feedback**

- **Group Sessions:** Group therapy emphasizes social interaction and provides a platform for receiving feedback from peers. This feedback can be particularly

valuable in addiction recovery, as individuals often gain new perspectives from others who have faced similar challenges. Group members can offer support, encouragement, and constructive feedback, which enhances self-awareness and personal growth.

- **One-to-One Sessions:** In contrast, individual therapy does not involve social feedback from peers, but instead focuses solely on the therapeutic relationship. The therapist's feedback is more structured and professional, offering a deeper psychological analysis of the client's behaviors and emotions. This feedback is highly personalized and often more reflective, focusing on helping the client understand their internal world.

### 3. Accountability and Motivation

- **Group Sessions:** The group dynamic fosters a sense of accountability among participants. Knowing that others are depending on their presence and participation can motivate individuals to stay committed to their recovery process. Additionally, witnessing the progress of others can inspire motivation and hope, encouraging individuals to continue their journey.
- **One-to-One Sessions:** In individual therapy, accountability comes from the therapeutic relationship itself. The therapist can hold the client accountable for their personal progress and goals, but there is no peer influence. The lack of peer accountability can be a drawback for some, especially those who benefit from external motivation and encouragement from others in recovery.

### 4. Therapeutic Focus and Depth

- **Group Sessions:** In group therapy, the therapeutic focus is often broad and must address the needs of the group as a whole. The therapist facilitates activities and discussions that are relevant to the group's collective needs, but there is less room for individualized focus. This broader focus is ideal for addressing common themes in addiction recovery, such as managing triggers or coping with cravings, but it may not provide the depth needed for addressing individual trauma or emotional issues.
- **One-to-One Sessions:** Individual therapy allows for a more focused and deep exploration of the client's specific issues. The therapist can guide the client through personalized experiential activities that directly address their emotional pain, trauma, or dysfunctional behaviors. This level of focus is crucial for clients who need to work through deep-seated emotional issues that may be driving their addiction.



## **Conclusion**

Both group sessions and one-to-one sessions in experiential therapy offer unique and complementary benefits in the treatment of addiction. Group therapy is essential for fostering peer support, shared experiences, and social accountability, all of which are critical for individuals in recovery. The collective nature of group therapy allows for emotional engagement, shared vulnerability, and the development of interpersonal skills that are necessary for maintaining sobriety in social contexts.

On the other hand, one-to-one sessions provide a more personalized and emotionally intimate setting, where the therapist can focus on the client's unique challenges, traumas, and emotional needs. These sessions allow for deeper emotional processing, greater therapeutic focus, and the development of a strong therapeutic alliance, all of which are essential for addressing the root causes of addiction.

For most individuals in addiction treatment, a combination of both group and individual sessions in experiential therapy is ideal. Group therapy provides the social support and accountability needed for recovery, while individual therapy offers the depth and personalization necessary for healing emotional wounds and fostering long-term recovery. Together, these therapeutic modalities create a comprehensive, balanced approach to addiction treatment, addressing both the individual's internal emotional struggles and their external social dynamics.

## **Practical tools and examples: Scenarios based on experiential therapy treatment**

### **Scenario 1**

#### **Art therapy for people with substance abuse**

##### **1. Objectives**

Art therapy aims to provide a non-verbal means for individuals to express their struggles with substance addiction. Through creative activities, participants explore their emotions, identify triggers, reduce stress, and foster self-awareness. The therapy focuses on

enhancing emotional regulation, building self-esteem, and offering a constructive way to cope with cravings and prevent relapse.

## 2. Target Group

This therapy is designed for adults (18+) dealing with substance addiction, including those in early recovery, individuals who have relapsed, or those experiencing emotional trauma related to their substance use. It is also suitable for people with co-occurring mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety, who may find traditional talk therapy challenging.

## 3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on Art therapy

### 3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group

Art therapy is chosen because it provides a safe and accessible medium for participants to express feelings that are difficult to articulate verbally. It offers an opportunity to explore emotional trauma and internal conflicts linked to addiction. The expected outcomes include improved emotional regulation, increased self-esteem, self-awareness, and a reduction in the likelihood of relapse. The sessions can be conducted both individually and in groups. Individual sessions offer a focused exploration of personal experiences, while group sessions promote peer support and shared understanding.

### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

At the start of the session, it is crucial to provide basic information about experiential therapy and art therapy specifically. This includes explaining how creative activities can help externalize emotions and experiences that may be too complex to express with words. Setting expectations about the non-judgmental nature of the session can ensure a smooth and open environment. It is important to emphasize that there is no right or wrong way to create art, and the focus is on the process rather than the end product.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

In the Art Therapy sessions for individuals struggling with substance addiction, activities are designed to help clients express their emotions, explore their addiction, and identify underlying triggers in a non-verbal and creative way. These activities can vary depending

on the client's comfort level, artistic ability, and personal experiences, but the focus is always on the process rather than the final artwork.

### **Example 1: "Emotions Collage"**

1. **Introduction:** The therapist begins by explaining the purpose of the activity: to help clients identify and express their emotions related to their addiction. The client is provided with various art supplies, including magazines, colored paper, glue, scissors, markers, and paints.
2. **Activity:** The client is asked to create a collage that represents their emotions around their addiction. The therapist might say, "Using these materials, create a collage that represents how you feel when you think about your addiction. There are no right or wrong answers; just let your feelings guide your choices of images, colors, and words."
3. **Exploration:** As the client works on their collage, the therapist observes and provides gentle prompts if needed. For example, "I notice you're using a lot of dark colors—what do those colors mean to you?" This encourages self-reflection and deepens the client's engagement with their emotions.
4. **Discussion:** Once the collage is complete, the therapist and client discuss the artwork. The therapist asks open-ended questions such as, "Can you tell me about the different elements in your collage?" or "What feelings were coming up for you as you created this?" This discussion helps the client explore their emotions, uncovering underlying issues related to their substance use.
5. **Processing:** The therapist and client work together to identify patterns in the artwork that may reflect emotional triggers or challenges. For instance, the client might notice that images of isolation or darkness are dominant, revealing a need to address feelings of loneliness in their recovery.

### **Example 2: "Triggers and Cravings Painting"**

1. **Introduction:** The therapist explains that the purpose of the activity is to explore the client's triggers and cravings through painting. A variety of paints, brushes, and canvases are provided.

2. **Activity:** The client is encouraged to paint a scene that depicts a moment when they experience cravings or encounter a trigger for substance use. The therapist might prompt with, "Think about a time when you felt a strong craving. What did that moment look like? What colors or shapes come to mind when you think about that feeling?"
3. **Exploration:** As the client paints, the therapist may offer gentle prompts to help guide the process. For example, "I see you've used a lot of red in this part of the painting—what does that color represent to you?" These prompts encourage the client to explore their cravings more deeply in a symbolic and non-verbal way.
4. **Discussion:** After the painting is finished, the therapist asks the client to describe their artwork and the emotions it evokes. Questions like, "What is happening in this scene?" or "How do these colors and shapes reflect your experience with cravings?" help the client articulate their feelings and gain insight into their addiction.
5. **Processing:** The therapist works with the client to explore coping strategies for dealing with the triggers depicted in the painting. For example, if the painting shows an overwhelming, chaotic scene, the therapist might ask, "What could you add to this painting to introduce a sense of calm or control?" This discussion empowers the client to think creatively about managing their cravings.

### **Example 3: "Sculpting My Journey"**

1. **Introduction:** The therapist introduces this activity by explaining that it will help the client visualize their journey with addiction and recovery using clay or other sculpting materials.
2. **Activity:** The client is provided with clay and instructed to sculpt a representation of their journey with addiction. The therapist might prompt, "Use the clay to create something that represents where you've been, where you are now, and where you hope to go in your recovery. This can be an abstract shape, an object, or even a figure—whatever feels right to you."
3. **Exploration:** While the client works on their sculpture, the therapist might provide gentle prompts to support the process. For instance, "What shapes or forms are coming up for you as you think about your past experiences?" or "How does it feel to mold and shape the clay as you create this piece?" These questions encourage the client to reflect on their journey in a tactile, hands-on way.

4. **Discussion:** Once the sculpture is complete, the therapist and client discuss the different aspects of the sculpture. The therapist may ask, "Can you explain what each part of the sculpture represents?" or "How does this sculpture reflect your feelings about your recovery?" This discussion helps the client process their journey and identify areas where they might need additional support or focus.
5. **Processing:** The therapist and client work together to explore the significance of the sculpture and how it might change over time. For example, the therapist might suggest, "If you could reshape part of this sculpture to reflect your hopes for the future, what would you change?" This encourages the client to consider their goals and the possibility of transformation in their recovery.

#### **Example 4: "Self-Portrait of Strength"**

1. **Introduction:** This activity focuses on helping the client identify their inner strengths and resources. The therapist explains, "In this exercise, you will create a self-portrait that reflects the parts of you that are strong, resilient, and capable of overcoming addiction."
2. **Activity:** The client is provided with a mirror, drawing or painting materials, and a blank canvas. They are instructed to create a self-portrait that emphasizes their strengths. The therapist might prompt, "As you draw yourself, think about the qualities you possess that help you stay strong in the face of addiction. How can you represent those qualities in your portrait?"
3. **Exploration:** During the creation process, the therapist encourages the client to focus on positive attributes and traits. For example, "What colors or shapes represent your courage or determination?" or "How do you want to portray your sense of self-worth in this portrait?"
4. **Discussion:** After the artwork is complete, the therapist asks the client to explain their portrait. Questions like, "What parts of yourself did you choose to emphasize and why?" or "How does this portrait reflect the strengths you bring to your recovery?" guide the client to recognize their inner resources and resilience.
5. **Processing:** The therapist and client explore ways to draw upon these strengths during challenging times. For instance, the therapist might say, "When you're facing a difficult moment, how can you remind yourself of the person you've depicted in this portrait?" This reinforces the client's self-esteem and provides a visual reminder of their capabilities.

These activities are designed to help clients express complex emotions and experiences that might be difficult to articulate verbally. Through art, clients can externalize their struggles, identify triggers, and explore their strengths in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.

### 3.4 Materials to be used (if any)

The sessions may use materials such as paint, markers, colored pencils, clay, and canvas. These options provide flexibility, allowing participants to select what resonates most with them. For other professionals implementing similar sessions, it's beneficial to have a variety of art supplies available to accommodate diverse preferences.

### 3.5 Setting

Art therapy sessions can take place both in-person and virtually, depending on accessibility. Face-to-face sessions benefit from a physical studio space where participants can fully immerse themselves in the creative process. A well-lit, quiet room with art supplies readily available creates an ideal environment. If held virtually, participants should be advised to find a quiet space at home where they can engage with the materials without interruption.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

During the creation process, the therapist may ask open-ended questions like:

- "What emotions are coming up as you create this piece?"
- "Why did you choose these colors or shapes?"
- "Does this artwork represent a specific experience or feeling related to your addiction?"

These questions help guide the discussion, enabling participants to connect their artwork with their emotions and experiences.

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

To close the session, participants will be encouraged to reflect on what they have learned about themselves through the activity. The therapist might ask:

- "How does creating this piece help you understand your feelings better?"
- "What did you notice about your thoughts or emotions during this process?"

These reflections help consolidate the insights gained and provide a constructive ending to the session.

## Scenario 2

### Guided Imagery for people with various Behavioral Addictions

#### 1. Objectives

Guided imagery therapy aims to assist individuals with behavioral addictions (e.g., gambling, work, food, or internet addiction) in visualizing and processing their emotional triggers and cravings. The goal is to encourage relaxation, reduce stress, and build resilience against compulsive urges. Through mental imagery, clients practice strategies for resisting impulses and develop greater self-awareness and emotional regulation. Additionally, clients are guided to imagine healthier outcomes, helping them prepare for real-life situations in which they might face temptation.

