

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE GESTALT PERSPECTIVE AND THE MIDDLE-CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

According to Louw, et al (1998:326) the child in the middle-childhood developmental phase is between the ages of 6 years to 12 years. Pretorius (1993:6) and Read (2002:32) refer to the differences in the life span of the primary school child, which refers to middle-childhood. Characteristic traits of the child in this developmental phase are important because there is a relation between abilities and the developmental phase and according to Rooth (1997:28) these are important to understand middle-childhood. He can handle his challenges more effectively if the play therapist that is involve have the necessary knowledge and insight. For the purpose of this study literature reviews and semi-structured interviews will be focused on through play techniques to gather information for assessment purposes to get a theoretical perspective for further refining. The focus of this research is domestic violence to establish the effect from a Gestalt approach on the middle-childhood child.

#### **2. AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE MIDDLE-CHILDHOOD CHILD**

The middle-childhood phase is generally considered as the more peaceful development period this could however change with the prevalence of violence in the family. It should be borne in mind that patterns are established during these years and that cognitive-, social-, emotional-, self-concept development takes place (Schoeman 2001:14-17). The child should master the following accomplishments during this developmental stage:

- increased and refined motor development;
- the establishment of sex-role identity;
- increase in social participation;

- the development of greater self knowledge;
- the development of pre-conventional morality

It should be noted that social development is of utmost importance and really cannot be separated from cognitive, moral, and emotional development (Wait, Meyer and Loxton 2003:126). Social development within the context of violence could mean depriving from social development due to the emphasis being on survival. From a Gestalt approach every child is seen as a human being with having his own process. The researcher would therefore like to add that every child would have the characteristics of his developmental phase and would deal with it according to its own process.

The following information would be the **ideal** development of middle-childhood and is supported by Schoeman (2001:14-17) and Smith (1981:68). It includes areas of development and will be discussed shortly.

## **2.1 Physical development**

During the middle-childhood phase the growth is slower than the pre-school phase and even the adolescent phase (Shaffer, 1999:46; Sharma, Cross and Vennis, 2000:117). There is rapid growth in the child's arms and legs that can be detected very easily. The child's body becomes like that of an adult. The brain reached its adult size and weight. Breathing becomes more regular as well as deeper, the circulation system functions at a decreased tempo (Louw et al. 1998:327). The physical development stabilizes in this phase as preparation for adulthood.

## **2.2 Psychic development**

### **2.2.1 Intellectual development**

The development of independence from parent's progresses, peer group

relationships grow. This is an important developmental task. Due to the lack of parental stimulation and child-parent bonding the parent-child closeness might never have been there, so there might not be that move towards independence. The intellectual ability would center on the ability to think a situation through, this is reinforced by Read (2002:33), connect with the past and possible future experiences. They are also able to think empathetically, to analyze and reconstruct logically and this has a positive effect on their functioning. Ebersohn & Eloff (2003:23) adds the following character traits namely memory span, attention, planning and reflection.

### **2.2.2 Emotional development**

There are various stimuli leading to emotions. The nature of emotional expression is verbal that is being replaced by the non-verbal. The middle childhood child has the ability to think through their psychic experiences (Read 2002:33). Emotions are more controlled. According to Bender (in Blom 2004:10) a child's concept of emotions changes drastically in between the ages of 6 to 12 years. Louw et al (1998:343) speaks of emotional flexibility and this is very much motivated by the peers, where there would be no crying in front of the peers. Emotional development is generally characterized by relative emotional calm period due ventilation of frustrations, clearly defined roles, less frustration due to the increased skills. The negative emotions around fear exist because death or possible death and punishment of adaptation to school, rejection by peers and his personal inadequacy. They become skilled and aware of emotional expressions and those emotional expressions are related to different situations and experiences of violence.

From a gestalt perspective it can be said that children in this developmental phase would be able to express their feelings if they should be exposed to

family violence. If however the child is not able to express his feelings of perhaps fear or anger if the situation is experienced as traumatic, this could be seen as 'unfinished business' that could confront the child in a later stage of development.

