

## Focusing in the 1950s and early '60s - in a nutshell



1. Focusing originated in Gendlin's research into the process of psychotherapy in the 1950s. As a philosophy graduate student, he observed and participated in the work of Carl Rogers and his team as they developed Client Centered Therapy (later known as the Person-Centered Approach) at the Counseling Center of the University of Chicago.
2. Gendlin first described the process of experiencing and the need for focusing in a series of papers presented to the Chicago group from 1955 onwards.
3. The findings from these papers are summarized in Gendlin's 1964 paper, 'A Theory of Personality Change'. Here he describes 'Focusing' as 'the whole process which ensues when the individual attends to the direct referent of experiencing':

*This "descent" into himself, this focusing and the overall feeling process which arises, give verbalization to the underlying flow of events of personality change.*

4. Carl Rogers' openness to Gendlin's ideas is evident in Rogers' papers from 1956 onwards. He fully acknowledges Gendlin's influence and even borrows wording from Gendlin's early papers.
5. Gendlin moved with Rogers and his team to the University of Wisconsin in 1957 to manage a huge research project into psychotherapy with schizophrenic patients.
6. The Wisconsin project had mixed results and eventually collapsed in 1963 in bitterness and recrimination. Rogers moved to California and Gendlin moved back to Chicago.
7. The 'splitting' of the team led to a 'splitting' of the theory.
8. In Chicago Gendlin began to investigate how clients who would not normally be successful in long-term therapy might be helped:

*A group of students helped me to sustain the nerve to write and test 'instructions' for finding one's direct experiencing. We used these only outside the therapy hour. (2002:4)*

Thus Focusing as a taught procedure was born!

*Judy Moore*