

CHAPTER 11

Boundaries and the Internet

Although the preceding chapters have addressed matters pertaining to the Internet, these lessons have to be reinforced. The Internet has had a profound impact on our lives, both personal and business. The boundary lines have gotten blurred—and sometimes seem to have disappeared altogether. Our actions on the Internet have the potential to violate the code of ethics, our clients' boundaries, and harm our own reputations. Extra diligence is required in order to protect our clients and protect ourselves.

Many people are used to using the Internet for multiple purposes: school, work, e-mail, banking, and bill-paying, social media, blogging, advertising, research, shopping, just to name a few.



Smart phones, tablets, and notebooks have made it possible to stay tethered to the Internet no matter where you are. The propensity of some people to take pictures and videos—and share those on the Internet—has almost made it a law of the universe that we should all assume that anything we say or do might wind up posted on the Internet.

Client Privacy

Every contact with a client, from the first phone call to the last visit, is subject to our obligation to keep their information confidential. That means their records, whether handwritten or electronic, anything that they communicate to you verbally (or nonverbally, as is sometimes the case due to the nature of our work), and just the fact that they are our clients at all, is confidential information and must be treated as such.

Not only is the rule of confidentiality a part of the code of ethics; it is also the law in regulated states, and it can also go as far back as our mandate to first do no harm. Although people tend to think of that in terms of not causing physical harm to the client, such as ignoring contraindications for massage, it can also mean any kind of harm, such as sharing information that is supposed to be kept private, deriding clients in public (even when you don't mention their name—more about that later), or doing anything that violates the sanctity of the therapeutic relationship.

HIPAA

HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act, was created in 1996 to protect the privacy of the client when information is electronically transmitted. In theory, this is meant to protect the individual's identifying information and personal data when health records are transmitted between health plans, health plan clearinghouses, and health-care providers who use electronic means of communication. In reality, it goes deeper than that. Massage therapists are technically not considered health-care providers under the statutes in the majority of regulated states. That does not excuse us from following the spirit of the privacy rules of HIPAA, which serve numerous purposes:

- Gives patients more control over their health information
- Sets boundaries on the use and release of health records
- Establishes appropriate safeguards that the majority of health-care providers and others must achieve to protect the privacy of health information
- Holds violators accountable with civil and criminal penalties that can be imposed if they violate patients' privacy rights
- Strikes a balance when public health responsibilities support disclosure of certain forms of data
- Enables patients to make informed choices based on how individual health information may be used
- Enables patients to find out how their information may be used and what disclosures of their information have been made

CONSIDER THIS

If you use a computer in your lobby/waiting area, be sure that any client who is waiting is not seeing any client information. Never leave your online scheduler, e-mail, client database, or other things that may contain client names and information open on the screen where anyone may see it. It's easy to get distracted when clients are waiting, so set your screensaver to go dark very quickly when it's out of use so that you won't forget about it.

- Generally limits release of information to the minimum reasonably needed for the purpose of the disclosure
- Generally gives patients the right to obtain a copy of their own health records and request corrections
- Empowers individuals to control certain uses and disclosures of their health information (Source: Center for Disease Control: HIPAA Privacy Rule and Public Health, Guidance from the CDC and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessible online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/m2e411a1.htm>)

Therapists who work in chiropractic offices, hospitals, hospice care, or other medical settings may have more knowledge of HIPAA than others. Even for those working alone in other settings, there are some insurance policies that do cover massage, as well as opportunities to work with personal injury and worker's compensation cases. The fact that we may not be involved in accepting insurance does not mean that we shouldn't be familiar with what the privacy rules are intended to accomplish—to protect the privacy of anyone seeking services.

Any electronic service you are using, such as online booking for clients, or transmitting any of their information, even if it's nothing more than their name and address, should be done over secure sites.

Many of us consider ourselves members of the health-care team, even when the law does not consider us as such. Many of us have referral relationships with doctors and other health-care providers; whether that is the case or not, we're under an obligation to safeguard the client's privacy as if we were guarding all the gold in Fort Knox.

From a technical standpoint, any client information should only be transmitted securely. If you're not technically savvy, educate yourself or hire a computer expert to help you understand the ins and outs of secure transmission. For example, "http" preceding a website means that it is not a secure site. "Https" indicates that it is. Banks, credit card companies, health-care entities, any site that you are conducting commerce with, such as buying something over

CONSIDER THIS

You might be a therapist who doesn't particularly consider yourself a health-care provider, nor have any ambition to be considered one. However, let's say that a long-time client is involved in a car accident, and her attorney sends you a signed release to obtain the records of the care she has received from you during a certain period of time. (a) You're going to appear totally unprofessional if you're one of those therapists who doesn't keep records and (b) You can't just dash that response off in a quick e-mail without being sure it is being securely transmitted. If you still use a fax machine that is being transmitted over a land line, you can find out from your phone service provider whether or not that is a secure line. If it isn't, you shouldn't be transmitting any client identifying information or health care records over it. The same goes for your Internet connection.

the Internet and giving your credit card information, should have the “https” designation. In a nutshell, “https” means that a web page is utilizing a form of encryption known as a Secure Socket Layer. While it is safer than http, there are plenty of creative hackers out there who can get around that, as evidenced by people hacking into banks, the Social Security Administration, and the Pentagon. Still, it does offer an additional layer of protection. Any electronic service you are using, such as online booking for clients, or transmitting any of their information, even if it's nothing more than their name and address, should be done over secure sites.

Phones and Texting

The use of your phone in any capacity, answering calls or texting while you are with a client, is an absolute violation of your client's time and goodwill. I've seen complaints posted on social media from consumers of massage who stated that they noticed their therapist only had one hand on them and found that they were texting! The client is paying for your time and attention. That means your time and attention should be devoted to them, and no one else.

Texting your spouse (in the lobby, not in the treatment room with the client present) to say you'll be late is fine. Texting your spouse to say “Mary Hill decided to get a 90 minute appointment instead of an hour, so I'll be late getting home,” is not—even if your spouse knows Mary Hill as well as you do. You simply do not name your clients, in conversation, texting, or any other communications, other than to those health-care providers, emergency contact, attorney or others that they have given you a signed release to do so.

CONSIDER THIS

One of my favorite apps is a posture analysis app. It involves taking pictures of the clients, which of course will only be done with their permission. Massage therapists sometimes forget that confidentiality should be honored even when communicating with a colleague or peer. In a group practice, spa, or franchise situation, it should be made clear to the client that they may be seen by more than one therapist and that everyone employed there may see their records. But let's say you're eating lunch with a massage therapist friend who practices across town, and you start telling her how cool the posture app is, and whip out your phone to show her. It would be an ethics violation if you showed the client's pictures to someone who is not directly involved in his or her care.

E-mail

You may desire to have a client's e-mail address for several reasons. Perhaps you send out a monthly newsletter, or announcements of specials you're offering. If that's the case, you should be following the rules of secure and private e-mail communications.

Using an Internet mail service, such as MailChimp or Constant Contact is the best way to avoid making a mistake that could result in a privacy violation, such as your clients seeing each other's e-mail addresses. That may sound like a simple thing, but it is not. Many people use their name as their address, like *lauraallen@website.com*. When you consider that we are not even supposed to tell anyone the names of our clients, sending out an e-mail and failing to use the BCC (blind carbon copy) feature could result in everyone seeing the names and e-mail addresses of other people. It's an easy mistake to make, and I've had it happen to me in communications from other business people who ought to know better.

