

# LAWS, RULES, AND REGULATIONS

## CHAPTER PREVIEW

- Laws, rules, and regulations affecting your massage therapy business and your actions
- Why and how laws are made
- Importance of knowing laws, rules, and regulations
- Ethical practice within the boundaries of laws, rules, and regulations

## KEY TERMS

**Accountability:** showing the responsibility or proof of performing a task or duty

**Civil law:** system of law involving relationships or disputes between two parties

**Criminal law:** system of law regarding actions that are harmful to the public

**Laws:** rules established and enforced by governing bodies that protect or restrict actions by all citizens or specific parties

**Ordinances:** rules and regulations established at the local level

**Regulations:** rules of conduct that are often associated with laws, involving an expansion or explanation of the laws

In almost every walk of life, laws, rules, and regulations affect how we act. Laws, ranging from guidelines for duties such as paying taxes to protecting us from injury, violence, and damage to our personal belongings, affect everyone. Laws and regulations are rules that governing bodies have determined people must follow. In most cases the governing body also states the consequences for people who do not obey the laws.

Laws are enacted not only to protect the public from harm but also to keep agencies and governing bodies running smoothly and with **accountability**. With civil law, for example, governing bodies give citizens the right to file a lawsuit against another party for damages when they feel they have been wronged.

In this chapter, you will learn about the importance of laws, rules, and regulations; how they affect your massage practice; and how ethical behavior involves working within laws and regulations.

## LAWS

**Laws** are passed to protect the public, to keep governing bodies running effectively, and to set guidelines for appropriate behavior. Almost all countries have some structure of laws that states what behaviors are acceptable and what are not. The laws of different countries vary greatly, often depending on the type of government that runs the country and that society's ideas of right and wrong. In the United States we elect officials at the national, state, and local levels to set our guidelines. Literally thousands of laws, rules, and regulations are created every year by these governing bodies.

Each level of government establishes rules of conduct for a defined population. Our national governing body is the U.S. Congress, the legislature, a branch of the federal government. We elect representatives and senators to serve in Congress. They create the laws for the entire nation for matters

such as taxes, the environment, criminal acts, and business operations. Federal laws and regulations apply to everyone in the United States.

At the state level, we also elect officials who serve in a state legislature. The laws and regulations created by this body affect people living only within that state. A state legislature passes laws, for example, that may give the people in that state additional protections beyond those in federal law. A state cannot pass a law that is contradictory to a federal law, however. For example, if the U.S. Congress passes a law making it illegal to dump certain chemicals in any river, a state cannot override that law to authorize this dumping in the state. In some instances, the federal government may set certain general guidelines for the entire nation but allow states to determine specific aspects of that regulation. Setting the speed limits for highways is an example. The maximum speed limit may be 65 or 70 miles an hour for all federal highways, but a state can set a lower speed limit in areas it deems dangerous. Other areas are left entirely to the states to determine what laws may be needed. This is the case with licensure for massage therapy. Currently some states have laws and regulations pertaining to massage, while in other states only cities or counties have regulations. Some areas have no state laws or regulations or local ordinances that apply to massage therapy.

Currently, no national laws govern the practice of massage and bodywork. Although it might seem beneficial to have consistent laws, rules, and regulations that apply to all therapists in all locations, there is no present movement toward this goal. The National Certification Exam is currently accepted as a test for licensure in many states, but it is not required at the national level. Not all states that require licensure for massage and bodywork accept the National Certification Exam as a requirement for their state licensure. Because of such differences, you must research the laws and regulations of any state or area where you are thinking of building a practice.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF LAW AND ETHICS

Laws and ethics are closely related but are not the same thing. Many laws are based on ethical principles. For example, it is unethical to hurt someone, and laws also make this a criminal act and apply some form of punishment.

When a law is broken, police and the court system take action against the offender. With a civil offense, individuals may file lawsuits against others who they feel have wronged them. When an ethical offense occurs, however, it may be a professional association that takes action against the offender. For example, if

a client feels unfairly treated by a therapist, the client can file a complaint with the association, which then determines if indeed an unethical act has occurred and what should be done.

Laws at the national and local levels cover many actions and behaviors, but they cannot cover every possible aspect of what is right and wrong. Unscrupulous people will always try to “bend” the law or find loopholes in the law. A society’s ethical principles may clearly indicate what is right or wrong, but unfortunately some individuals will not behave within those parameters but may still avoid breaking the law.

The law also changes to reflect current beliefs and issues. For example, in the early and mid-2000s, our society has emphasized business law and ethics. Many criminal and civil proceedings involved corporations and their owners or directors. Many criminal cases and individual lawsuits focused on activities involving the stock market. In general, laws change with the times and a society’s needs. Ethical principles, however, do not change as easily, because our society generally has a strong foundation of right and wrong. Yet at times ethics and the law may conflict. For example, some would argue that legal limitations on gay rights in some areas conflict with the general ethical principle of fairness.