### **2.2.3 Motivation**

The emotional area of the child's development ties in directly with his level of motivation and his willpower. There is an eagerness to learn and a need for achievement. Amongst peers there is lots of competition and school is suppose to be an important role in satisfying hunger for knowledge. Rewards from parents become important, however very little would be visible where violence exists. There is a realization of societal expectations.

## **2.3 Social development**

According to Erikson (in Bee, 1998:318) the task of this period is simply to develop the repertoire of abilities society demands of the child as also confirmed in the eight stages of development. The family, peers and school play an important role with social development. Relationship with the parents is the primary source of security, role of the father increases and is seen as the role model for the boy, and likewise for the girl the mother becomes the important role model. Zimmerman & Thayer (2003:39) reinforce this by saying that where there is a loss of family togetherness there is also a loss of security. Children who grow up in a house where there parents leave them in the care of extended family or strangers very often have no role models and start idealizing popular members in the community for example gang leaders and so on.

The relationship with siblings often teaches loyalties, helpfulness and competition become great amongst siblings. Peer group relationships is the main developmental

task for the middle-childhood child. Meaningful relationships with friends are formed, also known as a gang phase. Peer groups, group activities and group conformity and solidarity become important. Their ability to share develops. For a child who has no parent role model like the child living in violence the group forming becomes even more important because it provides:

- standards for self evaluation (testing, enhancement or changing of self-image);
- opportunity for self-dependent behavior, enhances independence;
- opportunity for social relationships;
- social support, ventilation of feelings;
- models for coping, learning and social skills; and
- opportunity for appropriate role development.

Other social interaction exists within the school environment and the school also provides expansion of social environment and peer interaction. The educator influences adaptation, progress, fulfills important role and often viewed as a substitute mother by the school beginner. This becomes very important and ties in why it was necessary for the abolishment of corporal punishment because if the teacher would hit it would give the message that hitting is acceptable (WCED 2001:3). Behavior towards the mother may be generalized to the educator. Reynolds (1997:44) adds that the child begins to question his parents' attitudes and authority. By this stage she adds that the child should be well adjusted, sociable and reasonably independent.

It is evident that a child in this developmental phase is very dependent on external support. A child being exposed to family violence and has no family as security needs to find support elsewhere (Read 2002:36). From a Gestalt perspective if external support could move to self-support, the child and family would be able to

find ways of coping within themselves and within the family as a unit. This move according to Sinay (1998:130) is an essential aim of Gestalt therapy: the transition from external support to self-support. Thus by self-support it is understood the capacity that the individual has to take charge of himself, to satisfy his own needs, to move into the awareness that he is what he is in his here and now and, finally, to close his own interrupted Gestalts. Thus self-support becomes a tool for personal development. The reality is that the resources for family support is very limited with little intervention, and families should be looking at there own internal locus of control to become supportive of themselves as an individual and as a family.

## **2.4 Development of self-image**

According to Barnette (1996:83) as a child grows, he develops a self-image: he has feelings about himself and how lovable he thinks he is. This would depend a great deal on the way his parents treat him. Brinegar (1999:69) agrees that feedback from the parent is important for the development of a positive self-image. Negative feedback from parents could impact negatively on the child and would result in a low self-esteem.

The child should have a stabilized view of the self. The opinions of the peers influence the self-image significantly. Other influential factors are:

- physical development- how big or how small he is in relation to his peers. If he is smaller this would definitely affect the self-image, could lead to him being bullied, abused by other children and so on. Very often if he is bigger built than the others, he becomes the bully.
- Socio-economic status of the family. If the parents are financially stable or not or if they have money or not. This would impact on what clothes he wears, what he brings to school for lunch if any and who his friends really are.

- Intellectual ability. This would include your academic abilities. Very often if there is no parental involvement at home the school work gets behind, lack of resources at home to do projects and assistance in doing homework lacks. This in turn leads to a child not knowing what happens in class, becomes very frustrated in class; this leads to drawing attention in other ways and often is labeled as a child with behavior problems. The child is often not seen in the context where he comes from, and is blamed for not showing an interest in his work as school.