E-mailing clients should not be done without their express permission. I have a line on my own intake form that asks for the e-mail address with the statement *if you would like to receive our monthly newsletter and special announcements*. Another line asks clients if they would like to receive e-mail, calls, or text reminders of their appointment times. If you are using an online scheduler, those will state on the scheduler that it will automatically send e-mail appointment reminders to clients or give them the option of receiving a text.

Every e-mail you send to a client should give them the option to unsubscribe from receiving e-mail from you. Lack of an unsubscribe option is characteristic of spam. Even if you have permission to add the client to your e-mail list, avoid slamming people with e-mail, or you'll lose subscribers. Your clients don't need to hear

Boundary Lessons

Don't take it personally whenever a client declines to give you his or her e-mail address. Some people don't use e-mail at all; while some people may find that incredible, you have to remember that not everyone uses the Internet. Some people depend on the phone, texts, and instant messaging instead of e-mail. People may have their own reasons for not giving out their e-mail address. Perhaps, they feel like they already have too much e-mail to wade through on a daily basis. Or they may share an e-mail address with a spouse or other family members and don't want that person to know they're seeing you. I used to feel a little upset and disappointed when people didn't provide their e-mail address on the intake form. I felt insulted that they didn't want to get my newsletter or hear about my specials. I was complaining about it one day to another therapist friend of mine, and she said "You have to remember it's not all about *you*. It's about what the client feels comfortable with, and we have to respect that." She's right, and I've never taken it personally again.

—S.L., MT

from you on a daily basis. Use your e-mail wisely and in a professional manner. Avoid sending nonbusiness-related e-mails to your client list. They provided it to you on the premise that they would be receiving e-mail related to the business, not jokes or recipes from the Internet.

Social Media

Social media is fun, isn't it? People who use it may reconnect with people they haven't seen since grade school, find long-lost relatives, meet up with other massage therapists or otherwise like-minded people through all the groups and forums, share news, jokes, videos, inspirational posts, rants, and any number of things. Social media is also a great tool for promoting your business, used in the right way.

As I'm writing this, Facebook has over 1.65 billion users. Over 80 million photographs per day are uploaded to Instagram. Twitter has over 320 million active users. Everybody knows everybody else's business! People post their love affairs, their breakups, their opinions, their complaints, their pictures, their politics, their prayers, their porn, their deaths and births, their blessings, and their problems. Social media has made the world a much smaller place. It makes it easy to keep up with friends, family, and followers. It's also, unfortunately, one more opportunity to violate client confidentiality, and another opportunity to harm your own reputation (or have someone else harm it) as a professional massage therapist.

CONSIDER THIS

Your clients may not be on your FB page, but mutual friends or family members may be. Let's say you make a post about a client that you thought was rude, or otherwise didn't suit you for some reason. In your anger, you might say "besides being rude, she had the worst case of acne I've ever seen and spent the whole session unloading on me about her divorce and her child being diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and complaining about how he's always in trouble at school." Some local person on your page may instantly know who you're referring to. They may also wonder if you talk about them!

Take Facebook, for example. There are numerous groups for massage therapists on Facebook. I am the administrator of a couple of our state groups and organizational pages myself. As the ones I administer are much smaller than a national or worldwide group, and primarily used to share information such as local continuing education classes or a local therapist selling a massage table, there's not much inappropriate sharing in those groups. Some of the larger, more open groups are a different story entirely. It's routine for therapists to post body-shaming comments about clients who are overweight or have excessive body hair, or some other condition that they can make fun of.

- *Can you imagine if you were a person thinking about getting your first massage, and you saw the following social media post:*

I had a client today who must have weighed 300 pounds and I bet she hasn't shaved her legs in years! She looked like a fat grizzly bear! EEEEEW!

- *Or what about this one:*

Some people just have ugly feet! I got a new client today who had the ugliest feet I've ever seen. He had weird-looking long bony toes and a bunion the size of a golf ball. He wanted me to work on his feet and I really wanted to refuse. Just the thought of touching them made me cringe!

Yes, those are unfortunately real posts from Facebook. First of all, if you are in judgment of people's bodies in that manner, then you have no business being a massage therapist. It's part of the job to be accepting and nonjudgmental of people who are fat, bony, hairy, hairless, white or any other color, people who have stretch marks, scars, warts, bunions, corns, physical deformities, amputations, and any other thing that may be unique to their body. Second, posting such things on social media is a surefire way to scare off anyone who might be thinking about visiting a

CONSIDER THIS

Even if you do not specifically use the celebrity's name, you may still violate confidentiality. Social media posts like "I just massaged the head coach of the Miami Dolphins!" or "The CEO of Verizon just got a massage from me!" are a violation . . . it takes less than 3 seconds to find that person's name on a search engine.

massage therapist and you in particular, if your name is on the post. It makes the whole profession look bad!

There are very few people in the world who don't have some part of their body that they wish were different—including supermodels. How would *you* feel if you were in that client's shoes? What if you visited a dermatologist and later saw a post she made about your bad case of eczema? You wouldn't like it at all. Your doctor is not on social media making posts about your condition—thank goodness—and you are held to the same standard.

Many people have let their desire to brag override the confidentiality rule. I've seen numerous posts like "Guess what! I'm massaging Lady Gaga tonight before her concert and I get to be backstage!" or "I just massaged Tom Brady and he gave me a \$100 tip!" It's incredible that any massage therapist doesn't see the wrong in that. If a celebrity gives you a written testimonial, leaves a review on a website, posts on his or her own Twitter account that he or she just got an amazing massage from you, or allows you to take a selfie with him or her while he or she is at your office, then the person knows it's out there for public consumption. Otherwise, it is a serious ethics violation.

Massage therapists sometimes lose sight of the fact that it is not the client who is bound to abide by a code of ethics. It is us!

Otherwise, it's confidential, and all clients should be able to have the expectation of privacy, whether it's the star quarterback or the minister from the church across the street from your office.

Even in the event a client treats you badly, or makes an inappropriate overture, you are still obligated to safeguard his or her confidentiality. It is *not* okay to make a post like this:

Don't take any checks from Betty Smith! She wrote me a check for a gift certificate and it bounced!

or a post like this:

Warning all Lakeland massage therapists, if a client named John Doe calls you for an appointment, refuse it! He is just a pervert!

Your Own Social Media Image

Other than making inappropriate posts about clients on social media, have you considered how you are presenting yourself? If you're identifying yourself as a massage therapist on your social media pages, and posting pictures of yourself holding a shot

of tequila in your hand while you're dancing on the bar in a local club, or posting pictures of yourself in revealing clothing and that "come hither" look on your face, how do you think that appears to clients? What message are you trying to send?

You may think you're safe if your privacy settings are set so that only your own friends can see what you post, but that's not really so. Let's say that your neighbor is also a social media friend. He has a few buddies over to watch the football game, and his computer screen is up so everyone in the room can see it. There you are in a picture taken at his last barbecue, when you all got a little too drunk and decided to go skinny dipping in his pool. You didn't even know those pictures were taken.

You can harm your own reputation without even thinking about it.

Or maybe you did know, and you were showing off for the camera, not thinking in your alcohol-befuddled state what the consequences might be. His friends see your picture on the screen, ask who that is, and he says "Oh, that's my hot neighbor across the street. She owns a massage business on 4th Avenue." You suddenly find yourself inundated with calls from males who have seen your picture and they want a massage—and more. You can harm your own reputation without even thinking about it.