#### 2. Target Group

This therapy is intended for adults (18+) with a history of compulsive behavioral addictions, particularly those in early recovery or those who have relapsed. It is especially suited for individuals experiencing intense cravings and anxiety associated with behavioral addictions. Additionally, it benefits those with co-occurring mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety, which can often exacerbate addictive behaviors.

#### 3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on Guided Imagery

##### 3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group

Guided imagery is selected because it provides a safe and controlled way for participants to explore their emotions and cravings without acting on them. The expected outcomes include improved stress management, increased emotional regulation, greater self-awareness, and enhanced ability to resist compulsive behaviors. The sessions can be conducted individually, allowing clients to work closely on personal triggers, or in group settings to foster a sense of shared support and collective resilience. Individual sessions allow for personalized imagery and specific coping strategies, while group sessions promote mutual encouragement and accountability.

##### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

Before starting, it's important to explain the concept of guided imagery. Clients should understand that this technique uses the mind's power to evoke calming and positive images, helping them navigate cravings and triggers more effectively. Reassure them that

this is a gentle process; they are not expected to face their addictions directly in the imagery. Instead, they will visualize situations in which they feel in control, capable of making healthier choices. Clients should be informed that they are free to stop or alter the imagery at any point if they feel uncomfortable.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

In Guided Imagery therapy, each session focuses on deep relaxation and visualization exercises designed to help individuals with behavioral addictions (such as gambling, food, internet, or work addiction) process their cravings and practice healthy coping mechanisms. The therapist leads the client through a series of imagery exercises, encouraging them to visualize themselves in calm, supportive environments and situations that help manage their addiction.

#### Example 1: Safe Place Visualization

1. **Introduction:** The session begins with a brief relaxation exercise. The therapist instructs the client to close their eyes, take deep breaths, and slowly release tension in their body. The client is encouraged to focus on their breathing, using slow inhales and exhales to promote a sense of calm.
2. **Guided Imagery:** The therapist then guides the client to imagine a "safe place" – an environment where they feel secure, peaceful, and in control. For example, the therapist might say, "Picture yourself in a serene garden. Notice the colors of the flowers, the sound of birds chirping, and the warmth of the sun on your skin. This is your space, a place where you feel completely at ease and free from cravings."
3. **Exploration:** As the client visualizes this safe place, the therapist asks questions to deepen the imagery: "What do you see around you? What sounds can you hear? How does the air feel against your skin?" These prompts encourage the client to fully immerse themselves in the visualization.
4. **Application to Addiction:** Once the client feels settled in their safe place, the therapist introduces a scenario related to their addiction. For instance, if the client struggles with gambling, the therapist might say, "Now, imagine you receive an invitation to visit a casino. Notice how your body and mind react to this thought while you remain in your safe place. What emotions come up?"
5. **Positive Coping Rehearsal:** The therapist then guides the client to visualize themselves responding calmly and confidently to the temptation. For example, "Imagine you take a deep breath, look around at your garden, and remind yourself of



the peace you feel here. You decide to decline the invitation and stay in this calming environment instead. How does that choice make you feel?"

6. **Discussion:** After the exercise, the client is encouraged to share their experience, focusing on the emotions that arose and any insights they gained. The therapist might ask, "What did you notice about your feelings when you visualized the gambling invitation?" and "How did the imagery of your safe place help you manage those feelings?" This discussion helps connect the visualization experience with real-life coping strategies.

### **Example 2: Resisting the Craving Visualization**

1. **Introduction:** The session begins with a relaxation exercise, using deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation to help the client enter a state of calm.
2. **Guided Imagery:** The therapist guides the client to visualize a peaceful setting, such as a quiet beach or forest. Once the client is fully immersed, the therapist introduces the concept of a craving. For a client with a food addiction, the therapist might say, "Now, imagine a craving coming towards you like a wave approaching the shore. Notice its size, shape, and intensity. It's okay to acknowledge its presence."
3. **Coping Visualization:** The therapist then guides the client to visualize themselves handling the craving in a healthy way. For example, "Picture yourself standing on the shore, watching the wave of craving approach. As it gets closer, you take a deep breath and calmly step back, letting the wave pass without pulling you in. You remain grounded, feeling the sand beneath your feet and the stability it provides."
4. **Evoking Positive Emotions:** The therapist encourages the client to focus on the sense of calm and control they feel while resisting the craving. "Notice how empowered you feel as the wave of craving passes by without affecting you. You chose to stay calm and in control. How does that make you feel?"
5. **Discussion:** After the imagery, the client shares their thoughts and emotions. The therapist may ask, "What was it like to see the craving as a wave?" and "How did it feel to watch it pass by without engaging?" This discussion helps the client relate the visualization to real-life scenarios and reinforces their ability to manage cravings.

### **Example 3: Future Projection Visualization**

1. **Introduction:** The session begins with a deep breathing exercise to calm the mind and prepare for visualization.

2. **Guided Imagery:** The therapist guides the client to imagine a future situation where they might encounter a trigger. For example, for someone with internet addiction, the therapist might say, "Imagine it's a weekend afternoon. You're feeling bored and reach for your phone, thinking about browsing social media."
3. **Exploring the Trigger:** The therapist encourages the client to explore their emotions in the scenario. "As you reach for your phone, notice the urge building up. What do you feel in your body? What thoughts are crossing your mind?"
4. **Positive Visualization:** The therapist then guides the client to visualize a healthier response. "Now, imagine you take a deep breath and remind yourself of your goals. Instead of grabbing your phone, you choose to go outside for a walk. Picture yourself stepping out into the fresh air, feeling a sense of freedom and accomplishment as you take control of your choices."
5. **Anchoring Positive Emotions:** The therapist prompts the client to focus on the positive emotions associated with their choice. "How do you feel as you walk outside, leaving the temptation behind? What does it feel like to make a decision that aligns with your well-being?"
6. **Discussion:** After the visualization, the client reflects on the experience. The therapist might ask, "What was different about handling the trigger in this way?" and "How can you use this visualization to support yourself when facing real-life urges?"

This helps the client internalize the imagery as a coping strategy for future situations. These activities provide a structured way for clients to mentally rehearse handling triggers, build resilience, and evoke positive emotions associated with making healthier choices. Through repeated practice in sessions, clients become more confident in their ability to manage their addiction and implement these strategies in their daily lives.

### 3.4 Materials to be used (if any)

These sessions generally require minimal materials, primarily focusing on the client's mental engagement. However, it can be helpful to have calming background music, nature sounds, or a meditation cushion to enhance the relaxation experience. A comfortable chair or yoga mat can also be used to support physical relaxation during the session. For professionals, having a selection of guided scripts or prompts can be beneficial when guiding clients through the imagery process.

### 3.5 Setting

Guided imagery sessions are most effective in a quiet, comfortable space, free from distractions. They can take place in a therapy office with a calm atmosphere or be conducted virtually if necessary. The key is to create an environment where clients can fully relax and immerse themselves in the imagery. Whether in-person or online, clients should be advised to find a quiet spot, use headphones for enhanced focus, and ensure they will not be interrupted during the session.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

During the session, the therapist may ask reflective questions to help clients deepen their visualization, such as:

- "What does the environment you've imagined look, sound, and feel like?"
- "How do you feel as you successfully walk away from the urge to engage in the behavior?"
- "What strengths or qualities do you notice within yourself in this imagined scenario?"

These questions help clients fully engage in the imagery and connect their visualizations to their real-life emotions and challenges.

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

To conclude the session, the therapist guides the client to slowly bring their focus back to the present, perhaps by deepening their breath and gradually opening their eyes. Following the imagery, clients are encouraged to share their experiences and emotions, discussing any insights or feelings of empowerment they may have gained. Questions like,

- "What did you learn about your ability to handle cravings?" or
- "How might you use this experience in real-life situations?"

can help consolidate the session's impact and provide a positive takeaway. The therapist may also suggest incorporating elements of the visualization into daily practices to reinforce the skills developed during the session.

## Scenario 3

### Psychodrama for people with internet addiction

#### 1. Objectives

Psychodrama is a therapeutic approach designed to help individuals with internet addiction explore the emotional issues driving their compulsive online behavior. Through role-playing

and reenacting real-life situations, participants gain insights into their addiction, develop problem-solving skills, and enhance their emotional regulation. The therapy aims to break unhealthy habits, promote healthier social interactions, and encourage more balanced emotional responses.

## 2. Target Group

This therapy is tailored for adolescents and adults (16+) who struggle with internet addiction, particularly those who find it difficult to regulate their online use, experience social isolation, or suffer from co-occurring conditions like anxiety or depression. Psychodrama is particularly suitable for individuals who use the internet as a way to avoid real-life challenges or emotions. The therapy benefits those who are motivated to understand the impact of their addiction on their lives and relationships.

## 3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on Psychodrama

### 3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group

Psychodrama is chosen because it allows clients to safely explore their feelings, behaviors, and relationships in a controlled environment. By acting out their struggles with internet use, participants can identify underlying emotional triggers, develop problem-solving skills, and gain new perspectives on their behavior. Expected outcomes include increased self-awareness, enhanced emotional regulation, improved social skills, and healthier online habits. Group sessions are often used because they foster peer feedback, build empathy, and provide a supportive community, although individual sessions can also be adapted for more personalized exploration.

### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

At the start of the session, it's important to introduce clients to the concept of psychodrama, explaining that it involves role-playing scenarios to explore emotions and behaviors related to their internet use.

- Emphasize that the session is a safe, non-judgmental space where they can express themselves freely.
- The clients should understand that psychodrama is not about acting perfectly but rather about using the process to gain insights into their thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Reassure them that they have control over how deep they wish to go into their emotions and experiences during the session.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

The psychodrama session starts with a **warm-up phase** to help participants get comfortable and open up emotionally. This might include activities like simple movement exercises, deep breathing, or short, non-threatening role-playing games. For example, participants might act out a simple scene where they introduce themselves using exaggerated emotions or take on a fun role, such as a favorite animal or object. This helps reduce anxiety and sets the stage for more in-depth exploration.

#### Main Psychodrama Activity: Role-Playing Scenarios

Once the participants are warmed up, the therapist introduces the main psychodrama activity, tailored to explore specific issues related to internet addiction.

#### Example 1: The "Conflict with Self" Scene

1. **Scenario Setup:** The participant is guided to act out an internal conflict they often face regarding internet use. For example, they might play out a scene where they intend to go to bed early but instead feel a strong urge to check social media or play an online game. The scene is set up in two parts of the room: one representing the desire to sleep and rest, and the other representing the temptation to go online.
2. **Role Assignment:** The participant takes on two roles: their "restful self" (the part that wants to sleep) and their "addicted self" (the part that craves the internet). In a group setting, other participants can be invited to play these roles, bringing different perspectives to the inner conflict.
3. **Enactment:** The participant moves between the two spaces, voicing the thoughts and feelings of each role. The "restful self" might say, "I need to sleep to feel good tomorrow," while the "addicted self" argues, "But just a few more minutes online

won't hurt." The therapist can pause the enactment to ask questions like, "What are the underlying emotions driving each side of this conflict?"

4. **Exploration:** The therapist encourages the participant to explore deeper feelings by asking them to focus on the emotions of both roles. For instance, the "addicted self" might reveal a need for connection or relief from stress, while the "restful self" might express feelings of frustration and exhaustion. This exploration helps the participant identify the emotional triggers behind their internet use.
5. **Resolution:** The participant is encouraged to experiment with different resolutions in the scene. They might try playing out a scenario where the "restful self" offers comfort to the "addicted self" or proposes a compromise, like a brief relaxation exercise before bed instead of going online. This rehearsal of healthier coping mechanisms prepares the participant for real-life situations.