Their sexual identity and defining sex roles is important to the development of the self-image. Others, especially peers, influence this significantly. An assessment of how peers influences them would be done during the semi-structured interviews within the research study. Parents and educators have an important influence in the development of the self- concept. Relevant aspects are:

- children should get the message that they are accepted as they are;
- unquestionable trust in the child's abilities leads to self-confidence. Positive motivation, stressing his contributions, capabilities and good qualities are building blocks;
- acknowledge the child's effort and achievement; and
- encourage rather than praise.

In families where violence takes place very often-parental roles are centered on survival and the above-related issues are non-existent. From a Gestalt perspective a child then need to identify him with both parts and integrate them (Sinay, 1998:128). This acceptance and integration in them signify a change.

## **2.5 Religious, moral development**

The religious development is apparent in the first signs of personal religious

realization. Parents play an important role in the development of religion. Very often you would find in communities where parents are not married and mother and father are not from the same religion and is not practicing any religion. This is also a period where the conscious develops and morality settled. The child has internalized values and norms. Respect for others manifests itself. Relationship with peers becomes important in this regard. Co-operation and fairness is learnt in-group situation. The child realizes that punishment does not necessarily indicate bad or negative punishment. In families where violence takes place one could find religious realization absent because of the family being in a survival mode.

From a Gestalt perspective Perls writes (in Sinay, 1998:117) “All the organisms require an environment to exchange essential substances. We need the physical environment to exchange air, food, etc. We need the social environment to exchange friendship, love and anger. We always have to consider the part of the world in which we live as part of us”. For a family living in violence this becomes very important because they always need to consider their violent environment before there other needs like religion for example.

For the purpose of this study the researcher for knowledge and insight have explored and described the field of play therapy for assessment purposes. We have looked at middle-childhood development from the Gestalt perspective for play therapist to assess to what extend family members can work towards self-support instead of waiting or relying on external support.

### **3. MIDDLE-CHILDHOOD AND GESTALT PLAY THERAPY**

According to Schoeman (2001:89) Gestalt cannot be translated exactly into English, but the meaning of the concept can be grasped. “Gestalt is a form, a configuration or a



totality that has, as a unified whole, properties which cannot be derived by summation from the parts and their relationships. It may refer to physical structures, to physiological and psychological functions, or to symbolic units.

The basic premise according, Perls and Smuts (in Jannasch, 2003:2) on which Gestalt therapy rests is that of holism, by saying that: “every individual form of life is unity ... it is this ultimate unity that shapes the innumerable products of life into an orderly and harmonious whole ... this distinct, single, indivisible unity of life in each individual I call the personality of that individual ...”

The focus of Gestalt theory in Schoeman (2001:90) is explained as the most important areas of concern are the thoughts and feelings people are experiencing at the moment. Normal, healthy behavior occurs when people act and react as total organisms this total functioning is absent where family violence is present. Many people tend to fragment their lives, distributing their concentration and attention among several variables and events at one time.

The results of such fragmentation can be seen in an ineffective living style, with outcomes ranging from low productivity to serious accidents. She goes on by saying that the Gestalt view of human nature is positive in that people are viewed as capable of becoming self-regulating beings who can achieve a sense of unity and integration in their lives. This for the middle-childhood child being exposed to violence is so important in changing behavior and becoming aware of his situation. Perls (in Schoeman, 2001:90) referred to the person as a total organism – not just the brain. His saying that people would be better off losing their minds and coming to their senses meant that our bodies and feelings are better indicators of the truth than our words, which we use to hide ourselves from the truth. Body signs such as headaches, rashes, neck strain, and stomach pains and even displaying disruptive behavior may indicate that we need to change our behavior. Perls (1975:54) believed that awareness alone could be curative. With full awareness, a state of organismic self-

regulation develops, and the total person takes control. Awareness amongst other concepts will be discussed at a later stage. It is important to note that Gestalt therapy has three defining principles according to Yontef (1993:203):

- Its only goal is awareness;
- It is based on dialogic existentialism; and
- It is based on holism and field theory.

Gestalt theory focuses on various concepts that could assist the middle-childhood child in the healing process. These concepts will be discussed shortly with specific reference on the application on assessment for the middle-childhood child that is exposed to domestic violence. The concepts that will be addressed are:

- Awareness
- The importance of the field and
- Dialogue.