It's Not All about Sex

If you've allowed clients to be on your personal social media pages, or your privacy settings are on "public," it's not only the sexual component that you need to consider. Everyone has differences of opinion, and people know that. Maybe you don't discuss your politics, your religion, and other personal beliefs with your clients, which is a wise idea. However, let's say you're all hot and bothered about the government, and your social media posts are filled with rants about how you hate the president, or you think all Democrats are morons, or the mayor of your town is an idiot, or you're insulting to any certain population of people. The client you

CONSIDER THIS

Celebrities who might be identifiable, even though you don't name them, are not the only potential violation. Let's say you make a post about a client that you thought was rude, or otherwise didn't suit you for some reason. In your anger, you might say "Besides being rude, she had the worst case of acne I've ever seen and spent the whole session unloading on me about her divorce and her child being diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and complaining about how he's always in trouble at school." Even though the person you made the post about is not on your FB page, some local person on your page may instantly know who you're referring to. They may also wonder if you talk about them!

thought was so nice, and who you thought really liked you, may (understandably) take offense at being lumped in a category of people that you consider morons, and find another massage therapist who isn't so publicly opinionated and insulting to people based on their political beliefs. Especially in a small town, word gets around. That client may be volunteering at Democratic headquarters and say to the other people there, "By the way, that massage therapist down the street thinks Democrats are all a bunch of morons. She's a good therapist but I'm going to find someone else who doesn't make daily Facebook posts about how stupid we all are for supporting the president."

You have just harmed your business standing in your own community by making a comment on social media that may have been harmless if you had said it privately to a friend—but when posting something on the Internet, you should act as if everyone in the world may see it—because in fact, they may.

REAL EXPERIENCE

There is a controversial church located in the small town where I live and practice. Over the years, many people have made accusations that the church is a cult; they've been embroiled in lawsuits, and made the local and national news from time to time. Former church members have made charges of abuse at the hands of leadership and other members; they've had picket lines, and sometimes there have been armed guards outside the church. I had several clients that I didn't even know were members of that church; after all, I don't ask any questions about my clients' religion on my intake form, and as I make it a point not to delve into my clients' private lives or discuss controversial subjects, it never came up in conversation. After our local paper reported a case of a former member suing them, I shared that on my Facebook page and made some derogatory comments about the church and its members—although personally I've never even been there; I was just sharing what had been said in the paper and adding my own opinion about it. The day after I made the post, a client called to cancel her appointment. When I asked if she would like to reschedule it, she said "No, I'm going to have to find another therapist. I heard that you were talking badly about my church online, and I just can't see you again. I'm also going to tell our other church members not to patronize your business." I was shocked. I had no idea that she was a member there, and I had also never considered that anything I said on Facebook could cause me to lose business, but it did. I lost three people on account of it. I now keep my mouth shut about things like that.

—S.H., LMT

Another thing to consider is whether or not you have social media pages for your business.

Facebook abounds with those; I had one for my clinic. If you allow others to post on your page, you're taking the risk that those will all be nice and complimentary, when that may not be the case. Deleting complaints from your page can also backfire—the person may state on their own page that when they made a valid (in their perception) complaint on your page, that you deleted it. Take a lesson from the way major companies respond to consumer complaints online. Usually, it is something along the lines of “We are sorry that you had a bad experience at our company, and we hope that you will give us another chance.” Avoid being argumentative, which will make you look even worse, even though there may be a valid excuse for why the customer had a bad experience. Here's an example: “I'm sorry the noise from the road construction in front of our business was a distraction the day you came for your massage. We did not know that was going to be happening, or we would have given you the option to reschedule. We will be glad to offer you a discount for a return visit.” That kind of response makes you appear much more responsive and caring to the customer instead of responding in a snippy way, or ignoring their complaint.

Your Own Website

Consumers expect businesses to have a website these days. Unless you are practicing out of your home and are only accepting word-of-mouth referrals, it will help your business to have one. If you belong to one of the professional associations such as AMTA or ABMP, a simple website is part of your membership package. You may build your own site if you have that capability, or hire or barter with a professional for that service. In addition to informing people about your business, your website can actively be an income stream for you, if you offer online gift certificate sales, retail products or act as an affiliate site, have online booking for appointments, or online registration for classes you may be offering. It can be a timesaver for you and convenient for clients if you put a downloadable intake form on your website, allowing people to have it filled out before they arrive for their appointment. Remember, if you are collecting any client information, taking online bookings, asking for credit card numbers or other personal information on your site, you must have a secure website.

Your website should be an honest representation of you, your business, your qualifications, your services and prices, and your policies. It's sometimes shocking to see the way things are misrepresented on the Internet. I once visited a massage school that I had seen a picture of online, and it showed the school at the foot of a mountain, with a big meadow in front, a very beautiful and pastoral setting. I was incredulous when I got there and discovered that the mountain was actually about 30 miles away from the school, and the school had been photoshopped onto the picture at the bottom of the mountain.

Most regulated states require you to have your license number displayed on any advertising, including a website. Be sure that you are in compliance with the requirements in your jurisdiction. You want to highlight your qualifications, so listing any specialty certifications or areas of additional training that you have are a good idea.

Having your services listed on your website will make it clear to the public what you do—and what you do not do. A professional-looking website can make it clear that you are a professional massage therapist, not a sex worker. When a consumer sees “Laura Allen, Clinical Massage Therapist” followed up by a description of the conditions you work with, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, low back pain or the like, that lessens the possibility that you’ll get phone calls about providing sexual services.

If your website is unclear about what you do, you may be unwittingly contributing to the number of calls you get for sexual services, or the number of people who act inappropriately once they are already in your office or on the table. Let’s say your business name is something like “Blissful Massage” or “Love Your Body Massage.” You need to be extra clear on your website and other advertising that you are offering therapeutic massage. A few days ago, a local attorney sent me a solicitation he had received from a sex worker masquerading as a massage therapist. She was actually calling her business “Exquisite Conclusions.” One can only assume that she thinks that sounds classier than “Happy Endings.” Her blatant solicitation left no doubt about what she was offering, but if the name of your business or your description of it sounds ambiguous, you may be courting trouble.

Having your policies clearly stated on your website can educate the public and offer you a measure of self-protection and something to point to when a client complains—but don’t let that be the only place they exist. Some clients may not use the Internet or may have heard of you through another source—and they still need to be informed of your policies. Your policies in regards to late arrivals, cancellations, gift certificates, refunds, and so forth should be detailed not only on your website but also on a sign in your office, on your brochures, or on a separate policy sheet that you give to clients when they visit your office for the first time. Your intake form should have a place for the client to sign stating that they have been informed of your office policies. In the interest of treating everyone fairly and equally, you can’t leave clients to guess what your policies are, you can’t expect them to adhere to policies they have not been informed of, and you don’t need to make them up as you go along.

Online Review Sites

The Internet abounds these days with sites where consumers can leave reviews of businesses. Have you ever looked to see what they’re saying about you?