### **Example 2: Reenacting a Real-Life Situation**

1. **Scenario Setup:** The participant chooses a recent situation related to their internet addiction, such as arguing with a family member about excessive screen time. The therapist helps them outline key moments of the interaction, including the thoughts and emotions involved.
2. **Role Assignment:** The participant takes on the role of themselves during the incident, while other group members (or the therapist, in individual sessions) play the roles of other people involved, such as the family member, a friend, or even an abstract concept like "temptation."
3. **Enactment:** The participant acts out the scenario, with group members responding based on the roles assigned. For example, the person playing the family member might express concerns like, "I'm worried about how much time you're spending online." The therapist might guide the scene to unfold as it originally did or explore different responses and outcomes.
4. **Role Reversal:** To deepen understanding, the participant switches roles with the family member. This technique helps them see the situation from another perspective, promoting empathy and insight into how their internet use impacts those around them.
5. **Processing:** After the role-play, the group discusses what happened during the enactment. The therapist might ask the participant questions like, "How did it feel to

play the role of the family member?" and "What new insights did you gain about your behavior and its effects?"

6. **Experimentation:** The participant then experiments with different ways to handle similar situations in the future. They might practice setting boundaries for their internet use or expressing their feelings more assertively.

### **Example 3: "Future Projection" Technique**

1. **Scenario Setup:** In this exercise, the participant imagines a future situation where they encounter a potential trigger for excessive internet use, such as a stressful day at work or school.
2. **Enactment:** The participant plays out the scene, starting with the stressful event and moving towards their usual response (e.g., retreating to social media). Other group members or the therapist might play roles that represent stressors or temptations.
3. **Exploration:** As the scene unfolds, the therapist pauses to explore the participant's feelings and urges. Questions like, "What are you trying to escape from in this moment?" or "What are you hoping to achieve by going online?" help the participant understand their motivations.
4. **Positive Role Rehearsal:** The therapist then guides the participant to rehearse a healthier response. They might try taking a break to practice mindfulness or calling a friend to talk about their feelings instead of turning to the internet.
5. **Feedback:** After the role-play, the group provides feedback, highlighting moments of strength and potential strategies for dealing with similar situations in reality. This feedback can reinforce the participant's confidence in applying these new strategies in their life.

Through these activities, participants experience their internal struggles in a new, tangible way, gaining valuable insights and practicing healthier responses. The enactment and reflection phases of psychodrama encourage clients to confront their addiction, explore its emotional roots, and develop the problem-solving skills needed for change.

### **3.4 Materials to be used (if any)**

While psychodrama primarily relies on role-playing and imagination, having simple props (e.g., chairs, masks, or signs) can enhance the enactment and make the scenarios more tangible. A flexible, open space is important to facilitate movement and interaction during the role-playing activities. For professionals, having a basic toolkit of props, along with guidelines for various role-playing techniques, can aid in creating an engaging and impactful session.

### 3.5 Setting

Psychodrama sessions are ideally conducted in person, in a spacious, private room where participants can move freely and express themselves without inhibition. The environment should feel safe, comfortable, and free of distractions to help clients immerse themselves in the role-play. For clients unable to attend in person, virtual sessions can be adapted using video conferencing platforms, with participants encouraged to create a similar safe space at home for the session.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

During the enactment and sharing phases, the therapist may ask questions like:

- "What emotions are you feeling as you play this role?"
- "How does acting out this situation help you understand your need to go online?"
- "What does this scene reveal about your triggers or the pressures you experience?"
- "What would it look like if you responded differently in this scenario?"

These questions help deepen the exploration of the participant's relationship with the internet and encourage reflection on alternative behaviors.

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

To close the session, participants are guided to step out of their roles, acknowledging the emotions and insights they experienced. The therapist may lead a brief relaxation exercise to help the participants ground themselves back in the present. The group then discusses what they have learned, focusing on how they can apply these insights to real-life situations. Questions like, "What new strategies do you feel ready to try in managing your internet use?" or "How can the awareness gained today help you in the future?" can help solidify the session's impact. The therapist encourages ongoing reflection and practice between sessions to reinforce behavioral changes.



## Scenario 4

### Creative Writing for people with overeating addiction

1. **Objectives:** The objectives of the experiential therapy sessions in Scenario 1 will focus on the techniques and methods of creative writing and their influence on addressing the behavioral addiction of overeating. The focus is going to be on:

- 1) Self – understanding
- 2) Meaningful interactions
- 3) Elevated self–esteem
- 4) Self - expression

These goals that creative writing focuses on can help in understanding the personalized needs of each individual and forming a proper treatment plan, tackling feelings of loneliness, and enhancing social and communication skills.

2. **Target Group:** Adults who are battling with the behavioral addiction of overeating, including those who are just starting their treatment, those who have relapsed, and those who have already completed their treatment plan.

3. **Experiential Therapy Sessions based on Creative Writing**

- 3.1 **Expected outcomes for the target group**

Creative writing is chosen as a form of experiential therapy because it facilitates self-awareness, self-expression, and the enhancement of cognitive skills. It also helps clarify goals, aspirations, hopes, and fears for the future. Through journaling daily thoughts, experiences, feelings, and behaviors, or by creating poetry using symbols and metaphors, individuals can externalize intense emotions. Overeating, an addictive behavior, often involves struggles with motivation and avoidance. Creative writing can increase motivation and aid in the emotional processing of distressing life experiences, helping individuals recognize avoidant behaviors associated with eating.

- 3.2 **Introducing the person to the therapy session**

Creative writing sessions can also be conducted alongside other forms of therapy. In this example, creative writing is carried out independently. At the start of the session, individuals are introduced to the concept of creative writing, the specific form/forms of this technique that will be used, the process that will be followed, and the materials that will be

utilized. Therapists should also make it clear that the sessions are safe spaces, free of judgment regarding any thoughts, insights, feelings, experiences, or behaviors.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

As noted above, activities in creative writing sessions intend to initiate self-expression, self-awareness, enhanced motivation, emotional processing, and recognition of avoidance.

#### **Example: “Food for thought”**

1. **Introduction:** At the beginning of the sessions, therapists can provide the individuals with some exercises as a warmup. For example, individuals can start the session by completing a sentence such as, “I hope... or I wish...”. Other warm-up exercises may involve abstract writing on specific topics such as "self-control," "loneliness," or "food." After completing their writing, individuals and therapists share their work with the group. If therapists notice that some participants need more time, they can set a time limit to help them complete the exercise. Reading usually begins with a volunteer and proceeds either in the order of the seating arrangement or based on participants' readiness and willingness to share.
2. **Activity:** At this point, therapists instruct patients to write a letter to their overeating behavior both as a friend and as an enemy. Therapists can help individuals by suggesting starting sentences such as, “Dear Overeating, you made me feel safe when...”, “You have protected me from...” or “Dear Overeating, I recognize you as an enemy because...”, “I am annoyed with you because...” Therapists should help individuals understand the purpose of both letters. Writing about overeating as a friend can help individuals recognize that while this behavior may seem harmful, it likely served a specific role, functioning as a coping mechanism. On the other hand, writing to overeating as an enemy allows individuals to explore and realize the extent of the behavior's impact on their mental and physical health, relationships, and daily life. Individuals should feel comfortable expressing any negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, or sadness, along with whatever feelings may arise during the exercise.
3. **Discussion:** Here, individuals are encouraged to share their writings, thoughts, or experiences with the group. Therapists can ask several questions to evoke many insights, fears, and inner emotions like, “In what way does food help you cope with your emotions?” “Did you manage to come to any realization regarding your behavior with

food and your feelings?”. The goal in this part is to facilitate self-understanding, group interaction, and discussion by empathetically working with each other and accepting each other's deeper feelings and thoughts, improving socialization skills, and reducing emotions of isolation.

- 4. Closure and Reflection:** Therapists can initiate a brief closing activity in which participants are asked to reread a specific part of their letters that had a significant impact on them. Based on the content individuals choose to reread, therapists can offer positive affirmations and encourage them to reflect on the session. To facilitate this reflection, therapists might ask questions such as, "What do you consider the most meaningful insight from today's session?" or "After writing about it today, how do you feel about your relationship with food?"
- 5. Closure exercise:** At the end of the session therapists can give individuals their printed writings to provide them with the opportunity for further study, discussion, and reflection.

### 3.4 Materials to be used (if any)

To conduct a session through creative writing, there are some materials needed such as pens, pencils, notebooks and journals, possible sticky notes for organizing thoughts, and a printer if therapists would like to print individuals' exercises. If sessions would be conducted online laptops, tablets, and writing software and apps would be necessary.

### 3.5 Setting

Creative writing sessions can be conducted both in person and online. When sessions take place face-to-face, individuals may feel the presence of the therapist and other group members, which can motivate them to complete the exercises and create a more welcoming, supportive atmosphere. Additionally, therapists can arrange participants in a circle to foster a positive environment and encourage expression. For online sessions to be effective, participants should ensure they have all the necessary materials ready beforehand. Beyond the usual requirements for any therapy session—such as creating a safe, friendly, non-judgmental, and warm environment—this type of therapy does not require any additional special settings.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

*Depending on the writing task the therapist will choose to facilitate the sessions, there are multiple questions that could be used, like:*

- *“Did you come to any realization about your relationship with food, through this exercise?”*
- *“How were you feeling when you were writing this letter about your eating disorder behavior?”*
- *“When you were writing the exercise, did any additional thoughts, feelings, or memories arise?”*
  -

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

At the end of the session, small exercises can be used as a closing activity. Therapists might reserve time for rereading or revisiting individuals' work, reflecting on the session's themes and conclusions, or composing a brief final piece incorporating participants' writings. This could then be printed and shared with the group to encourage further reflection and discussion. Additionally, therapists can ask specific questions to prompt insights, thoughts, and feelings about the session, such as: "How were you feeling before the session, and how do you feel now?" or "What was your main goal in attending the session?"

## Scenario 5

### Art Therapy for people with Gambling Addiction

1. **Objectives:** The objectives of the experiential therapy sessions in Scenario 2 will focus on the techniques and methods of art therapy and their influence on addressing the behavioral addiction of gambling. The core elements that will be analyzed in this scenario are how art therapy can enhance the:
  - 1) Identification and expression of the addicted person's feelings
  - 2) Identification of safe places and new coping behaviors
  - 3) Self-exploration

These goals that art therapy focuses on can support an individual's understanding of their gambling addiction, help create personalized strategies and methods for coping with behavioral addiction, motivate to stop and restore their relationships with their families.

2. **Target Group:** Adults who are battling with the behavioral addiction of gambling, including those who are just starting their treatment, those who have relapsed, and those who have already completed their treatment plan.

### 3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on Art therapy

#### 3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group

Art therapy, as a form of experiential therapy, is chosen in this scenario because it allows individuals to express themselves non-verbally, unlike many traditional therapies that rely on verbal communication. Individuals struggling with addiction often find it difficult to articulate emotions such as shame or trauma, making art therapy a valuable tool for externalizing these feelings. The expected results from art therapy interventions include improved self-expression, emotional regulation, self-discovery, increased self-esteem, the development of empathy, and healthier coping skills. The sessions can be conducted in two ways: individually or in groups. Individual therapy focuses on the emotional dynamics of the person, while group therapy aims to reduce feelings of isolation and empower participants to confront challenges with the support of others who struggle with similar difficulties.

#### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

At the beginning of the session, individuals are introduced to the purposes and goals they can achieve through art therapy, a form of experiential therapy. These goals include identifying and expressing feelings, recognizing safe spaces, exploring new coping behaviors, and engaging in self-exploration. As they begin the art process, individuals often face performance anxiety, which is expressed through statements like, "I'm not an artist" or "I always failed art classes." Therefore, art therapists should create a safe and supportive environment to help reduce this initial anxiety and foster a sense of security.