### **3.1 Awareness**

A central goal of Gestalt approach is to help the middle-childhood child achieve awareness or insight Rumble (2003:3). She goes on by saying that awareness is seen as the primary tool for affecting changes in an individual's behavior.

Awareness can be defined according to Sinay (1997:89) as a deliberate consciousness about what is happening physical sensations, feelings, imagination "to me" and what is happening in the environment the person are integrated in. Awareness comes from the answer to four key questions:

- What are you doing?
- What do you feel right now?
- What are you trying to avoid at this moment?
- What do I want, what do I expect from you?

Awareness allows the patient to situate the contact; it is a warming up that allows for previous unfinished to surface, even during assessment.

### 3.1.1 The nature of awareness

According to Rumble (2003:3) **the nature of awareness means that** the organismically balanced person has the capacity to experience intellectually, emotionally and sensory. Gestalt approach believe that changing one's behavior becomes possible through an awareness of what one is doing, using sensory, motor and intellectual modalities. The individual is taught to re-direct his awareness through all his sensory modalities. In order to complete unfinished business, the individual has to fully experience it in the present. In other words for the middle-childhood child who has been exposed to violence has to experience the situation as it is in the here and the now. Rumble (2003:3) also states that there is both a passive and an active aspect to awareness. The passive aspect refers to the way in which external events capture our attention and we become aware of them, example, rays of light touch our eyes, sound reaches our ears. The active element refers to the interaction between the individual and the environment, example the individual may become more aware of feeling of being left out because of aggressive behavior and act on his feeling of being left out and seek change.

There are five qualities of awareness that Rumble discuss (in Nevis, 1992:3). They are **Contact** refers to the meeting of differences in coming up against the other individuals experience their differences in the manner in which they think and feel. This serves to enhance the individual's awareness. **Sensing** refers to information that reaches us through our senses (example giving rise to auditory, visual and tactile sensations) as well as from feedback from our own bodies. **Excitement** covers the whole range of emotional and physiological excitations. The

degree of openness and closeness determines if there is fragmentation between the child and his family. Fragmentation such as domestic violence will mean that the child will not respond to his real needs and that there will thus be unfinished business in his life. He cannot satisfy his needs. His need for a holistic integrated way of life is not possible which means that he have to suppress his needs and live a fragmented life according to Oaklander (1994b: 194) to survive. Some of the strategies that the child attempts to deny awareness of his circumstances are retroflection, introjection, projection and deflection (Oaklander, 1994:238; Joyce & Sills, 2001: 112-130).

### **3.1.2 The consequences of avoiding awareness**

Individuals may go to great lengths and make use of a variety of defensive strategies in order to keep areas of self-functioning out of awareness. Some of these strategies will be discussed shortly.

#### **Retroflection**

Yontef (1993:10) sees Retroflection as a split within the self and a resisting of aspects of the self by the self. The self is substituted for the environment. This means that the behavior that a person display does for the self what is intended for someone or something else and he is therefore actually doing to self what he wants someone else to do for him. An extreme example of retroflection is when a person commits suicide. They are angry with someone or something and would want to hurt them in the worst possible manner. But, society does not allow for this and therefore the behavior is turned to the self. During domestic violence the child cannot react to his needs or express himself emotionally.

#### **Introjection**

During introjection, foreign material is absorbed without discrimination or assimilation. He has no opinion on a topic and accepts his circumstances according to

Yontef & Jacobs (2000:315). Yontef (1993:142) adds that the child will make the wrong demands on himself. The researcher states that the level of awareness and the strength of the persons boundary, will determine the level of introjection.

### **Projection**

Projection is a confusion of self and others that results from attributing to the outside something that is truly self. He keeps a person or his domestic violence responsible according to Yontef (1993:142). Due to domestic violence the child will deny his own experiences and will decide if his emotions and reaction is unacceptable. He do not have according to Oaklander (1994b: 145) the feelings and will share his reaction as diversion.