Based on my own searching around these sites, a lot of times, it is not the skill—or lack thereof— of the therapist that gets a bad review. Most complaints are about attitude, lack of listening to the client, not giving them what they paid for and what they expected to get, and other such offenses. Here is an actual review of one business:

- *I went to ____ in _____. What a terrible experience. I was given incorrect directions which made me 7 minutes late for a booked, hour and a half appointment. I was informed that I would only be getting an hour and 15 minutes because I was late, but I would be paying for the full hour and one half. I complained that I was late because I was given the wrong directions and was told that's too bad. I wound up getting a 1 hour massage that was poorly performed. She didn't adjust the head rest, she forgot to do my left hand and neck, and knew nothing about how to massage feet. I will NEVER go there again.*

Here's another:

- *I bought a package of six gift certificates from ____ at a special price. It did not say anything on the advertisement for the special, or on the gift certificates themselves, that it was for new clients only, and the therapist did not mention that when I made the purchase. Imagine my embarrassment when several of my coworkers, whom I had gifted with the certificates for Christmas, reported to me that they were charged an additional \$25 because they had been to the business before. I was mortified and when I called the business, the owner was not apologetic at all. When I told her that wasn't on the advertisement I had seen in the paper, which was what spurred me to buy the gift certificates, nor was it on the certificates, she said "Well, it's on my website, and that's how most people book their appointments." I will never spend another dime at that business.*

We have to remember that one person's perception of a good massage may not match someone else's, but bad reviews can be devastating to a business when there are enough of them. Here's one such review:

- *She has absolutely no idea what she's doing; all she did was bathe me in lotion. She rushed through everything; she massaged half of my arms and my legs. That was basically a rub; I wouldn't call it a massage. But at the end, she massaged my shins so hard and for so long that I literally got shin splints. She didn't seem to like the job; it looks like she is just there to collect paychecks. Honestly, she has no business working as a massage therapist; she needs to*

work somewhere that has zero interaction with people, maybe a bank teller at the drive thru! NO PERSONALITY!

And another:

- *I went to ___ for a massage, and what a rip-off. The massage was mediocre, and the therapist took up about 15 minutes doing some kind of thing where she was just placing her hands on me, not even moving. She told me she was balancing my chakras, whatever that is. They have the price listed as \$80 an hour, but when I was checking out, the receptionist informed me that a \$20 tip was expected. I told her I wasn't tipping at all and that I wouldn't be back. It rubs me the wrong way, no pun intended, to be held up for a tip when the service wasn't even what I expected. I booked a massage, not some kind of wishy-washy stuff I didn't want to begin with.*

It's next to impossible to get bad reviews removed from these sites. With that thought in mind: *Give people good service.* Treat every massage like it's the best massage you're ever going to give. Give people what they pay for and what they book for—and avoid throwing in things that people have not asked for and unfamiliar with just because it is what *you* want to do. It is not about you; it is about the client. State your financial policies clearly. State your gift certificate policies clearly. If you have a receptionist or others answering the telephone, it's helpful to have a printed list of directions beside the phone (and also on your website) that they can refer to. Have your office policies stated clearly on your website in regards to late arrivals and missed appointments. If you give someone incorrect directions, you shouldn't penalize them for being late. Many of the worst reviews on the Internet are about poor customer service and poor communication. The best action is always preventative action.

The best action is always preventative action.

You can never please all of the people all of the time, but you can be proactive in your practice of massage therapy and the manner in which you conduct your business. We all have off days, and you'll have the occasional complaining client who is having an off day and decides to take it out on you. An occasional complaint does not mean the end of your business, but if a number of bad reviews complain about the same thing, then it's time to take a personal inventory, and recognize that you may indeed have habits or policies that people consider to be poor business practices.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

To summarize this chapter, the Internet can be used for many things—the good, the bad, and the ugly. It's up to you to be diligent in safeguarding client privacy, diligent in not committing any ethical violations on the Internet, and to be diligent in protecting your own online reputation.

Questions for Reflection

1. Think of a situation where you've seen something on the Internet—an unflattering video or photograph of someone—that they were probably unaware was being taken. Imagine that it is you in the photograph or video. How would you feel? Would you feel embarrassed? Would you feel angry at the person who took it and put it on the Internet? How would you deal with it?
2. Look at all the pictures you have posted on your social media sites. If a potential client was looking at those pictures, what kind of impression do you think they would form of you? Do you think they would view you as a professional? Or do you think they may get the wrong idea?
3. If you participate in massage groups on the Internet, go to one of the group pages and spend an hour reading all the posts and comments. Pretend that you are a client who is thinking about getting your first massage. Have a piece of paper to use as a score card. How many posts and comments do you see that would convince you that you should get a massage? How many posts and comments do you see that would convince you that you shouldn't get a massage? Now pretend that you are a physician. How many posts and comments do you see that would make you think "I'd feel good about referring someone to that massage therapist?" How many posts and comments do you see that would make you think "I'd never refer anyone to that massage therapist?" Total those results. How do you think massage therapists are representing themselves overall in the group you just analyzed?
4. Do some Internet research of your own, and visit the websites of other massage therapists. Do you think they are giving the business or individual therapist a professional image? What problems do you see with any of the sites? If you were a member of the public searching for massage, is there something that would make you wonder whether or not the person is offering legitimate massage therapy, or is there something that might give you the impression that they are offering sexual services?
5. Have you ever written a bad review of a business on the Internet? If so, think back on that. Revisit the website where you left the review, and read the other reviews that are there. Are most of them sharing your complaint, or are the majority of reviews complimentary of the business? If that's the case, do you think it is possible that you were personally having a bad day and taking it out on the waitress, the business owner, or other person you were dealing with? Or in retrospect, do you feel that your review was perfectly justified? If you realize that you were personally having a bad day and wanted to delete the review, which may have been unfair to the business, would you attempt to get your review deleted, or decide that's too much trouble and leave it there?

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CHAPTER 12

Help with Boundaries: Support, Consultation, and Supervision

Few of us have training in professional relationship skills. True, our common sense and natural instincts are often enough to get us by, but to become solid professionals, we often need outside help and support.

Support can help keep our spark and enthusiasm for our work alive, and that can make a difference in how well we keep boundaries. Learning how to practice good boundaries isn't merely a question of memorizing rules; we can know what we're supposed to do and still make mistakes. How well we maintain boundaries can depend on our overall emotional health and even on how we're feeling on any particular day. Discouragement, loneliness, and boredom take their toll on boundary skills. Perhaps the reason for the most common boundary problem—practitioners using clients as a captive audience—comes from the fact that many practitioners feel isolated and want someone to talk with.

Nobody tells us this in school, but it can be lonely out there. Some of us work in isolation—in our homes, in a private office—and we're alone with clients who may be needy or hurting and looking to us for relief. Even if we work in a spa or an office with other massage therapists, we may not receive enough support in our everyday work lives.

Nobody tells us this in school, but it can be lonely out there.

Most practitioners find that this work isn't as simple as just giving a massage. We work every day with issues of intimacy, dependency, and pain. We all have unresolved beliefs and attitudes that can get in our way. For instance, some of us were raised to believe that we shouldn't complain about aches and pains, that suffering in silence shows strength. How will we feel about clients who come in with a long list of complaints—as is their right? Some of us were brought up to feel that taking care of ourselves and saying no to others is selfish. Will we then be able to draw the line when a client with a sore back wants an appointment on our day off?

Consultation:

A meeting with a professional trained in psychological dynamics to get advice about and insight into a particular client or issue.

Supervision:

An ongoing arrangement made with a professional trained in psychological dynamics for help with the relationship aspects of a practitioner's work.

Regardless of our work setting, how well we handle the relationship aspect of our work can make or break our practices. We need to build into our work lives an abundance of ways to get support, feedback, and new perspective.

Several options for help are available: **consultation**; **clinical supervision**, both in groups and individually; peer support groups; peer supervision groups; and mentoring. Since most of these are still new ideas for the profession, this chapter explores them in detail.

Basics of Consultation, Supervision, and Groups

Many practitioners are learning how to untangle client relationships by consulting with another professional. This might be a one-time consultation about a perplexing situation or ongoing supervision for support and insight.