#### 3.3 Activities implemented

Activities in Art Therapy sessions are intended to support individuals in understanding their addiction, expressing their feelings, finding more coping strategies, providing motivation to stop their addictive behavior, and restoring relationships with their families in a creative and nonverbal manner. These activities might be influenced by the individual's performance anxiety, artistic ability, and life events, but the process is always more significant than the artwork in its final form.

#### **Example: "Abstract feelings"**

1. **Introduction:** At the beginning of the session, the therapist explains the objective of the activity: to assist individuals in identifying, understanding, and expressing their feelings (shame, anxiety, and guilt) that often have been

influenced by their gambling addiction. Individuals are provided with pencils, erasers, colored pencils, markers, and scratchpads.

2. **Activity:** Individuals are asked to depict their emotional state abstractly and are encouraged by therapists to use any shapes, patterns, and colors they choose. Therapists might use phrases such as, "Describe through lines, colors, shapes, and anything that comes to mind how you are feeling right now when you think about yourself and gambling." The therapeutic process must clarify that "there are no wrong or right answers; everyone should let their emotions guide their choices of colors, lines, patterns, and the length of the lines, and so forth".
3. **Exploration:** At the same time the individuals are preparing their drawing, therapists observe and, if necessary, give mild cues. For instance, "I observed you used more pressure on your pencil there, what does this mean to you?" This promotes self-exploration and increases the individual's emotional engagement.
4. **Discussion:** When the drawing is finished, the therapist and the individual (or the group, depending on the way the sessions will be conducted) discuss the drawing through open-ended questions like: "What kind of emotions arose when you were creating this?" or "Could you help me understand your choice of the different colour patterns?" This part of the session motivates the individuals to identify and understand their emotions while at the same time revealing connections related to their gambling addiction.
5. **Processing:** Together, the client and therapist examine the artwork to identify patterns that reveal underlying emotions related to the gambling addiction. For example, if they notice many sharp or edgy lines in the drawing, the individual may recognize a sense of lack of control or intense feelings of anxiety and/or aggression, which they need to address in their treatment plan.

### 3.4 Materials to be used (if any)

A variety of materials can be used in the sessions, such as pencils, erasers, colored pencils, markers, and sketch pads, allowing participants the flexibility to choose what suits them best at the time. In general, it is helpful for participants to have access to different materials to ensure their needs and preferences are fully expressed.

### 3.5 Setting

Art therapy can be conducted both face-to-face and virtual. Virtual sessions can be conducted with materials that individuals have on their own (colored pencils, markers, clay, sketch pads, etc) or via online apps that can support making art with no physical supplies. Face-to-face sessions can take place in studios where dedicated spaces provide individuals with the appropriate materials and support, enabling them to create art that closely aligns with their needs and emotions.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

Therapists could provide open-ended questions such as the following, throughout the exploration and creative phase:

- “I noticed you used darker colors in this part of your drawing, what made you use these colors?”
- “What are you feeling as you form this clay?”
- “What made you choose these materials to deliver the particular activity?”

As a result of these discussion-guiding questions, individuals are encouraged to relate their artwork to their experiences and emotions connected to the addiction they are struggling with.

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

Participants will be asked to consider what they have discovered about themselves as a result of the exercise as the session comes to a close.

Some of the questions therapists can ask to promote this self-discovery are:

- “What kind of emotions arose when you were creating this piece?”
- “What did you feel when you started creating your piece and what are you feeling now that you have finished it?”
- “When was the last time you felt similar emotions?”

These closing thoughts for the session, serve to reinforce the lessons learned and bring the discussion to a positive conclusion.

## Scenario 6

### Music Therapy for people with Internet and Gaming addiction

1. **Objectives:** The objectives of the experiential therapy sessions in Scenario 3 will focus on the techniques and methods of music therapy and their influence on addressing the behavioral addiction of the internet and gaming. The focus is going to be on:

- 1) Engaging emotions, motivations, and barriers to recovery
- 2) Motivation to receive treatment
- 3) Social cohesion
- 4) Cooperative group activities

These goals that music therapy focuses on can support an individual in developing personal, emotional, and social skills and engaging in psycho–social activities.

2. **Target Group:** Adults and adolescents who are battling with the behavioral addiction of internet gaming, including those who are just starting their treatment, those who have relapsed, and those who have already completed their treatment plan.

### 3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on music therapy

#### 3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group

In this scenario, music therapy, as a form of experiential therapy, is chosen because, unlike many conventional therapies that rely on verbal communication, it allows individuals to express themselves, their emotions, and their needs nonverbally. Additionally, music therapy can have positive effects on socialization, coping skills, motivation, engagement, and attendance—factors that are crucial in treating addictions. Sessions can be conducted both individually and in groups. While group therapy aims to reduce feelings of isolation and provide participants with the confidence to face challenges with the support of other peers who are experiencing similar struggles, individual therapy focuses on the emotional dynamics of the patient. This scenario will be facilitated by a group framework to increase the chances of positive effects.

#### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

At the start of the session, it is very important to explain to the individuals what music therapy is, the goals they can reach through it, and its techniques. Some of the outcomes of music therapy are as described above; enhanced motivation and engagement, self–expression, self–awareness, and reduction of negative emotions like guilt, regrets,



blame, fear, etc, feelings that are very common to people struggling with addiction. In this session, the focus will be on lyric analysis, a therapeutic intervention that uses popular music.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

Individuals are introduced to the Five-Level Framework for Lyric Analysis Processing (Kees & Jacobs, 1990) and its therapeutic goals, which include decision-making, relaxation, emotional expression, sociability, communication, self-esteem, coping skills, stress management, and group cohesiveness—goals that are fundamental to treating addictions, particularly internet-gaming addiction.

#### **Example: “Exploring Internet and gaming addiction – Welcome to the Internet”**

1. **Foundation:** At this level, the therapist presents and plays the chosen song—in this case, 'Welcome to the Internet' by Bo Burnham—and focuses the individuals' attention on reflecting on their feelings and sensations evoked by the song. One of the objectives of this phase is to create a safe, secure, and comfortable environment for individuals to express themselves before moving into the core activity. Open-ended questions, such as 'What kind of impact did the artist want to achieve?' can be used to evoke feelings of safety, emotional expression, sociability, group cohesiveness, and communication, inside the group.
2. **Reflection:** Here the therapist's goal is to dive into the individual's deeper feelings and thoughts that have arisen from the song. In this case, the therapist could use a specific line of the chosen song, for example, “Could I interest you in everything? all of the time? A little bit of everything, all the time?”, “How does this phrase resonate with your feelings and thoughts about the overwhelming and addictive nature of online platforms?”. This could be one of the questions the therapist could use in this case, to create a discussion about the individual's, feelings, self-esteem, decision-making choices, and possibly, coping skills.
3. **Group process:** At this level, the therapist asks questions that will guide individuals' attention on other individuals' reflections and the effects of the song, to enhance participants' engagement and cohesion, interpersonal interaction,s and reflect on their personal experience. Therapists can motivate the discussion by asking questions like:

“What kind of resemblances or disparities did you notice between your responses and others in the group that was related to your internet–gaming addiction?”.

- 4. Personal Insights:** At this stage, the therapist’s goal is to deepen the discussion by focusing on the emotions, thoughts, and perceptions of the participants that arise from the song. Some questions that can be used at this level include: “What emotions or insights did this song evoke?” and “In what ways does this activity help you personally?”
- 5. Replacement/Transfer:** At this level, as the title suggests, the therapist focuses on transferring the new insights into the participants’ lives while simultaneously developing future action plans and improving coping skills. Questions that could guide these goals include: “What self-awareness have you gained during this session that you could use to address your gaming/internet addictive behaviors?” and “What do you feel capable of doing in the next few hours, days, or weeks to move toward your goals related to your gaming/internet addictive behavior?”

### 3.4 Materials to be used (if any)

To conduct a music therapy session there are some prerequisite materials needed like: a song with characteristics that will help the therapists achieve their goals, they should have printed lyrics or screenshare for online sessions, some notebooks and pens or pencils, speakers or headphones to play the songs and/or instruments for the therapist or the clients to reproduce or produce the songs. Furthermore, participants can use specific apps to generate music needed for the sessions.

### 3.5 Setting

Music therapy sessions can be conducted both in person and virtually. The only materials required for the sessions are those mentioned above. However, online sessions may sometimes hinder the therapeutic process due to internet issues or technical problems such as malfunctioning microphones, speakers, or cameras. Both the participant and the therapist must be adequately prepared before each session to prevent such barriers. This type of therapy does not require a special setting beyond what is typically needed for any therapy session, such as fostering a safe, welcoming, non-judgmental, and warm environment. If necessary, the space where the music sessions are held can be soundproofed, and the seating should be comfortable to allow participants freedom of movement to create music.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

Depending on the form (lyric analysis, songwriting, improvisation, singing, parody, etc) of conducting a music therapy session, therapists may ask questions such as:

- “How did you feel when you were playing that rhythm on the drum? Did it bring up any specific feelings or thoughts?”
- “What was the most impactful part of today’s session for you? Is there a specific area you’d wish to explore more in our next meeting?”
- “What part of the song stood out to you?”
- “What message do you think the musician was trying to communicate?”

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

Therapists can use a relaxing, repetitive finger-picking pattern on the guitar or a calm, steady rhythm on the piano to enhance a breathing meditation exercise to close the session. Additionally, participants can be encouraged to reflect on what they have learned about themselves during the session and highlight possible coping strategies to address their struggles with internet and gaming addiction. Some possible questions include:

- “What kinds of feelings did you notice when we first started the session, and how are you feeling now?”
- “Have you identified any coping strategies that you feel could help you with your struggles with internet and gaming addiction?”

These final remarks for the session reinforce the lessons discovered and summarize the conversation constructively.

## Scenario 7

### Gestalt therapy for Internet and gaming addiction

## Objectives

The primary objective of the experiential therapy sessions is to employ Gestalt therapy techniques to address behavioral addictions more specifically on the Internet and gaming. This therapy focuses on increasing participants' self-awareness and fostering personal growth through present-moment experiences. The specific goals of these sessions are to:

- Increase self-awareness of emotions and behaviors: One of the core goals of Gestalt therapy is to help individuals understand how their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors contribute to their addiction. By focusing on awareness, participants will begin to recognize patterns in their gaming habits, such as when they turn to gaming as a coping mechanism for difficult emotions like stress, loneliness, or anxiety.

Encourage present-moment experience: The sessions will emphasize the importance of staying grounded in the present. Behavioral addictions often involve escaping into virtual realities to avoid real-life challenges. By helping participants engage with their current emotional and physical experiences, Gestalt therapy will encourage them to confront their feelings rather than escape from them. This present-centered approach fosters a deeper understanding of how participants react to life stressors, which can reduce their reliance on gaming.

- Enhance self-regulation and personal responsibility: A major component of overcoming behavioral addiction is learning to self-regulate. Gestalt therapy encourages participants to take responsibility for their actions, emphasizing that they are in control of their behaviors, even when those behaviors are addictive. Through this process, participants will begin to understand how their choices contribute to their addiction and explore healthier alternatives. This self-regulation will help reduce compulsive gaming and promote more intentional and balanced life choices.
- Support authentic social interactions and emotional expression: Addictive behaviors, including gaming, often lead to isolation or superficial social interactions, which can perpetuate emotional struggles. Gestalt therapy focuses on helping individuals engage in meaningful and authentic interactions. By encouraging participants to express their feelings and emotions honestly, the therapy will aim to foster emotional release and better emotional regulation, both of which are crucial for long-term recovery. In the context of group therapy, this will also promote empathy and shared understanding among participants.