### **Deflection**

This mechanism is seen as the avoidance of contact or awareness by turning aside according to Joyce and Sills (2001:11). Not expressing or receiving directly can accomplish this. An example of this during contact during assessment can be fragmented and will result in the child rather wanting to speak about the past or the future instead of the here and now. Further on, Oaklander (1994a: 284) says that pain-based feelings can be reflected in wishes or dreams or extreme negative behavior and angry outbursts. The person receiving the compliment deflects it straight back at the person giving it. This could also be by appearing vague, understanding or breaking contact while in conversation, therapy or during assessment.

The above strategies serve to block awareness of current behavior. In so far as the individual relies on these strategies to block awareness. He will be left with vast areas of the self, which are alienated and inaccessible and interfere with the flow of life according to Rumble (2003:5). The major consequence of the above is that unfinished business piles up. Dealing with unfinished business will enable the individual to assume responsibility form him and make appropriate decisions.

### **3.1.3 Enhancing awareness**

On assessment level the here and now awareness should be determined. Enhancing awareness is one of the basic dilemmas is that the child has lost awareness of the process by which he alienates parts of his self-functioning. This may lead to a variety of neurotic behaviors, Rumble (2003:11) quotes Yontef in Stephenson and O'Connell. According to the Gestalt approach the loss of awareness of his inner world of feelings, plans, memories and thoughts are blocked due to being exposed to violence. This results that the child will not deal effectively with unfinished business and responsibility for him and make the appropriate decisions around his behavior.

## **3.2 The importance of the field**

The field is seen by many authors as everything around the organism, all the aspects the person comes into contact with. According to Estrup (2000:1) the field is everything out there, everything that exists; your interaction with the field is everything and everyone. The field is the unitary whole – everything affects everything else, and it has definite impact on the child's existence. The field is a whole in which the parts are in immediate relationship and responsive to each other and no part is uninfluenced by what goes on elsewhere in the field, Martin (in Yontef, 200:1).

In other words those with who he is in direct contact with affect the middle-childhood child. His field could consist of his family, his peers in the community and his interaction with educators at school and other learners. He is influenced by the lifestyle of his field with whom he is in contact daily. A change produces in one-person upsets family equilibrium, requiring adaptation on the part of other members of the system (Janson & Harris 1986:57). One could also make the assumption that if he has been influence by a field where violence is prevalent, it could be expected of him to relate in violent and aggressive ways of relating to his field.

### **3.3 Contact in Gestalt Theory**

A person survives within his environment by means of creative exchange, which is referred to as contact and assimilation by Gestalt theorists. Contact is described by Perls in Clarkson & Mackewn (1993:55) as the meeting between a person and his environment. The relationship of the person with the environment is termed the organisms or environment or field as already discussed. In Gestalt theory it does not make sense to think of a person out of context. Humans are always part of the holistic universe and participate in the unity formed of their relationship to objects, events and other human beings.

Contact is what happens between two people, a person and his environment, or within oneself. It involves not only a sense of self, but also a sense of the other with whom the contact is made. It can be explained as a specific moment in a relationship at which one experiences oneself in relation to whatever is external to oneself. Contact takes place by means of a creative exchange between the person and the environment when something is integrated within the self and rendered usable. This includes every interaction that occurs between a person and his surroundings. Example of this may be: eating, shouting, laughing and loving. Contact within oneself takes place when one becomes aware of various parts within oneself. Perls, Hefferline & Goodman (in Martin, 2003:3) quotes: “Primarily, contact is the awareness of, and the behavior towards, the assimilable novelty; and the rejection of the unassimilable novelty”. Contact is the means by which people grow, develop and change. When contact is dynamic and assimilation thorough, it will automatically lead to change and in turn growth. In the light of the wholeness of a gestalt, the researcher finds that the result of true contact and assimilation is not just the mere rearrangement of old elements, but a creation of a new configuration containing aspects of the old

personality together with new materials from the environment. Perls (in Martin, 2003:3) says that after each contact experience a person has a new or different sense of himself. The person is active and creative in this process: he does not remember himself, merely reshuffling the cards, but “finds and makes” himself.