The consultant or supervisor should be someone who is both experienced in psychological dynamics and appreciative of the issues involved in bodywork and massage therapy. That would be either a bodyworker or massage therapist who also has training or credentials in relationship dynamics or a mental health practitioner who respects the special problems associated with bodywork and massage therapy. The mental health practitioner doesn't need to be trained in bodywork or massage techniques, since technique won't be discussed (see "Choosing a Consultant or Supervisor" later in this chapter).

Consultation

In a consultation, you and your consultant meet outside the session to discuss a particular client or situation. Although the professional might be a psychotherapist or counselor, this kind of consultation isn't the same as psychotherapy. The purpose is to deal with work-related issues. Although you might discover your countertransference issues, personal subjects won't be probed to the same depth as they would be in psychotherapy. Here are some examples of how a consultant could help:

- *Massage therapist Mary dreads the days when she sees her client Fred, who constantly complains about his life. Try as she might to be patient, Mary always ends up feeling irritated by his negative outlook.*

In this case, a consultant might, for instance, help Mary realize that Fred reminds her of her father, who disappointed her with his sour outlook on life. Simply

having an awareness of how she might be transferring feelings about her father to her client could help Mary work with the client more objectively and compassionately. (If this were psychotherapy, Mary would probably be urged to explore her history and feelings about her father in greater depth.) Also, having that insight would probably help Mary to respond more positively when other clients turn out to be complainers.

- *Bodyworker Bob has a client who sometimes cries about her failing marriage during her sessions. Lately, she has seemed more depressed, crying frequently and saying she feels hopeless. Bob wants the client to feel free to express her emotions with him, but he has never been entirely comfortable with her crying, and he now feels overwhelmed by her despair. He thinks she should see a counselor but doesn't know how to suggest that without hurting her feelings or making her feel rejected.*

Bob could discuss several issues with a consultant. He may want to explore his discomfort when a client cries. He might learn, for instance, that crying is generally a healthy release for clients and that he doesn't need to be concerned about occasional tears or feel that he must cheer up the client. He may also learn that in this case, the client could be showing signs of the kind of depression that needs expert help. A consultant could help him identify those warning signals. Furthermore, Bob could learn some skills in referring a client to a counselor. In this instance, he could let her know that although he is concerned and committed to working with her as her massage therapist, he also wonders if she might want to seek professional counseling to help her get through this difficult time.

When to Use Consultation

Here are some red flags that could indicate you would benefit from a consultation:

- Any strong negative feelings about a client that persist, such as frequently feeling impatient or annoyed with a client, feeling drained by a client, or downright disliking a client
- Strong positive feelings about a client, wanting to make special exceptions for a client without objective reasons, or wanting to have a sexual relationship with a client
- Working with a client who is actively dealing with issues of sexual or physical abuse
- Working with a client who seems unusually depressed or who you suspect might be mentally unbalanced
- Having trouble setting limits with a particular client



Supervision

Rather than waiting until they have a problem with a client or are in trouble, many practitioners choose ongoing supervision to gain new awareness and ease in their relationships with clients and to break the isolation of their practices. Supervision can also help when you feel bored with your work. Again, this type of supervision is not about the hands-on aspect of your work; it's about helping you improve your professional relationships with clients.

“Supervision” may sound like someone telling you what to do or how to run your business, and that may make you wary. However, a good supervisor supports and guides rather than giving unasked-for advice or making you feel inadequate. Time with a supervisor should feel like a visit with a helpful, friendly teacher.

Unlike a consultation, which is generally a one-time or occasional meeting, with supervision, you would get together on a regular basis, perhaps monthly. The goal is to increase your awareness of yourself as a professional and to clarify your strengths and vulnerabilities in the relationship aspect of dealing with clients.

Good supervision can give you confidence and free you up to do your best work.

(Getting a consultation is a good way to check out how well you would work with another professional you are considering for a supervisor.)

Supervision could make your work life more satisfying by helping you understand stumbling blocks that get in your way and by giving you support when you need it, for instance, with setting limits,

trusting your intuition, or appreciating your assets. Good supervision can give you confidence and free you up to do your best work.

A colleague reports:

- *At first, I didn't like the idea of supervision, mostly because I was afraid I'd look stupid. After all, I'd been practicing for many years, and I thought I was supposed to have all the answers. However, a friend seemed to be getting so much from her supervision that I decided to try it. To my delight, it was a big boon to my practice. My attitude and behavior toward my clients became more understanding, and clients responded positively to that. The client I had thought was annoying and demanding turned out to be a likable woman who was just frightened about giving up control. The client that I had judged as weird and eccentric turned into a loyal long-term client when I became less judgmental of him. I began to understand my unhelpful patterns and also how to help clients feel more comfortable with me as their practitioner. My practice increased and I am happier with my work life.*

When to Use Supervision

You don't need a special reason to seek out supervision. You may just want to grow as a professional, or you may want your practice to be more satisfying. While you would seek out a one-time consultation for a particular client, for instance, you can use supervision when you notice patterns that don't serve you well in your relationships with clients. Here are some red flags that could signal the need for supervision:

- Having a good number of clients who seem “difficult” or controlling
- Having a lot of clients who challenge your boundaries
- Making friends with clients more than once in a blue moon
- Realizing that you take on the issues, feelings, or energy of a client in a way that depletes you
- Often feeling sexually attracted to clients
- Frequently feeling drained or exhausted at the end of the day
- Often feeling bored with your work
- Any negative feelings about clients that persist

The Power of Groups

Some practitioners prefer getting together with colleagues, either with or without a leader or consultant, to share their experiences and knowledge. Some believe that

support from colleagues is a must in a profession that is so minimally recognized and acknowledged in the culture. Also, because of the element of touch, somatic practitioners face unique issues that may be understood best by their colleagues.

Many of us have little contact or serious discussion with other manual therapists. Even if we work around other massage therapists, we don't always take the time for serious discussion. I have given workshops in which bodyworkers start a question with "Maybe I'm the only one this happens to. . ." and then relate a situation that is commonly experienced by practitioners. It helps to have the reassurance that others are dealing with the same dilemmas.

People who stay with this work over the long haul are usually part of a strong group or community of colleagues that support and educate each other.

It also helps to have the validation of talking with a respected colleague or a group of colleagues when you are learning how to set boundaries and limits with your clients. Getting outside support and ideas is fortification for dealing with manipulative or hard-to-handle clients.

Especially in the first years of your practice, you may not know enough to know when you are in over your head or when what a client needs is beyond the scope of your methods or beyond your expertise. You might not fully trust your intuition or recognize a red flag.

Getting together with colleagues in an open, honest, and non-judgmental environment can be comforting, confidence building, and a boon to your practice. People who stay with this work over the long haul are usually part of a strong group or community of colleagues that support and educate each other.

Group Supervision

Less expensive than individual supervision, group supervision is great for dealing with isolation. It's also a good way for inexperienced practitioners to learn the common client-relationship issues of this work and gather ideas about the ways others deal with problems that are shared by all practitioners. As with peer support groups, hearing the struggles of others in the group can help you see that you're not alone or unique in the kind of dilemmas that you have. The difference between a peer support group and group supervision is that a supervision group is led by a supervisor and there is usually a fee for attending.

A massage therapist from Seattle praises her supervision group:

- *My supervision group has been getting together for a year, meeting every 3 weeks. We alternate meeting with just each other and meeting with a supervisor. Being in the group is helping me move to a place that is healthier with my client relations. For instance, I've learned that I was brought up to see my value as a person as how "helpful" and "selfless" I could be. Now I don't work so hard and long on a client that my thumbs are aching, as I used to. I won't*

take one more client that will be too taxing for my body or mind. I don't take responsibility for clients' healing. I empower them in their healing process. My relationships with my clients feel cleaner with less hidden agendas. And I'm making more money!