These objectives align with the holistic, client-centered approach of Gestalt therapy. By achieving these goals, the sessions are expected to help participants not only break free from the cycle of addiction but also develop healthier coping mechanisms, improve their emotional intelligence, and enhance their relationships with others.

### Target Group

The experiential therapy sessions will focus on adults and adolescents who are battling behavioral addiction to internet gaming. This group includes individuals at various stages of recovery, such as:

- Early-stage participants who have recently started seeking treatment and are beginning to confront their addiction.
- Individuals who have relapsed after a period of abstinence and require additional support to regain control of their gaming behaviors.
- Those who have completed a treatment plan but may need ongoing therapeutic support to prevent relapse and maintain their recovery.

This diverse target group shares a common struggle with internet gaming addiction, a form of behavioral addiction that significantly impacts their emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Gaming addiction can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including isolation, neglect of responsibilities, poor emotional regulation, and damaged personal relationships.

Given the unique nature of behavioral addictions, Gestalt therapy is particularly well-suited for this group. The present-focused, experiential approach of Gestalt therapy encourages participants to become aware of their feelings and behaviors as they occur, which can help them recognize the emotional triggers that lead to excessive gaming. By fostering self-awareness, personal responsibility, and authentic emotional expression, the therapy can help participants address the root causes of their addiction, improve their emotional regulation, and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

This target group benefits from experiential therapy sessions that provide a safe and supportive environment for self-exploration, making it an ideal fit for both individual and group sessions. Group therapy is recommended for those who may benefit from sharing

their experiences and learning from others in similar situations, while one-on-one therapy is ideal for individuals who need personalized attention to address deeper emotional issues. Group sessions, in particular, can promote empathy, build social connections, and reduce feelings of isolation that are often exacerbated by internet gaming addiction.

## 1. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on gestalt therapy

### 3.1 Expected Outcomes for the Target Group:

The expected outcomes for adults and adolescents struggling with internet gaming addiction through Gestalt experiential therapy sessions are focused on fostering self-awareness, emotional regulation, and personal responsibility. This therapeutic approach is particularly effective in helping individuals understand how their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are interconnected, which is crucial for overcoming addiction.

Key outcomes for this target group include:

- **Increased Self-Awareness:** Through Gestalt therapy's emphasis on present-moment experience, participants will be encouraged to notice how their thoughts and emotions impact their actions, particularly their compulsive gaming habits. This heightened self-awareness will help them identify triggers—such as stress, boredom, or social pressure—that lead to excessive gaming. By becoming more aware of these patterns, they can start to take steps to break the cycle of addiction.
- **Improved Emotional Regulation:** One of the core benefits of Gestalt therapy is its ability to help individuals process and regulate emotions that have previously been ignored or suppressed. For those addicted to gaming, this will mean learning healthier ways to manage emotions such as frustration, anxiety, or loneliness without resorting to gaming as a form of escape. The ability to better regulate emotions will help reduce the reliance on gaming as a coping mechanism.
- **Enhanced Personal Responsibility:** Gestalt therapy encourages participants to take ownership of their actions and choices. As individuals become more aware of the ways their thoughts and emotions fuel their gaming habits, they will also begin to accept responsibility for their recovery. This shift in mindset is key for long-term change, as it empowers participants to take control of their lives and actively engage in the healing process.

- **Strengthened Social Connections:** Behavioral addiction to internet gaming often leads to isolation and social withdrawal. Through the therapeutic process, participants will be encouraged to engage in more authentic, meaningful interactions with others, both inside and outside the therapy sessions. By improving their social skills and addressing interpersonal challenges, participants can begin rebuilding relationships that may have been damaged by their addiction.
- **Reduced Gaming Behaviors and Preventing Relapse:** The ultimate goal of this therapeutic approach is to reduce the compulsive urge to game and to help participants develop healthier coping strategies. By addressing the emotional and psychological factors driving their addiction, participants will be better equipped to resist the temptation to relapse. They will learn new ways to manage stress, boredom, and social challenges without turning to gaming.

#### Group or Individual Therapy Format:

Both group and one-on-one therapy sessions can be beneficial for this target group, depending on individual needs. Group sessions provide a platform for participants to connect with others facing similar challenges, fostering a sense of community and shared understanding. This can reduce feelings of isolation, which are common among individuals with internet gaming addiction. Additionally, group sessions allow participants to observe and learn from others' experiences, which can reinforce their own growth.

Alternatively, one-on-one sessions may be more appropriate for participants who require more individualized attention or are dealing with more complex emotional issues. Personalized sessions allow for deeper exploration of the underlying causes of addiction, enabling therapists to tailor interventions to the individual's specific needs.

### **3.2 Introducing the Person to the Therapy Session:**

Introducing a person to an experiential therapy session, particularly one based on Gestalt therapy, requires careful consideration of their background, current emotional state, and previous experiences with therapy. For individuals struggling with internet gaming addiction, entering a therapy setting might feel daunting, especially if they are unfamiliar with experiential or Gestalt approaches. Therefore, it is crucial to provide them with a clear and compassionate introduction to help them feel comfortable, safe, and motivated to engage in the therapeutic process.

## **Introduction to Gestalt Therapy:**

Gestalt therapy is an experiential, humanistic form of therapy that emphasizes living in the present moment, self-awareness, and personal responsibility. It is different from more traditional talk therapy methods because it focuses on helping individuals experience their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in real-time, rather than simply discussing them. The main idea behind Gestalt therapy is that by becoming more aware of how you experience the world around you—your thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and relationships—you can develop new insights that allow you to change unhelpful behaviors, such as excessive gaming.

At the start of the session, it's important to explain to the participant that the therapy will not be centered on “fixing” them or focusing solely on their addiction. Instead, it will involve helping them explore how they are currently functioning in their lives, what their emotional and behavioral patterns are, and how these patterns contribute to their reliance on gaming as a form of coping. The therapist will encourage the person to stay in the present moment, paying attention to their emotions, physical sensations, and reactions as they arise during the session. This approach helps uncover deep-seated emotional issues that may have been fueling the gaming addiction.

The individual should also be reassured that while Gestalt therapy may involve creative and experiential exercises (such as role-playing, guided imagery, or mindfulness practices), they will always have the freedom to decide how much they want to participate. The therapist is there to guide them but will respect their boundaries and comfort level. This collaborative approach emphasizes the individual's autonomy, which can be particularly empowering for someone who may feel trapped or out of control due to their addiction.

## **Setting Expectations:**

At the beginning of the first session, it's important to set clear expectations. For example, the therapist might say something like:

"During our sessions, we're going to focus on the present moment. I want you to notice your thoughts and feelings as they come up. You may notice physical sensations like tightness in your chest, or thoughts like 'I need to be doing something else.' We'll explore these reactions together. The aim is to understand what's happening for you right now because that will help you recognize patterns that may be influencing your choices outside of therapy, such as turning to gaming when certain emotions or situations arise."



It's also essential to explain that experiential therapy is a process that takes time. The participant should be encouraged to stay open to the experience, even if they find it challenging or unfamiliar at first. They may not feel a significant change after the first session, but over time, they will begin to notice shifts in how they relate to their emotions and behaviors.

### **Introducing the Role of the Therapist and the Relationship:**

Gestalt therapy places a great emphasis on the therapist-client relationship as a central component of the healing process. It's important to let the participant know that the therapist will act as a supportive guide, not as an authority figure. The therapist will often share their observations or reactions to what is happening in the session to help the individual become more aware of their own feelings and responses.

For example, if a person avoids discussing a difficult topic or seems disconnected during the session, the therapist might gently point it out by saying, "I notice you shifted your body when we started talking about that. What's coming up for you right now?" This kind of feedback is not intended to make the individual feel judged but to increase their awareness of how they react in the moment. Through these real-time observations, participants can begin to understand their behaviors more deeply and apply these insights to their addiction.

The therapist will also explain that their role is not to give advice or solutions, but to help the participant explore their own feelings and reactions. This approach is designed to foster self-awareness and empower the individual to take ownership of their decisions, both inside and outside of therapy. This can be particularly helpful for those who feel powerless in the face of their addiction, as it provides them with the tools to reclaim control over their actions.

### **Creating a Safe and Non-Judgmental Space:**

For individuals battling gaming addiction, therapy may feel like an overwhelming step, especially if they've experienced shame or guilt related to their addiction. It is crucial to introduce the session by reassuring the person that the therapy space is a safe, non-judgmental environment where they are free to express themselves without fear of criticism. They should be reminded that addiction is a complex issue, and the therapy is not about assigning blame or pointing out flaws, but rather about understanding their experiences with compassion and curiosity.

The therapist might say:

"In this space, you are encouraged to express any thoughts, feelings, or concerns you have. Whether you're feeling frustrated, confused, or unsure about what to say, that's okay. We'll explore it together. There's no right or wrong way to feel here."

Creating this kind of environment is especially important for those who may have been socially isolated due to their gaming behaviors or who may have experienced negative reactions from friends, family, or society regarding their addiction.

### **Providing Structure for the Session:**

Lastly, it's helpful to introduce some structure to the session so the participant knows what to expect. They should be informed about the length of the session, what types of activities may be involved, and how the session will flow. For example, the therapist might explain:

"We'll start today by checking in with how you're feeling and what's been happening in your life. Then, we might explore some exercises to help you connect with your emotions and bodily sensations. I may ask you to notice what's happening in your body as we talk or to imagine a situation you've experienced recently. We'll end by discussing what you've learned and how you're feeling about the session."

This kind of explanation helps the individual feel more grounded and prepared for what's to come, reducing any anxiety or uncertainty they may have about the process.

### **3.3 Activities Implemented:**

In Gestalt therapy, the activities are designed to bring the client's focus to the present moment and encourage them to experience and explore their thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations in real time. Since the target group consists of individuals struggling with behavioral addiction to internet gaming, the activities will be tailored to help them connect with their lived experience and recognize how their gaming habits may be linked to emotional needs, avoidance, or unresolved conflicts. Below is a detailed description of the activities that will be implemented during the session:

#### *1. Mindfulness and Grounding Exercises*

At the start of the session, the therapist will guide the individual through a brief mindfulness or grounding exercise. This could involve a simple body scan, where the person is asked to

close their eyes and pay attention to their bodily sensations, from head to toe. Alternatively, they may be asked to focus on their breathing, noticing the rise and fall of their chest. The purpose of this activity is to help the individual become fully present and aware of their internal state.

### **Why this activity?**

People with gaming addiction often use gaming as a form of escape from uncomfortable emotions or stress. Mindfulness encourages them to reconnect with the present moment and gain an awareness of emotions or sensations that they may normally avoid. This exercise serves as a gentle introduction to the experiential nature of the session.

## *2. The Empty Chair Technique*

The "Empty Chair" technique is a classic Gestalt therapy activity that will be used to help participants explore unresolved emotions or conflicts. In this exercise, the individual is asked to imagine that they are sitting across from someone or something they want to address, such as a parent, a loved one, or even their gaming habits. The therapist will invite them to engage in a dialogue, speaking to the imagined person or situation and then switching chairs to respond as the other party.

### **Why this activity?**

This technique allows the individual to externalize their feelings and conflicts, creating an opportunity to gain new insights into their emotions and behaviors. In the case of gaming addiction, they may use the empty chair to talk to the part of themselves that is drawn to gaming, which can provide valuable awareness about the emotional triggers and unmet needs that gaming fulfills.

## *3. Body Awareness Exercise*

Gestalt therapy emphasizes the connection between the body and mind. During the session, the therapist may invite the individual to become aware of how their body reacts to certain emotions or topics discussed. For instance, the therapist might ask, "Where do you feel that in your body?" or "What is your body telling you right now?"

### **Why this activity?**

Gaming addiction can be linked to dissociation or emotional avoidance, where individuals become disconnected from their physical and emotional experiences. By paying attention to body sensations, the individual can become more aware of how their body holds tension, anxiety, or other feelings that might drive their urge to game.