### **3.4 Dialogue in Gestalt Theory**

Dialogue in Gestalt Therapy is an engagement. According to Buber (in Kritzinger, 2003:1), belief's that “only through a certain kind of person-to-person engagement could healing take place (and that this) full engagement takes place in the here and now”. This engagement is the relationship between the therapist and the client, which is the most important aspect for assessment of information. Dialogue is an essential part of the Gestalt approach methodology and is a manifestation of the existential perspective on relationship. This relationship grows out of contact. People grow and identities are formed during contact. Yontef (in Kritzinger, 2003:1) states that the Gestalt therapist works by engaging in dialogue for the child play is the form of communication medium. Dialogue is based on experiencing the other person as he or she really is and showing the true self, sharing phenomenological awareness.

## **4. PLAY FORMS AND TEECHNIQUES**

The researcher would like to emphasize the ABC framework as outlined by Schoeman (2001:54) where the gestalt concepts are put in a framework when working with children to gather more information for assessment purposes. Play does not only form an important part of the child's development by his knowledge of the environment and himself can also be expressed and his relationship building according to Fernie (2003:1) is influenced.

The child that is exposed to domestic violence has the opportunity express his pain, confusion and aggression through play. The child can then be considered and



the expert through the use of such helping aids during semi-structured interviews where significant information around his experiences, feelings and behavior could be gathered for assessment. This information is important to use during the therapeutic process to provide a theoretical perspective on the middle-childhood's developmental phase of domestic violence from a Gestalt approach.

There are different forms and techniques of play that could be used for assessment purposes during semi-structured interviews. The discussion that follows is outlined by Schoeman (2001:64-66).

#### **4.1 Dramatised play**

Porter (in Schoeman 2001:64) is of the opinion that: "When it comes to dramatized play, it is the play which offers the child the opportunity to play out the situation, to dramatize it."

There are different mediums that can be used for gathering information e.g. role-plays, puppets, dance and movement and doll cupboard.

Advantages of dramatized play for assessment, is that the child:

- \* Become aware of intense feelings through expressing them;
- \* Re-enactment circumstances of domestic violence;
- \* Is exposed to different roles;
- \* Has the opportunity to communicate with the therapist;
- \* Is given the opportunity to experience freedom;
- \* Behavior may change;
- \* Is exposed to direct influencing; and
- \* Develops insight.

## **4.2 Creative play**

A child communicates that which he is unable to put into words by means of creative play production. A creative production offers the opportunity of breaking the ice in acquiring information, which the child finds too painful to communicate by other means. There are different mediums that can be used e.g. clay work, sand work, drawings and letters.

Advantages of creative play for assessment, is that the child:

- Is given the opportunity to unloading feelings and emotions;
- Is put in charge of the circumstances that he creates for himself;
- Is prepared and ready to share information;
- Is encourages to interact with the therapist;
- Manipulates the circumstances to suit his needs;
- Is given the opportunity for discharge of anger; and
- Is given the opportunity for regression.

## **4.3 Biblio-play**

Biblio-play implies the creative usage of the written word. The written word may be directed on the past, future, a portrayal of the present, or it may be a fantasy, which is created by pen. The therapist may create it or the child himself could create it. There are different mediums that can be used e.g. autobiography or life book, diaries, comics, poems and stories.

Advantages of biblio-play for assessment, is that the child:

- May project his feeling by means of other characters, which he has created in writing.
- Will be allowed for emotional discharge to take place in a safe venue.

- Is given the opportunity for indirect channels to be created by which he can enter the forbidden and threatening world.
- Is able to manipulate his models to fulfill his incompleteness.
- Is able to first “experiment” with possibilities without making himself vulnerable.
- Is offered the opportunity to accept responsibility at a “safe distance”.
- Is offered the opportunity to experiment with polarities.

#### **4.4 PLAY TECHNIQUES**

There are different techniques of play according to Schoeman (2001:68) that could be used such as Oaklander’s working model, dream technique, monster technique, Rose bush, Schoeman’s model and empty chair technique. For the purpose of the research only the Schoeman model and the empty chair technique will be used to gather more information during assessment.