I actually went into supervision to learn how to run my business better and make more money. But what was most helpful was that I learned about my boundary problems during the course of being in the group. It's ironic that my initial goals are being met in an entirely roundabout way!



Peer Support Groups

It is possible to meet as a group of practitioners to discuss common issues without a supervisor. Peer groups are not supervised by any of the members and have different benefits than groups that include supervision. Nan Narboe, clinical social worker and boundaries expert, says:

- *There are things that only your peers will tell you and that you can only hear from your peers. For instance, if our supervisor praises the way we responded*

to a difficult client, we may assume she’s “just being nice.” If we hear the same praise from our peers, we tend to believe it. There are times, however, when individual supervision is best. There are things that only your supervisor will tell you and that you can only hear from your supervisor, such as where your blind spots are.

Peer groups are an excellent and inexpensive way to get support and learn from others. Groups may also want to hire a consultant to work with them occasionally on a specific issue or for a specific purpose.

Jack Blackburn, LMP, certified Trager practitioner, registered counselor, and supervisor for bodyworkers, reinforces the need for meeting with colleagues: “The main reason practitioners burn out isn’t because they work too hard or take too much responsibility for their clients. It’s because they don’t have a place to talk with other massage therapists and bodyworkers about what happens in their practices.” In peer groups, practitioners can learn how to support each other’s learning by using active listening and other techniques to help each other understand their relationships with clients.

Benefits of Supervision and Consultation

Whether you work with a group or individually, here are some of the reasons that consultations and supervision about client–practitioner dynamics are invaluable to both inexperienced and seasoned practitioners.

Identifying Blind Spots

We all have less-than-positive ways of interacting that we tend to put out of our awareness—ways that we might unconsciously hurt clients, ways that we might overstep boundaries. We need feedback from someone who has the skill and willingness to tell us what we do not see about ourselves. Our teachers don’t always do this, nor do all friends, partners, or spouses. We like to think of ourselves as always caring, and it can be painful to have someone, even diplomatically, point out ways we might be insensitive to others. But how else are we going to learn?

Ethics consultant Daphne Chellos says it straight out:

- *Supervision is a preventive measure against abusing clients. Abuse can be unintentional as well as intentional, subtle as well as blatant. As humans, all of us can be “victims” and all of us can be “aggressors.” Our tendency is to remember violations against us and to either forget or ignore our aggressive acts. This blind spot exists as well in therapeutic relationships. A competent supervisor will notice when a therapist is being inappropriate or abusive, no matter how*

subtly or unintentionally, and bring it to the therapist's attention. (Chellos D. Supervision in bodywork: borrowing a model from psychotherapy. Massage Ther J. 1991;Winter:15.)

“Abuse” may seem like a strong word. It is used here to mean anything a practitioner does that could, even in a minor way, take advantage of or wound a client—from an insensitive remark about the client’s body to overcharging for services.

Keeping Confidentiality

Clients tell us their secrets. Even if they don’t tell us, we might guess. Perhaps we realize how frightened that successful, confident-looking businessman actually is because we see the tension in his body. Maybe we sense the underlying sadness of the vivacious woman who tries so hard to be upbeat. Clients confide in us about their private lives and concerns, but as professionals, we’re not allowed to talk about our clients with our colleagues, friends, or families, and we’re certainly not allowed to divulge anything they say. As Trager instructor Amrita Daigle says, “If we don’t have someone who we can talk with in professional confidence, we will tend to gossip about our clients.” It can become a burden to carry all that pain, all those secrets. Having a supervisor who is also bound by rules of confidentiality gives us a way to share that burden.

Easing Guilt

I’ve talked with many practitioners who feel ashamed of an instance when they used poor judgment or went outside ethical boundaries. Sometimes no harm was done to the client, and sometimes the practitioner couldn’t have foreseen the problem. However, these moments weigh on practitioners who strive to be ethical. Talking with a trusted supervisor or consultant helps put those mistakes in perspective. A good supervisor or consultant will hear our mistakes and errors without making us feel ashamed or incompetent.

Recognizing Prejudice

How do we really feel about working with people of other races, gays and lesbians, overweight people, the chronically ill, racists, Orthodox Jews, Hindus, Muslims, and born-again Christians—just to name a few groups? What about people who voted for the candidate we campaigned against? Or sexist men, pampered women, angry feminists? Do any of these types of people make our hearts snap shut? Everyone makes prejudgments to some degree. Consultation and supervision help us recognize these prejudgments so that we can get beyond our negative feelings and learn to either care about the client or refer the client to someone else.

Getting Help with Mentally Ill Clients

We will probably encounter emotionally disturbed people in our practices, and they will respond to us and our work differently than will other clients. We may be baffled by their behavior or be insensitive to their fears. Or we may not know how to take care of ourselves when we are working with them. A consultant trained in psychological dynamics is a valuable resource for helping us identify and figure out what to do with clients who may be mentally ill.

Clients with mental illness can make complaints or feel harmed even when practitioners are ethical and careful. As caring practitioners, we may want to help a client who appears to be floundering. Yet some people who are mentally ill can exhibit extreme helplessness on the one hand and rage on the other. We may be ill-fatedly drawn to try to rescue a seemingly helpless client, only to wind up as the recipient of that person's anger. For our own protection, we need help identifying mental illness.

Although it is not our place to make a specific diagnosis, we do want to know whether a client is mentally ill for his or her protection as well as our own. For example, people with a mental illness generally don't have the interior strength to weather a process that can strip away defenses, such as emotionally-oriented work. Ordinary folks seek out that kind of work to experience a deeper part of themselves. For disturbed people, who may feel blank or chaotic behind their social exterior, such work can be uncomfortable and disorienting. An experienced consultant or supervisor can help us identify signs of mental illness and judge whether our work will be beneficial to the prospective client. Of course, if the client is being treated by a mental health professional, we should obtain written permission from the client to speak with the other professional to make sure our work will be helpful to the client.

Supporting Our Intuition

Many manual therapists use their intuition to understand how best to work with clients. Intuition is a useful gift, but sometimes it fails us. Sometimes clients slip beneath the radar of our intuition, or we need more information to be able to understand them. We may misread them and fail to offer the kind of support they need. A consultant or supervisor could help us see the reasons we didn't understand the client and educate us about how best to use our intuitive side.

And the #1 Reason for Getting Consultation or Supervision

Perhaps it's a little late to say this, but good boundaries can't be entirely learned from reading a book. We have to experience them. We need to experience the safety of working with someone who is clear and careful with boundaries. We have to get the solid feeling of good boundaries inside us.

A book can give us an idea of why it's important to be professional, but we can't learn it all from a book. Some may have had a teacher along the way who was careless or uneducated about relationship issues, and we need a remedial experience. If we aspire to a high level of professionalism, we need the good modeling that a compassionate professional trained in transference and countertransference can provide.

Finding Help and Support

For manual therapists, getting help with the relationship aspect of our work and coming together to support each other are still new concepts. Certainly, practitioners get together informally with friends who are also bodyworkers to encourage each other and talk about common issues. However, more organized ways of meeting together are still not that widely practiced. But casual sharing, aside from the possibility of leading to violations of confidentiality, doesn't always offer the depth of support and insight that we need. Fortunately, practitioners can now find and create other ways to enrich their professional lives.