#### *4. Role-Playing and Reenactment*

In this activity, the individual might be asked to reenact or role-play a scenario from their daily life where they felt the urge to engage in gaming. For example, they could be guided to recreate a situation where they felt stressed and chose to escape into gaming. Through the role-play, the therapist helps them explore the emotions, thoughts, and physical responses they had in the moment.

##### **Why this activity?**

Role-playing allows individuals to gain greater awareness of the triggers that lead them to gaming. By reliving these moments in a therapeutic setting, they can safely explore how they might react differently or cope in more constructive ways in the future.

#### *5. Present-Moment Awareness*

Throughout the session, the therapist will periodically ask the individual to pause and check in with what they are experiencing in the present moment. This could include questions like, "What are you noticing right now?" or "How are you feeling as we talk about this?" This ongoing present-moment check-in is a hallmark of Gestalt therapy and helps individuals remain connected to their experience in real-time.

##### **Why this activity?**

Present-moment awareness helps the individual avoid getting lost in past regrets or future worries, both of which can fuel addictive behaviors. By focusing on the "here and now," the individual is encouraged to fully experience their emotions and become more conscious of how they respond to situations that normally trigger their gaming behavior.

#### *6. Creative Expression*

If appropriate, the therapist may introduce a form of creative expression, such as drawing or writing, to help the individual externalize their feelings. For example, the person could be asked to draw an image that represents their relationship with gaming or to write a letter to their future self, envisioning life without gaming addiction.

##### **Why this activity?**

Creative expression provides a non-verbal outlet for exploring deep emotions and patterns. It can help the individual access feelings that might be difficult to articulate through words, and it also promotes self-reflection more engagingly and insightfully.

#### *7. Dialogue with Parts of Self*

The therapist might guide the individual to engage in a dialogue between different parts of themselves. For example, the person may be encouraged to speak as the "addicted" part of themselves that craves gaming and then respond as the "rational" part of themselves that understands the negative consequences of the addiction.

### **Why this activity?**

This internal dialogue fosters self-awareness and highlights the internal conflicts that contribute to their addiction. By giving voice to both sides, the individual can gain a better understanding of their motivations and desires, which is a critical step toward finding healthier ways to cope with emotional challenges.

Each of these activities is designed to foster awareness, emotional exploration, and self-regulation, all of which are essential for overcoming behavioral addiction. The therapist will tailor the selection and pacing of these activities based on the individual's comfort level, readiness, and emotional responses during the session. The goal is not only to help the participant gain insights into their addiction but also to provide them with new tools for managing their emotions and behaviors in more adaptive ways.

### **3.4 Materials to be Used:**

The materials selected for this Gestalt therapy session aim to enhance the experiential aspect of the therapy, encouraging self-expression and awareness of emotions, sensations, and thoughts. While Gestalt therapy typically relies on dialogue and interpersonal interaction, incorporating creative and sensory materials can deepen the client's engagement with the therapeutic process. Below is an overview of the materials that may be utilized in this session:

#### *1. Chairs*

The use of chairs is central to the "Empty Chair" technique, which is a core activity in Gestalt therapy. At least two chairs should be available for the client to physically switch between during the exercise. This allows the client to symbolically shift perspectives, giving them the ability to engage in a dialogue with different parts of themselves or with imagined figures (such as the gaming addiction or a significant person in their life).

- **Why use this material?**

The physical act of switching chairs reinforces the mental and emotional shift that

occurs during the empty chair exercise. It helps the client visualize and externalize their internal conflicts or relationships.

## *2. Notebooks or Journals*

Providing clients with a notebook or journal can be a valuable tool during the session. The client can use it to jot down thoughts, feelings, or reflections that arise during or after the session. Journaling can also serve as a follow-up activity between sessions, helping them track their progress and remain engaged with the therapeutic process.

- **Why use this material?**

Writing allows clients to reflect on their emotional experiences in a structured manner. For individuals struggling with behavioral addiction, writing can be a grounding activity that helps them process emotions and develop insights into their behaviors.

## *3. Art Supplies (Paper, Markers, Paints, Crayons)*

Creative materials like drawing paper, markers, paints, or crayons can be incorporated to help clients express emotions and thoughts non-verbally. After an activity like the “Empty Chair” or body awareness exercise, the client may be asked to draw or create an image that represents their current emotional state or relationship with gaming.

- **Why use this material?**

Visual arts can help clients express complex emotions that are difficult to articulate through words. For clients with gaming addiction, who may be used to expressing themselves through a virtual or digital medium, creative expression through physical art can offer a new, tangible outlet for self-exploration.

## *4. Body Awareness Tools (Mats or Cushions)*

For body awareness exercises, it might be helpful to provide mats or cushions for the client to sit or lie on comfortably. This is particularly useful when guiding the client through a body scan or other mindfulness exercises, which require them to focus on their physical sensations and connect with their body in a relaxed state.

- **Why use this material?**

Creating a comfortable and safe physical environment is essential for mindfulness

and body awareness practices. Mats or cushions allow the client to focus inward, helping them relax and attune to their body's responses without physical discomfort.

### *5. Timers or Bells*

A timer or small bell can be used to gently signal the beginning and end of mindfulness or grounding exercises. This helps clients stay present during the activity and indicates clear transitions between different phases of the session.

- **Why use this material?**

A timer or bell adds structure to the session and helps create a mindful atmosphere. It also encourages clients to focus for a set period without feeling rushed or uncertain about how long the exercise will last.

### *6. Handouts or Worksheets:*

Worksheets or informational handouts about Gestalt therapy principles (e.g., present-moment awareness, personal responsibility, body-mind connection) may be provided for clients to take home. This can reinforce what was discussed during the session and give the client additional tools for reflection outside of therapy.

- **Why use this material?**

Handouts offer a reference point for clients to review and remind themselves of key concepts between sessions. For clients with addiction, this can be especially useful to help reinforce self-awareness practices or mindfulness techniques.

## **3.5 Setting**

The ideal setting for the Gestalt therapy sessions can vary depending on the client's needs and preferences. Both face-to-face and virtual settings have their advantages, and the choice may be influenced by factors such as the target population, therapeutic goals, and the specific techniques employed during the session.

### *Face-to-Face Sessions*

In-person sessions are generally preferred for experiential therapy, which emphasizes interaction and immediate feedback. The physical presence of both the therapist and client allows for a more immersive experience, fostering a connection that is often critical for emotional exploration. In-person sessions facilitate the use of various techniques that involve physical movement, such as the “empty chair” method, body awareness exercises, and creative activities.

- **Why face-to-face?** Being physically present allows for rich, real-time engagement in the therapeutic process. The therapist can observe body language, emotional responses, and other non-verbal cues that are crucial for understanding the client's experience. Activities like role-playing, creative expression, and mindfulness exercises benefit greatly from an in-person setting, where clients can fully engage with the materials and the therapist.

#### *Possible Settings for Face-to-Face Sessions*

1. **Therapist's Office or Clinic:**

A therapist's office provides a quiet, safe, and confidential environment conducive to therapy. It should be equipped with enough space for movement during activities, such as switching chairs or participating in body awareness exercises.

2. **Therapeutic Studio or Art Room:**

For sessions that involve creative expression, such as drawing, painting, or crafting, a dedicated art therapy room or studio can be beneficial. This space allows for a broader range of materials and promotes engagement in artistic activities that can enhance emotional exploration.

3. **Nature-Based Settings:**

Nature therapy can provide a calming and grounding environment for clients, making it a valuable setting for experiential therapy. Outdoor sessions can help clients reconnect with their surroundings, promoting mindfulness and presence. This is especially beneficial for individuals dealing with various forms of stress, anxiety, or trauma.

#### *Virtual Sessions*

While face-to-face sessions are generally preferred for the reasons outlined, virtual therapy can also be an effective alternative. Online sessions can accommodate clients who may



have logistical challenges, such as geographical distance, mobility issues, or health concerns.

- **Challenges with virtual settings:**

While virtual sessions can maintain therapeutic engagement, they may limit some of the embodied practices and non-verbal interactions that are essential to experiential therapy. The therapist might find it challenging to guide physical exercises or creative activities in the same way they would in person.

- **Why virtual sessions?**

Virtual therapy can still provide valuable support, particularly for clients who prefer the convenience of participating from home. It allows the therapist to engage with clients who may otherwise not have access to in-person services. Techniques such as dialogue, reflective questioning, and self-exploration can still be effectively implemented online, though adjustments may be necessary to accommodate the digital format.

### *Conclusion on Setting*

The choice of setting for Gestalt therapy sessions should prioritize creating a safe and supportive environment where clients can engage in meaningful exploration of their emotions, thoughts, and experiences. Face-to-face sessions generally offer the best opportunities for immersion and interaction, particularly when utilizing creative and experiential techniques. However, virtual sessions can serve as a flexible and accessible alternative, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds and situations can still benefit from the transformative power of experiential therapy.

## **3.6 Questions to Ask During the Sessions**

In experiential therapy, the use of open-ended questions is crucial for fostering self-exploration and emotional awareness. The questions should guide participants in reflecting on their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, both concerning the therapy process and their situations, including any addictions or challenges they may be facing. Below are suggested questions divided into two categories: those focusing on the experiential therapy process and those addressing the client's specific situation or addiction.

### *A) Questions about the Experiential Therapy Process:*

1. **How are you feeling right now in this session?**
  - Purpose: This question encourages clients to connect with their immediate emotional state, promoting mindfulness and awareness of their feelings.
2. **What thoughts or sensations are you noticing as we engage in these activities?**
  - Purpose: Helps clients articulate their experiences during the session, facilitating deeper understanding and reflection.
3. **What was your experience of the “empty chair” technique? How did it feel to engage with that part of yourself or that situation?**
  - Purpose: Encourages clients to reflect on their experiences with specific techniques, promoting insight into their internal dialogues.
4. **Did you notice any physical sensations during the exercises? What did you feel in your body?**
  - Purpose: This question links emotional experiences to physical sensations, enhancing body awareness and emotional integration.
5. **What thoughts came up for you when we discussed [specific topic or situation]?**
  - Purpose: Guides the client to reflect on their mental processes and how they relate to the therapeutic work being done.
6. **How do you think engaging in these activities is helping you understand your feelings better?**
  - Purpose: Encourages clients to assess the value of the experiential therapy process in their self-exploration.
7. **What has been the most impactful part of today’s session for you?**
  - Purpose: This question helps clients identify moments of significance, reinforcing their engagement and participation in the therapy.
8. **How do you feel about sharing your experiences with others in the group?**
  - Purpose: If the session is group-based, this question promotes discussion about vulnerability, support, and connection among participants.

B) Questions about Their Situation/Addiction:

1. **Can you describe how your [situation/addiction] has affected your daily life?**
  - Purpose: Encourages clients to articulate the impact of their situation on various aspects of their lives, fostering awareness and insight.

2. **What emotions do you typically associate with your [situation/addiction]?**
  - Purpose: This question helps clients explore the emotional underpinnings of their behaviors and experiences.
3. **When you think about your [situation/addiction], what thoughts or beliefs arise?**
  - Purpose: Promotes reflection on cognitive patterns related to their addiction or situation, which is crucial for understanding their motivations and behaviors.
4. **What coping strategies have you used in response to your [situation/addiction]? How effective have they been?**
  - Purpose: Guides clients to evaluate their current coping mechanisms, facilitating discussions about their effectiveness and potential alternatives.
5. **How do you feel about your relationship with [specific behavior or substance]?**
  - Purpose: Encourages clients to explore their feelings towards their addiction or behavior, fostering insight into their motivations and struggles.
6. **What changes would you like to see in your life concerning your [situation/addiction]?**
  - Purpose: Helps clients set intentions and goals for their therapeutic journey, promoting motivation for change.
7. **How do you think your feelings about your [situation/addiction] influence your relationships with others?**
  - Purpose: Encourages exploration of the broader impact of the addiction on the client's interpersonal relationships.
8. **What support do you feel you need to navigate your challenges more effectively?**
  - Purpose: Promotes self-advocacy and identification of support systems that may assist the client in their recovery journey.