##### **4.4.1 Schoeman Model**

This model starts off with the building and establishment of the relationship, then getting the child sensory in tact and together with the above and throughout establishing the child’s process. The child makes a projection by using any form of play; a technique is then selected by the therapist in working with the projection to gather more information. The child then takes ownership of his projection where he relates it to his own experiences of domestic violence. Alternatives ways of coping are brainstormed, as well as shifting the focus from external support to self-support where he takes responsible for his own circumstances. Then an evaluation and summary of the assessment are done and self-nurturing takes place. The play therapist must throughout the session clarify, empower, work in polarities and confluence.

#### **4.4.2 Empty chair technique**

The Gestalt technique of the empty chair is often used to role-play a conflict between people or within a person. This technique will be used during the semi-structured interview to gather more information for assessment. The child can sit in one chair and play his or her own part in domestic violence; then, sitting in the other chair, the child can play out a projection of what the other person or the perpetrator of domestic violence is saying or doing in response. Similarly, a child may sit in one chair and discuss the pro's of making a decision and then argue the cons of the decision while sitting in the opposite chair.

### **5. GESTALT PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS**

There are a number of Gestalt concepts that could assist in obtaining more information in assessment during the semi-structured interviews from the middle-childhood child.

#### **5.1 The Circle of courage**

From the circle of courage, there are four important aspects that influences balance. These four according to the research of Brendtro & Du Toit (2005:14) will be discussed shortly.

- **Belonging Attachment**

They explain that an array of evidence shows that humans possess a fundamental need to belong. This is fulfilled by frequent positive interactions with at least a few persons who share mutual concerns. Belonging creates positive emotions, particularly pride; rejection produces shame, among the most painful social emotions humans can experience.

- Mastery – Developing Achievement

They say that a central motivation behind many human behaviors is the quest to become competent. Children can acquire a mass of knowledge, including an entire language code, without formal instruction. The talents of young persons can only crystallize with the support of adult mentors or more skilful peers. This includes developing the necessary skills.

- Independence – Developing Autonomy

All children desire to control their lives and influence events in their social world. Some act as pilots, setting the course toward personal goals. Others are more like robots who react automatically to events which surround them. Here the term internal and external locus of control can also be used to describe persons who feel in charge of their lives and those who feel they are pawns to others.

- Generosity – Developing Altruism

Humans function best when they are part of a community of mutual social support. As they fulfil obligations to others, they discover that they are valued and esteemed. Brendtro & Du Toit also states that Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bond, noted that many modern youth suffer from the “misery of unimportance” and long to be used in some demanding cause. Giving to others develops higher levels of moral development and provides children a sense of purpose.

The circle of courage is important to understand where the respondents have broken down in their circle. Due to the home circumstances and the over crowding they do not have a sense of belonging and have broken down in the core part of the circle because no other part of the circle can develop is the basis of the circle has not been formed.

According to Oaklander (1994a: 288) and Schoeman (2001:88) there are important theoretical principles that could be used of assessment and service delivery to the child. Concepts that are refined, discussed and applied to obtain more information from the child's experience, feelings and behavior will be discussed shortly. These concepts are holism, I-thou, homeostasis and awareness, fragmentation, figure ground here and now and the layers of personality.

## **5.2 Holism**

The concept holism, means a whole and is most important theoretical concept in the Gestalt play therapy approach. Perls (1973:75) also emphasize that the basic premise on which Gestalt rests is that of holism. Blom (2004:11) distinguish between emotions, thought, communication and behavior as well as body and spirit. The child that is exposed to domestic violence thus needs to be explored and described within his totality.

## **5.3 I-thou**

Respect for one another within a trusting relationship makes sharing easier for the play therapist to obtain more information with regard to the child's gestalt. Yontef (1993:21) emphasize that the "achieved encounter" is the element of importance otherwise it is not effective.

## **5.4 Homeostasis and awareness**

Organismic self-regulation of homeostasis is according to Blom (2004:11) a process that keeps a child in tact to regulate his needs and experiences. The behavior that he displays can range from denial, anger outbursts and or supportive and hopeful. The assessment of such problem behavior can provide valuable information for future service delivery because it could be a pattern that the child presents unconsciously to strive and maintain a balance. Awareness will thus form a Gestalt play therapy approach according to Oaklander (1992:66) reduce fragmentation.