Choosing a Consultant or Supervisor

Because getting consultations and supervision for the relationship issues of this work is a fairly new idea, you will have to be creative in finding someone with whom to work. The practitioner you choose should be someone who is trained in psychological dynamics and understands and appreciates bodywork and massage. A psychiatric social worker, psychologist, or other mental health professional who has never experienced bodywork may not be able to understand the intimacy of the work and the problems involved. Your consultant or supervisor should also respect the profession and be aware that manual therapists perform a valuable service for the community.

You can also work with a bodyworker or massage therapist who has training and experience in relationship dynamics. Although that would be ideal, few manual practitioners have such training.

No set way exists to find someone who will suit you. You can ask others for the names of good psychotherapists in your community and see if they would be interested in working with you. They have to understand that you don't want personal counseling, and they need to know the difference between consulting about work issues and doing psychotherapy. Not all psychotherapists have the experience or the inclination to do this kind of consulting.

Because you are hoping to learn more about good relationship boundaries, it should be obvious that your consultant or supervisor needs to be someone with whom you don't have another relationship.

Keep in mind that because the consultant or supervisor doesn't need to see your hands-on work, supervision and consultation can occur by phone. If you live in

You want someone who gives you the feeling that you have a new ally, that you have someone in your corner.

a small town, you may choose to have telephone appointments with an out-of-town consultant who does not know your clients.

When you are trying out a supervisor or consultant, you want to notice if this is someone who helps you trust your own intuition, who can suggest new choices without making you feel judged, who is enthusiastic about your work, and who helps you feel more confident. You want someone who gives you the feeling that you have a new ally, that you have someone in your corner.

Forming a Peer Group

While in school, many students form close bonds with other students but do not keep in touch once they have graduated. Once out in their practices, massage therapists and bodyworkers don't always have an awareness of how crucial it is to their professional health to stay in touch with colleagues.

To start a group, you have to round up some colleagues who would like to get together regularly to share experiences. An ideal number would be between 4 and 12 participants. It's a good idea to ask members to commit to meeting on a regular schedule for a certain length of time—perhaps once or twice a month for at least six meetings—to give the group a chance to gel.

Groups need to adhere to rules of confidentiality in agreeing not to talk outside the group about what other members say there. Also, members should agree to make every effort to disguise the identity of clients they are discussing.

It's a good idea if group members agree to other ground rules as well, such as not offering advice unless they are asked to or not interrupting others. Care should be taken to give each member a chance to bring their issues to the group. Although a small amount of venting can be useful, groups shouldn't be allowed to deteriorate into gripe sessions.

It's important that groups state their intentions clearly from the beginning, for instance, that they're interested in learning from each other and wanting to grow as professionals.

One important consideration may be that you belong to, or form, a group of like-minded individuals . . . people who have similar practices. For example, if you are an evidence-informed practitioner of massage, you may not feel comfortable in a room full of people who practice energy work, and vice versa.

A Word about Mentoring

With mentoring, you make an agreement with a more experienced colleague that she or he will be available to answer your questions. It can be an informal arrangement and is often unpaid. It may be as simple as, "Let me take you to lunch and get

the benefit of your years as a bodyworker.” Everyone graduating from manual therapy training needs mentors. It should be a given that we all need help and support to start a practice.

Mentoring usually addresses less complex issues than supervision does. It’s good for business-building and practice-building kinds of questions, such as the value of using an answering service or the pros and cons of working out of your home.

A mentor can be any practitioner you respect, whose work is similar to yours and who is willing to meet with you to share his or her experiences.

These days, it’s even possible to find excellent mentoring on an online forum for massage therapists or bodyworkers. On such forums, there are hundreds of massage therapists and bodyworkers with varying levels of experience. Participants can ask questions that they would ask a mentor and receive a wide range of advice. The obvious disadvantage of this method is that there isn’t the face-to-face relationship that can provide ongoing encouragement and support, and you don’t necessarily know the qualifications of the people responding.

Taking Care of Ourselves

To forestall burnout, somatic practitioners need to learn how to take good care of themselves, which means getting help from others. Sharing with someone else about what really goes on in our offices, what pushes our buttons, and when our hearts get shut down is crucial to the health of our practices.

The work we do is complex and demanding. Consultations, supervision, peer support, and mentoring can take away the isolation and depletion that can kill our interest in our work. Our professional lives are more rewarding when we find ways to keep our interest alive and be kinder to ourselves.

Questions for Reflection

1. If you are a student, what steps can you take when you finish your training to make sure you have the support and information you need? If you are already practicing, do you have enough support to keep you excited and encouraged about your work? Do you have any resources to help you sort out the therapeutic relationship aspect of your work? What steps could you take to make sure you have enough support and resources?
2. How do you feel about the idea of going to someone for supervision or consultation? What would be the pros and cons for you personally?
3. Are there areas where you could benefit from help—for instance, setting limits, working with women who have been sexually abused, or knowing how to work with an emotionally-fragile client? What are the areas that

are the most challenging for you? What can you do to help you feel more confident about these areas?

4. If you are already practicing, can you think of a time when a problem with a client would have gone much smoothly if you had had outside professional help with it? How would you handle that situation now?

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American Massage Therapy Association Code of Ethics

This Code of Ethics is a summary statement of the standards by which massage therapists agree to conduct their practices and is a declaration of the general principles of acceptable, ethical, professional behavior.

Massage therapists/practitioners shall:

1. Demonstrate commitment to provide the highest quality massage therapy/bodywork to those who seek their professional service.
2. Acknowledge the inherent worth and individuality of each person by not discriminating or behaving in any prejudicial manner with clients and/or colleagues.
3. Demonstrate professional excellence through regular self-assessment of strengths, limitations, and effectiveness by continued education and training.
4. Acknowledge the confidential nature of the professional relationship with clients and respect each client's right to privacy.
5. Project a professional image and uphold the highest standards of professionalism.
6. Accept responsibility to do no harm to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of self, clients, and associates.

AMTA goes further by spelling out the Rules of Ethics:

Massage therapists/practitioners shall do the following:

1. Conduct all business and professional activities within their scope of practice and all applicable legal and regulatory requirements.
2. Refrain from engaging in any sexual conduct or sexual activities involving their clients in the course of a massage therapy session.

3. Be truthful in advertising and marketing, and refrain from misrepresenting his or her services, charges for services, credentials, training, experience, ability, or results.
4. Refrain from using AMTA membership, including the AMTA name, logo or other intellectual property, or the member's position, in any way that is unauthorized, improper, or misleading.
5. Refrain from engaging in any activity that would violate confidentiality commitments and/or proprietary rights of AMTA or any other person or organization.

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Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals Code of Ethics

As a member of Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP), I pledge my commitment to the highest principles of the massage and bodywork profession as outlined here:

1. Commitment to High-Quality Care

I will serve the best interests of my clients at all times and provide the highest quality of bodywork and service possible. I recognize that the obligation for building and maintaining an effective, healthy, and safe therapeutic relationship with my clients is my responsibility.

2. Commitment to Do No Harm

I will conduct a thorough health history intake process for each client and evaluate the health history to rule out contraindications or determine appropriate session adaptations. If I see signs of, or suspect, an undiagnosed condition that massage may be inappropriate for, I will refer that client to a physician or other qualified health-care professional and delay the massage session until approval from the physician has been granted. I understand the importance of ethical touch and therapeutic intent and will conduct sessions with the sole objective of benefitting the client.