### **3.7 Wrapping Up the Sessions**

Wrapping up a therapy session is an essential part of the therapeutic process, as it provides an opportunity for reflection, closure, and planning for the future. In Gestalt therapy, concluding a session should reinforce the insights gained during the session while

allowing clients to express any remaining thoughts or feelings. Here are some suggested activities, questions, and points of discussion to smoothly close the session:

### *1. Reflection Activity:*

Encourage clients to take a few moments to reflect individually on the session. This can be done through journaling or drawing. Providing paper and art materials allows clients to express their thoughts and feelings visually or in written form.

- **Guidance:**

- Ask clients to consider what stood out to them during the session.
- Prompt them to write or draw about a particular moment or insight that resonated with them.

### *2. Group Sharing (if applicable):*

If the session is group-based, facilitate a sharing circle where participants can share their reflections. This encourages connection and support among group members, reinforcing the idea that they are not alone in their experiences.

- **Guidance:**

- Invite participants to share one takeaway or feeling they wish to carry forward.
- Encourage active listening and respect for each person's sharing.

### *3. Questions for Closure:*

Introduce open-ended questions to guide discussion and summarize the session. This allows clients to articulate their insights and consider their next steps.

- **Examples of Closing Questions:**

- **What is one insight you gained today that you would like to carry with you?**
  - This question encourages clients to identify key takeaways that can inform their future actions.
- **How do you feel about the progress you've made today?**
  - This prompts self-reflection on their journey and reinforces positive change.

- **What emotions or thoughts are lingering for you as we end this session?**
  - This allows clients to express any remaining feelings and ensures they leave the session with a sense of completion.

#### 4. Setting Intentions for the Future:

Encourage clients to think about their intentions or goals for the upcoming days or until the next session. This helps them integrate their insights into their daily lives and emphasizes the ongoing nature of their therapeutic journey.

- **Guidance:**

- Ask clients to identify one specific action or practice they would like to commit to before the next session.
- Consider suggesting that they write this down and bring it to the next session for discussion.

#### 5. Summarize Key Points:

As the session concludes, take a moment to summarize the key themes and insights that emerged during the session. This reinforces learning and ensures that clients leave with a clear understanding of their experiences.

- **Guidance:**

- Highlight significant moments, breakthroughs, or realizations shared during the session.
- Emphasize the progress made and validate the clients' efforts in their self-exploration.

#### 6. Ending Ritual:

Introduce a simple ending ritual to signal the close of the session. This could be a grounding exercise, a moment of silence, or a brief mindfulness practice.

- **Guidance:**

- You might invite clients to take a few deep breaths together, allowing them to center themselves before leaving.

- Consider closing with a quote or affirmation that resonates with the themes discussed in the session, reinforcing positivity and motivation.

#### 7. Logistics and Next Steps:

Before ending the session, discuss any logistical details, such as scheduling the next appointment or addressing any questions clients may have regarding the follow-up process.

- **Guidance:**

- Confirm the next session's date and time, allowing clients to prepare and plan.
- Invite any last questions or concerns before concluding the session.

### **Scenario 8**

#### **Art therapy for social media and gaming addiction**

##### **1. Objectives**

The objectives of this scenario will focus on different methods and techniques of art therapy and its use in addiction treatment, specifically social media and gaming addiction. The focus is going to be on:

- a. Processing, expressing, and exploring emotions
- b. Developing new coping strategies
- c. Motivation to receive treatment
- d. Relaxation of the mind
- e. Enhanced self-awareness and self-esteem

These goals can enhance the individual's personal, emotional, and social skills and well-being.

##### **2. Target Group**

Adults and adolescents who struggle with behavioral addiction to social media and gaming, including those who have already completed a treatment plan.

##### **3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on art therapy**

###### **3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group**

The use of expressive art modalities helps adults and adolescents who struggle with social media and gaming addiction to explore the deepest feelings that cannot be expressed through words, i.e. by using symbols, colors, and shapes to represent the inner feelings and conflicts. In the process of making art, sensory qualities can relax the mind. Another benefit of using expressive art interventions is that they provide an improvement in self-awareness and group cohesion in terms of reducing online gaming addiction. Group sessions will be implemented because art therapy can facilitate intra- and interpersonal relationships,

### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

Experiential therapy is an active therapeutic approach that focuses on engaging individuals in activities, rather than solely relying on traditional talk therapy. This method helps people to express emotions and thoughts that may be difficult to verbalize. By engaging in activities such as role-playing, creative arts, or physical movement, clients are often able to access deeper emotions, work through trauma, and process experiences in a way that feels more natural and less confrontational.

Art therapy is a form of experiential therapy where clients use various art mediums to express themselves. It is important to highlight that art therapy doesn't require any artistic skill, as the focus is not on the quality of the artwork but on the process of creation and the emotions it evokes. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to create or participate. Art therapy allows clients to explore their inner world through color, shape, and form in ways that words cannot always capture. Participants do not need to have an agenda or know what they are going to express but be open to exploration and letting the process guide them. The emotions, thoughts, and sensations that come up during the process are the real value of the session.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

After an introduction and remaining questions by the group, participants will do a guided body scan to get grounded and check in on their body how they are feeling. They are free to share their feelings with the group.

1. Self-exploration with art

Participants are given the prompt to paint or draw everything that is on their mind right now, positive or negative. They are given 15 minutes and are free to choose from the provided art materials and paint anywhere in the room where they feel comfortable.

Reflection questions in the group

How did you feel during the process? Did any particular emotions come up?

How do you feel looking at your art?

2. Focus activity

“Out of the things that you have painted, pick one that evokes or represents an emotion or conflict that you would like to explore more. If you feel comfortable, it can be related to your social media or gaming addiction.”

Participants are given 15-20 minutes for this task.

When they are finished, they can partner up with somebody in the group, preferably someone they do not know well, and talk with this person about their art piece, what it represents, and why they chose certain colors, shapes, or symbols, taking turns.

3. Partner activity

In the remaining pairs, participants are asked to paint a solution or something to ease the represented emotion/ conflict in response to the partner's painting. When both are finished, they have time again to explain their painting.

Participants are given 15-20 minutes for this task.

4. Presentation and reflection in the group

Participants are welcome to share their painting and their partner's solution painting in the group if they feel comfortable doing so.

Reflection questions in the group

How did you feel about creating your focus piece? How did you feel about creating your partner's solution?

How did you experience your partner's response artwork?

Is there a way you can apply your partner's response to your life?

5. Closing

One minute of silence to check in on the body again.

Reflection questions in the group

Do you feel any changes after the activities?

Is there anything you'd like to explore in our next session?



Other prompts can be to paint their digital self and then compare it to their “offline” self and notice the differences.

### 3.4 Materials to be used

- Paper, canvas, or any drawing surface
- Drawing/painting materials: colored pencils, markers, crayons, paint, etc.
- Optional materials: clay, collage materials (magazines, scissors, glue), fabric, or natural elements (leaves, stones...)
- Relaxation or grounding exercises, body-scan (guided by the therapist)
- Blankets

### 3.5 Setting

The therapy sessions should take place in a bright, quiet and comfortable environment. A painting studio is not necessary, but there should be tables and chairs in the room. Optionally participants can sit on the floor, using blankets. Face-to-face sessions are preferred because it is easier to make interpersonal connections this way, but it is possible to include people virtually.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

Following questions that addresses their social media/ gaming addiction can be asked before the creative part begins :

- What emotions do you experience before, during, and after playing games or using social media?
- When you are gaming or on social media, how do you feel about yourself? Do you feel more in control, happy, anxious, or disconnected?
- Are there specific emotions or situations that trigger your urge to engage with games or social media? For example, do you notice this behavior increases when you feel stressed, bored, or lonely?
- Do you ever use gaming or social media to avoid certain feelings or situations in your life? If so, what might those be?

- What does gaming or social media give you emotionally that you feel you might be missing in your everyday life?

The following questions can be asked during the creative activity:

- How could your feeling look like in texture, color, and shape? How much space does it take up? Does your feeling come in warm tones or in cold tones? Does your feeling look strong, bold, or pastel? Does your feeling look sharp, pointy, or wavy? Is there a variety of colors? An ambivalence of feelings? Is there a symbol that represents your feelings?
- What shapes, colors, or textures reflect your feelings about gaming or social media?
- If your artwork could speak, what would it say about your relationship with gaming or social media?

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

#### Closing questions

How do you think your artwork reflects the ways you cope with (specific issue, addiction, or challenge)?

Did this session help you gain new insights or perspectives on your current challenges?

What steps or changes would you like to take based on what came up in this session?

If this artwork could serve as a reminder of something important, what would it be?

#### Closing activities

- Mindful Observation: Asking the participant to take a few moments to mindfully observe their artwork, noticing small details or symbols they might not have initially focused on. Encourage them to reflect silently or share what they notice. “Take a few minutes to sit quietly with your artwork. Observe it without judgment—notice the colors, textures, and shapes. How does it feel to sit with your work now that the session is coming to a close?”

- Title Your Artwork: Asking the participant to give their artwork a title that encapsulates the theme, emotion, or message of the piece. This can help solidify the meaning of the creative process. “If you were to give your artwork a title, what would it be? Why does that title feel right for this piece?”
- Moment of gratitude for showing up and taking the time to work on yourself and your addiction

## Scenario 9

### Music therapy for improving mental health and emotional well-being

#### 1. Objectives

The objectives of this experiential therapy session will focus on the techniques and methods of music therapy and their influence on improving mental health and emotional well-being. The focus is going to be on:

- Expressing and managing emotions
- Body-awareness
- Reducing anxiety and stress
- Enhancing self-awareness and personal insight
- Developing communication and social skills through dance

These goals that dance therapy focuses on can support an individual in fostering emotional regulation, improving self-esteem, and building stronger interpersonal connections.

#### 2. Target Group

Adults and adolescents who are experiencing anxiety, depression, or emotional distress, including those in the early stages of therapy, those who have relapsed, and those seeking to maintain their emotional health post-treatment.

#### 3. Experiential Therapy Sessions based on music therapy

##### 3.1 Expected outcomes for the target group

Dance or movement therapy is suitable for adults and adolescents who are experiencing anxiety, depression, or emotional distress. During the therapy sessions, they will get the chance to express their emotions through movement in a safe and supportive environment. Dance therapy helps to release tension and stress and allows individuals to experience joy and freedom. In group reflections, participants also develop communication skills. Face-to-face sessions are required to build a sense of connection in the group.

### 3.2 Introducing the person to the therapy session

Experiential therapy is a form of therapy that encourages individuals to actively engage in activities that evoke emotions and insights, rather than just talking about their experiences. It emphasizes expression through creative and physical activities, helping participants access emotions and memories that may be difficult to verbalize. Through this process, people gain deeper self-awareness and explore ways to address their challenges. Experiential therapy can include a wide range of activities such as art, role-playing, body movement, and music.

### 3.3 Activities implemented

1. **Body-Scan** (guided relaxation)
2. **Introducing 5 rhythms:** each rhythm represents a different energy or quality of movement that reflects inner emotional states. The goal is to move freely and authentically, letting the body guide the process. There's no right or wrong way to move.
3. **Flowing rhythm:** emphasizes continuous, circular movements. Flowing represents the state of being grounded, receptive, and connected to life.  
Instruction: *"As you move, imagine your body is like water, flowing in gentle, continuous circles. Stay connected to the ground beneath you and allow the movement to travel from your feet to the rest of your body. Let your breath guide you as you flow."*

#### Reflection question in the group

What do you notice in your body as you flow? What emotions or sensations are present?