## **5.5 Fragmentation**

If the child, as stated above, do not have sufficient awareness, fragmentation functioning with his peers with excessive self-image but at home where domestic violence is on the figure ground he will be subservient. Aronstam (1989:633) refers to this that the child's functioning is not holistically balanced. With the assistance of this information the child will be made aware of his emotions and alternative actions.

## **5.6 Figure ground**

With regard to the exploring and describing of the theoretical concepts from the Gestalt approach, is figure ground an important concept. Aronstam (1989:631) describe "figure" as the need that is important for the child at that moment. If this need of figure is satisfied then it forms part of the background in order for a new need to survive on the figure ground. He process change throughout. For this purpose assessment will also form part of the whole therapeutic process. During service delivery play forms and techniques will be used as helping aids for assessment purposes in order to experience and verbalize the needs of the child's figure ground experience.

## **5.7 Here and now**

Aronstam (1989:24) and Joyce & Sills (2001:29) mentioned that the child can only experience in the present tense. Even though situations and people affected him in the past, and he has the future expectations, he needs to as a learning experience become aware of the here and now. During service delivery this could be the focus.

## **5.8 The layers of personality**

As part of fragmentation and a fragmentation way of life Perls (1973:75) mentioned that the child's personality is constructed of five layers. From a Gestalt approach these layers will be shortly discussed for knowledge, understanding as well as assessment purposes.

### **5.8.1 Phoney layer**

Phony layer – According to Schoeman (2001:92) and Aronstam (1989:636) many people find them trapped in trying to be what they are not. The phoney layer is characterized by many conflicts that are never solved. The child living in violence normally has multiple issues to deal with like if they report the perpetrator (if it is the dad who is the breadwinner) where will they get money for food, shelter, clothing and education. The child is trapped and becomes what he is not.

### **5.8.2 Phobic layer**

According to Schoeman (2001:92) as people become aware of their phoney games, they become aware of their fears that maintain the games. This is often a frightening experience. Awareness due to play leads to fears and anxiety that maintains this role according to Thompson and Rudolph (2000:166) example the satisfied, well-mannered, dependent or naughty, loafing child. The child who shows resistance, have regular patterns and who fears change. Assessment should rather be postponed to give him time to be himself at a later stage.

### **5.8.3 Impasse**

The impasse is described by Perls (in Shoeman, 2001:92) as the crucial point in growth. Despite this statement of its importance, writing around the subject is somewhat limited, as noted by Judd et al (1998). Terms such as ‘sick point’, ‘void’, ‘boundary situation’ and ‘safe emergency’ have been used to describe the impasse. For the child living in violence he can get stuck very easy believing that violence has become an accepted norm. Very often exposure to how other families’ functions would get them out of this layer. The degree of external support will be the focus for the play therapist during assessment. Even though the child wants to avoid pain he also experience conflict due to unfinished business and the figure ground.



#### **5.8.4 The implosive layer**

Schoeman (2001:92) states that people become aware of how they limit themselves. In this layer there is acknowledgement of violence situations at home and would begin with distracting behavior at school because he do not know how to work on the problem. The play therapist should through direct observation be aware of the child's insight namely that the child believes that he needs external support and cannot deal with his problem. The unknown is related to change that take up a lot of energy.

#### **5.8.5 The explosive layer**

The child that functions in this layer according to Aronstam (1989:636) will give an indication that he has the energy to express and experience the emotions to experiment with new behavior. Change will be visible and the play therapist would be able to observe it. Resistance can surface that should be seen as positive since change implies adjustment and needs the necessary energy. Blom (2004:61) emphasize sensitive reaction for the sake of the child. The tempo and readiness within the child should be considered.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

The researcher would like to conclude that the knowledge with regard to the child in the middle-childhood phase was useful and necessary for assessing domestic violence from a Gestalt approach. The Gestalt principles and concepts assisted in understanding the child that is exposed to domestic violence. Play forms and techniques will be used as a tool for communication during assessment. The different forms of play and play techniques will assist in creating a child-friendly and trusting environment in which the child could share information around domestic violence.