3. Commitment to Honest Representation of Qualifications

I will not work outside the commonly accepted scope of practice for massage therapists and bodywork professionals. I will adhere to my state's scope of practice guidelines (when applicable). I will only provide treatments and techniques for which I am fully trained and hold credible credentials. I will carefully evaluate the needs of each client and refer the client to another provider if the client requires work beyond my capabilities, or beyond the capacity of massage and bodywork. I will not use the trademarks and symbols associated with a particular system or group without authentic affiliation. I will acknowledge the limitations of massage

and bodywork by refraining from exaggerating the benefits of massage therapy and related services throughout my marketing.

4. Commitment to Uphold the Inherent Worth of All Individuals

I will demonstrate compassion, respect, and tolerance for others. I will seek to decrease discrimination, misunderstandings, and prejudice. I understand there are situations when it is appropriate to decline service to a client because it is in the best interests of a client's health, or for my personal safety, but I will not refuse service to any client based on disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, physical build, or sexual orientation; religious, national, or political affiliation; social or economic status.

5. Commitment to Respect Client Dignity and Basic Rights

I will demonstrate my respect for the dignity and rights of all individuals by providing a clean, comfortable, and safe environment for sessions, using appropriate and skilled draping procedures, giving the clients recourse in the event of dissatisfaction with treatment, and upholding the integrity of the therapeutic relationship.

6. Commitment to Informed Consent

I will recognize a client's right to determine what happens to his or her body. I understand that a client may suffer emotional and physical harm if a therapist fails to listen to the client and imposes his or her own beliefs on a situation. I will fully inform my clients of choices relating to their care, and disclose policies and limitations that may affect their care. I will not provide massage without obtaining a client's informed consent (or that of the guardian or advocate for the client) to the session plan.

7. Commitment to Confidentiality

I will keep client communication and information confidential and will not share client information without the client's written consent, within the limits of the law. I will ensure every effort is made to respect a client's right to privacy and provide an environment where personal health-related details cannot be overheard or seen by others.

8. Commitment to Personal and Professional Boundaries

I will refrain from and prevent behaviors that may be considered sexual in my massage practice and uphold the highest professional standards in order to desexualize massage. I will not date a client, engage in sexual intercourse with a client, or allow any level of sexual impropriety (behavior or language) from clients or myself. I understand that sexual impropriety may lead to sexual harassment charges, the loss of my massage credentials, lawsuits for personal damages, criminal charges, fines, attorney's fees, court costs, and jail time.

9. Commitment to Honesty in Business

I will know and follow good business practices with regard to record keeping, regulation compliance, and tax law. I will set fair fees and practice honesty throughout my marketing materials. I will not accept gifts, compensation, or other benefits intended to influence a decision related to a client. If I use the Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals logo, I promise to do so appropriately to establish my credibility and market my practice.

10. Commitment to Professionalism

I will maintain clear and honest communication with clients and colleagues. I will not use recreational drugs or alcohol before or during massage sessions. I will project a professional image with respect to my behavior and personal appearance in keeping with the highest standards of the massage profession. I will not actively seek to take someone else's clients, disrespect a client or colleague, or willingly malign another therapist or other allied professional. I will actively strive to positively promote the massage and bodywork profession by committing to self-development and continually building my professional skills.

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GLOSSARY

Altered state: A state of consciousness in which we are more deeply relaxed, less aware of our thinking minds, and more open and vulnerable than we are in our day-to-day functioning.

Bartering: Used here to mean exchanging a manual therapy session for goods or services other than another manual therapy session.

Boundaries: In this context, a boundary is like a protective circle around the professional relationship that separates what is appropriate between practitioner and client from what is not. Keeping appropriate boundaries includes such behavior as not engaging a client in another kind of relationship, such as a social one, and honoring what is appropriate within the professional relationship, such as confidentiality.

Consultation: A meeting with a professional trained in psychological dynamics to obtain advice and insight about a particular client or issue.

Contract: An agreement between practitioner and client that is often implied rather than explicit about what each will or will not do. An ethical contract must be within the bounds of the practitioner's training and the ethical standards of her or his profession. The client agrees to give specific fees, goods, or services in return and agrees to be respectful of the practitioner's guidelines for appropriate behavior.

Countertransference: When a practitioner allows unresolved feelings and personal issues to influence his relationship with a client.

Dual relationships: Having a relationship with a client other than the contractual therapeutic one, such as having a client who is also a friend, family member, or business associate.

Emotionally-oriented bodywork: Manual therapy that is based on the idea that physical tension and restriction are related to unconscious patterns of holding that the client has adopted, often early in life, to cope with his or her emotional environment. The practitioner facilitates the client in releasing these tension patterns for the greater emotional and physical well-being of the client. Also called, *psychologically-oriented bodywork*.

Framework: The logistics by which practitioners define themselves as professional and create a safe atmosphere for clients. Framework includes the ways that we present ourselves in advertising, the preparation of the physical setting, policies on fees and time, and such ground rules as keeping the focus on the client.

- Informed consent:** The client's authorization for services to be performed by the practitioner. The client or the client's guardian must be fully advised of what the service will entail and its benefits and any contraindications and must be competent to give consent.
- Manual therapists:** Trained professionals who touch the physical or energetic body of the client using a method of movement to affect the body of a client for the purpose of facilitating awareness, health, and well-being. The term as used here is interchangeable with *somatic practitioners* and includes massage therapists, bodyworkers, movement educators, practitioners of Eastern methods, and practitioners who work primarily with energy fields.
- Mentor:** A trusted colleague who provides guidance and education. Mentors are usually helpful in advising on both the details of establishing oneself as a professional and the broader general aspects of taking on a professional role or of taking on the role of a particular kind of bodywork or massage practitioner.
- Peer group:** A group of colleagues who meet regularly to discuss common issues related to their professional lives, to share information and strategies, and to receive emotional support.
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** A type of anxiety disorder that can develop after experiencing a very traumatic or life-threatening event. It can cause flashbacks; sleep problems; nightmares; hypervigilance; feelings of isolation, guilt, and paranoia; and sometimes panic attacks.
- Power differential:** A concept used to describe a professional relationship where one person is viewed to have more knowledge and authority than the other, such as the client–therapist relationship.
- Professional therapeutic relationship:** A relationship between client and practitioner that is focused on the well-being of the client and is contractual.
- Right of refusal:** The entitlement of both the client and the practitioner to end a session or to decline to receive or give a particular kind of manipulation or technique.
- Role-playing:** Usually a structured exercise in which students or colleagues take a role—for instance, as client or practitioner—and act out a specific situation as a way of becoming more comfortable with handling the situation in real life.
- Scope of practice:** The traditional knowledge base and standard practices of the profession.
- Sliding scale:** Using a sliding scale to determine fees means that you offer a range of fees based on the client's income. For instance, someone who has a low salary would pay your lowest rate of \$40 per hour and a wealthier person would pay your standard rate of \$90 an hour, with gradations in between.

Supervision: An ongoing arrangement made with a professional trained in psychological dynamics for help with the relationship aspects of a practitioner's work. Supervision includes clarifying the client's transference issues and the practitioner's countertransference issues, suggesting effective interventions and identifying the practitioner's vulnerabilities and areas of strength.

Therapeutic contract: An agreement between practitioner and client that is often implied rather than being explicit about what each will or will not do. An ethical contract must be within the bounds of the practitioner's training and the ethical standards of his or her profession. The client agrees to give specific fees, goods, or services in return and agrees to be respectful of the practitioner's guidelines for appropriate behavior.

Therapeutic relationship: A relationship between client and practitioner that is focused on the well-being of the client.

Trade: Exchanging a manual therapy session for a manual therapy session with a colleague.

Transference: When a client unconsciously projects (transfers) unresolved feelings, needs, and issues—usually from childhood and usually related to parent or other authority figures—onto a practitioner.

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