4. **Staccato rhythm:** embodies precision, clarity, and the release of emotions. Staccato movements are sharp, focused, and direct, often associated with expressing passion, anger, or assertiveness.

Instruction: *“Now, let’s move into Staccato. Allow your movements to become clear, sharp, and direct. This rhythm is about expressing yourself with precision—whether it’s with your arms, legs, or even your voice. Feel the beat and let it guide your body’s edges and lines.”*

Reflection questions in the group

What emotions surfaced for you during this rhythm?

Did you feel assertive, passionate, or frustrated?

Where did you feel this energy in your body?

5. **Chaos rhythm:** encourages participants to let go and surrender to the movement. It represents emotional release, breaking free from control, and embracing spontaneity. Movements are wild, free, and unstructured.

Instruction: *“Now, we move into Chaos. Let go of control. Allow your body to move in whatever way feels right, even if it’s wild, erratic, or completely unstructured. This is a time to release—any tension, any stuck energy, any emotions that are ready to be set free. Let your breath carry you, and trust where your body wants to go.”*

Reflection questions in the group

What emotions or sensations came up for you?”

What did you release in Chaos?

How did it feel to let go of control?

6. **Lyrical rhythm:** light, playful, and expansive. Lyrical is about finding joy, freedom, and creativity in movement. It often brings a sense of transformation and renewal.

Instruction: *“Now, let’s move into Lyrical. Let your body become light, and playful. Dance as if you’re floating on air. Experiment with different movements, play with rhythm, and find joy in your body’s natural flow. Let this rhythm bring you a sense of freedom and renewal.”*

Reflection questions in the group

How did it feel to move with lightness and freedom?

What has shifted in your body or emotions?

7. **Stillness rhythm:** focuses on inner reflection, peace, and calm. Stillness is about finding balance and integrating the experiences from the previous rhythms.

*Instruction: Now, we enter Stillness. Allow your movements to slow down and become smaller, until you find a quiet stillness in your body. Breathe deeply, and notice any subtle shifts or sensations. Let the stillness be a place of reflection, where you integrate everything you've experienced today.*

*In this stillness, what do you notice? What is your body telling you now? What emotions are lingering or settling?*

#### Final reflection questions in the group

Which rhythm felt most natural to you? Which rhythm was the most challenging? What do you think that reflects about your emotional state?

Did any memories come up during the session?

How did your body respond to the different rhythms? Where did you feel tension, release, or freedom?

What rhythm would you like to explore more deeply in your life?

How can you take what you've learned today into your daily life?

### 3.4 Materials to be used (if any)

- Open space for movement
- Speakers and music playlist (appropriate music for each rhythm: flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness)
- Optional: Journals and pens for reflection after the session

### 3.5 Setting

The space should be large enough for participants to move freely with good acoustics for speakers.

### 3.6 Questions to ask during the sessions

- When you think about the time you spend online, how does your body respond? Do you feel restless, energized, or something else?

- If your gaming or social media habits had a movement, what would that look like? Is it fast and repetitive, slow and heavy, or something else?
- Are there specific movements that feel difficult or liberating? How might they relate to your relationship with your online habits?
- **Flowing:** In Flowing, notice how your body wants to move without force. What does it feel like to allow your body to move in its own natural way?
- **Staccato:** As you enter Staccato, what does it feel like to move with purpose and direction? Does it bring a sense of clarity or tension? What does it feel like to express your emotions through clear, direct movements? Are you able to communicate something you've been holding in?
- **Chaos:** Notice what happens when you let go of control. How does your body respond when you stop trying to direct your movements? What is it like to allow your body to express feelings of chaos or overwhelm? Does it mirror any emotions in your life right now?
- **Lyrical:** How does it feel to be creative with your movements? What would it look like if your movements were expressions of joy or spontaneity?"
- **Stillness:** As you move into Stillness, how does it feel to slow down your movements and find quiet in your body? Is it calming or uncomfortable?"  
What emotions surface as you hold stillness in your body? Do you feel peace, sadness, or something else?  
Where in your body do you feel most connected to stillness? How can you bring awareness to that part of your body?

### 3.7 Wrapping up the sessions

- What emotions surfaced during the movement session? Did you notice any changes in how your body or mind felt as you moved?
- Is there anything you discovered about your emotions or body today that surprised you?

- What did you learn about your body and emotions?
- How can you take what you've learned today into your daily life?
- How can you use movement to manage your emotions outside of this session?

## Resources

### Bibliography

Books.

1. **Corey, G. (2016).** *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Cengage Learning.
2. **Dayton, T. (2005).** *The Living Stage: A Step-by-Step Guide to Psychodrama, Sociometry, and Experiential Group Therapy*. Health Communications, Inc.
3. **Perls, F. S., Hefferline, R., & Goodman, P. (1994).** *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*. Gestalt Journal Press.
4. **Wheeler, G. (1998).** *Gestalt Reconsidered: A New Approach to Contact and Resistance*. Gestalt Press.
5. **Van der Kolk, B. A. (2015).** *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Penguin Books.
6. **Blatner, A. (2000).** *Foundations of Psychodrama: History, Theory, and Practice*. Springer Publishing.
7. **Teyber, E., & Teyber, F. H. (2010).** *Interpersonal Process in Therapy: An Integrative Model*. Cengage Learning.
8. **Horvath, A. O., & Symonds, B. D. (1991).** *Relation Between Working Alliance and Outcome in Psychotherapy: A Meta-Analysis*. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 38(2), 139–149.
9. **Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012).** *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change*. The Guilford Press.
10. **Flores, P. J. (2004).** *Addiction as an Attachment Disorder*. Jason Aronson.
11. **Levine, P. A. (2010).** *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*. North Atlantic Books.
12. **Oei, T. P. S., & Baldwin, A. R. (2002).** *Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Addiction: A Self-Help Manual*. Academic Press.
13. **Greenberg, L. S. (2002).** *Emotion-Focused Therapy: Coaching Clients to Work Through Their Feelings*. American Psychological Association.



14. **Toseland, R. W., & Rivas, R. F. (2017).** *An Introduction to Group Work Practice*. Pearson.
15. **Bivens, A., Leinart, D., Klontz, B., & Klontz, T. (2007).** The Effectiveness of Equine-Assisted Experiential Therapy: Results of an Open Clinical Trial. *Society & Animals*, 15(3), 257–267. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853007X217195>
16. **Burgon, H. L. (2011).** ‘Queen of the world’: Experiences of ‘at-risk’ young people participating in equine-assisted learning/therapy. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 25(02), 165–183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2011.561304>
17. **Conoley, C. W., Conoley, J. C., McConnell, J. A., & Kimzey, C. E. (1983).** The effect of the ABCs of rational emotive therapy and the empty-chair technique of Gestalt therapy on anger reduction. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 20(1), 112–117. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0088470>
18. **Constantin, V. (2019).** Therapeutic Letters within an Unifying Experiential Intervention – a Way of Healing Through Creative Writing. Case study. *Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy*, 22(4).
19. **Cruz, A., Sales, C. M. D., Alves, P., & Moita, G. (2018).** The Core Techniques of Morenian Psychodrama: A Systematic Review of Literature. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1263. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01263>
20. **Deveney, C., & Lawson, P. (2021).** Writing your way to well-being: An IPA analysis of the therapeutic effects of creative writing on mental health and the processing of emotional difficulties. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(4), 709–719. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12435>
21. **Duffy, K. E. M., Simmonds-Buckley, M., Haake, R., Delgadillo, J., & Barkham, M. (2024).** The efficacy of individual humanistic-experiential therapies for the treatment of depression: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Psychotherapy Research*, 34(3), 323–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2023.2227757>
22. **Elliott, R., Watson, J., Greenberg, L. S., Timulak, L., & Freire, E. (2013).** Research on humanistic-experiential psychotherapies. In M.J. Lambert (Ed.), *Bergin & Garfield’s Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change*, 6th ed., 495–538.
23. **Hogan, S., & Coulter, A. M. (2014).** *The Introductory Guide to Art Therapy*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315849188>
24. **Kedem-Tahar, E., & Felix-Kellermann, P. (1996).** Psychodrama and drama therapy: A comparison. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 23(1), 27–36. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0197-4556\(95\)00059-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0197-4556(95)00059-3)
25. **Kolmannskog, V. (2018).** *The Empty Chair: Tales from Gestalt Therapy*. Routledge.
26. **Lebow, J. L. (2008).** *Twenty-first century psychotherapies: Contemporary approaches to theory and practice*. J. Wiley.
27. **Murphy, L., Wilson, J., & Greenberg, S. (2017).** Equine-assisted experiential learning in occupational therapy education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 40(4), 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917712732>
28. **Rankanen, M. (2016).** Clients’ experiences of the impacts of an experiential art therapy group. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 50, 101–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2016.06.002>

29. **Sandu, Antonio. (2020).** The Importance and Limits of Experiential Psychotherapy. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Philosophy & Humanistic Sciences*, 8(2), 72–82. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs/8.2/46>

### Internet Resources

1. **American Psychological Association (APA)** - *The Benefits of Group Therapy*  
<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/group-therapy>
2. **National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)** - *Therapy and Counseling Options for Drug Addiction*  
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment/evidence-based-approaches-to-drug-addiction-treatment>
3. **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)** - *Group Therapy in Substance Abuse Treatment*  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/>
4. **Psychology Today** - *Group Therapy vs. Individual Therapy: Which Is Right for You?*  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/going-beyond-intelligence/201612/group-therapy-vs-individual-therapy>
5. **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)** - *Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Group vs. Individual Therapy*  
<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>
6. **Experiential Therapies Online** - *Individual vs. Group Experiential Therapy for Addiction*  
<https://www.experientialtherapies.com/>
7. **The Meadows Treatment Center** - *Group vs. Individual Therapy in Addiction Treatment*  
<https://www.themeadows.com/blog/group-vs-individual-therapy-in-addiction-treatment/>
8. **Gestalt Therapy International** - *Gestalt Therapy in Group and Individual Settings*  
<https://www.gestalttherapy.net/>
9. **The Addiction Recovery Guide** - *Experiential Therapy for Addiction Treatment*  
<https://www.addictionrecoveryguide.org/>
10. **Verywell Mind** - *Group Therapy: What You Should Know*  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-group-therapy-2795760>

11. **Good Therapy** - *Group vs. Individual Therapy: Differences and Benefits*  
<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/group-vs-individual-therapy-0902144>
12. **Addiction Center** - *Comparing Individual and Group Therapy in Addiction Recovery*  
<https://www.addictioncenter.com/>
13. **Harvard Health Publishing** - *Group Therapy: A Vital Element of Addiction Treatment*  
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/>
14. **Recovery.org** - *Group vs. Individual Therapy for Substance Abuse Recovery*  
<https://www.recovery.org/>
15. **National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)** - *Effectiveness of Group Therapy in Substance Abuse Treatment*  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>
16. **Drury University. (n.d.).** *What are the four methods of music therapy?* Retrieved from <https://www.drury.edu/music/what-are-the-four-methods-of-music-therapy/>
17. **Mental Health Library. (n.d.).** *Gestalt therapy: The empty chair technique.* Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealth.com/library/gestalt-therapy-the-empty-chair-technique>
18. **Positive Psychology. (n.d.).** *Experiential therapy guide: 24 activities, techniques & examples.* Retrieved from <https://positivepsychology.com>
19. **UK Therapy Guide. (n.d.).** *Principles of Gestalt therapy.* Retrieved from <https://uktherapyguide.com/principles-of-gestalt-therapy>