Massage therapists should accept the responsibility to know both the laws and ethical codes that apply to their profession. This information is readily accessible with research. Even if you do not join a professional association, adopting an accepting ethical code for your own professional practice will help your clients know that their well-being is important to you.

## WHO MAKES LAWS?

Laws, **ordinances**, rules, and **regulations** are all created at various levels of government. Citizens must follow all federal and state laws as well as local ordinances. State laws generally have similarities and differences from state to state. For the practice of massage and bodywork, 33 states now have some regulations. Most of these states define criteria for a license to practice, such as a certain number of hours of massage training, and many require a certification examination. In addition, most create a board to oversee practice and the profession within the state. In other states, local or county regulations often apply to therapists. It is the responsibility of all therapists to become educated about what local, county, and state regulations apply to their practice.

States differ, however, in other regulatory matters, such as the number of hours of training required, the type of examination used, the makeup of the

board that regulates the profession, and the cost of licensure. For example, in some states the medical board oversees massage practice, while other states have a separate board that regulates only massage.

Often local ordinances also regulate the practice of massage. Some community ordinances have education requirements for therapists, some require background checks and health examinations, and some regulate geographical areas where a practice can or cannot be located. Some communities have no specific regulations at all for massage and bodywork businesses. Most communities have general regulations that require anyone opening any business to have a business license. Some communities have additional rules and regulations for certain types of business such as massage therapy, doctor's offices, manufacturing plants, and food establishments. Every therapist planning to work in any community should ask at city hall or the county offices about the requirements for practice within that community. Opening a practice without completing the proper paperwork could lead to closure or fines by the local authorities.

Therefore, you need to know all laws and regulate pertaining to your location. You will learn your own state's requirements during your massage training, but if you are considering practicing in another state, you should contact officials there to learn its requirements for massage practice. Among different states, the training requirements range from 300 to more than 1,000 hours of training in order to be licensed to practice massage and bodywork. When relocating, you should contact both the state and local governments about licensure requirements. For example, if your current school offers a training program of 720 hours and you are thinking about relocating to another state, you should first contact that state's secretary of state office to learn how many hours of training are required. If it requires more than 720 hours, you will need additional training before you can begin practice there. Many other professions such as nursing, chiropractic, athletic training, and physical therapy are also regulated by state guidelines and laws.

## PROCESS OF MAKING LAWS

In the United States, at the national level, the government has three primary branches: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Congress is the legislative branch that, in keeping with the Constitution, passes legislation for laws and regulations. Congress consists of senators and representatives elected to serve in the Congress. The executive branch also consists of elected officials, led and directed by the President. The judicial branch consists of the federal

court system, in which federal judges are appointed by the executive branch and confirmed by the legislative branch. The Constitution designed this system of checks and balances to prevent any one branch of government from having too much power. For example, the executive branch can veto a law made by the legislature, and a court can rule on the constitutionality of a law. All branches are subject to the principles of the Constitution.

In general, laws are created because a need is shown for some type of regulation. Interested parties, agencies, or legislators assert that some regulation is needed for a particular behavior or practice or for the regulation of a professional group. For example, health care for elderly individuals is a major concern in our country today. Many legislators are looking at ways to make health care more affordable for elderly people. Many states are considering laws to reduce the cost of prescriptions, medical treatments, and nursing care. Special interest groups representing the elderly population present their arguments to a state legislator who may then propose a bill with specific steps to protect the group. Legislators may also reject the arguments of special interest groups proposing legislation if they do not believe there is a need for the new legislation or do not believe the legislation could pass. Different states have enacted laws regulating massage for a variety of reasons. Some view such laws as a way to protect the public from unscrupulous practitioners, while others may do so to provide guidelines for the education of massage therapists and to define the scope of practice for massage therapy.

Once a senator or representative decides to propose a new law, the process begins. The proposed legislation, called a bill, is first written. In most cases, this step requires study and research and possibly many months of writing and rewriting. Different interested parties often work together during this process to produce a final version of the bill, which is then presented to the legislature. In the case of massage practice, interested parties may include national and state massage associations, coalitions, special interest groups, and individual therapists. It is a costly process to produce legislation, and in many cases the funding is supplied by one of these groups. Special interest groups, associations, and coalitions help with this process to assure that laws and regulations are written to help ensure the safety of the public and to ensure that therapists are not unfairly restricted in their practice. For example, testing massage therapists for sexually transmitted diseases would be not only unrealistic and unfair but a burden for many.

The next step is for the legislature to consider the bill. The bill is introduced, is given a number, and is

usually referred to a committee. A bill concerning massage and bodywork may be referred to a professional licensing and regulation committee or to a health care committee; each state has its own system of committees. When the committee receives a bill, it has three choices. It can set up hearings, discuss it within the committee, or decide not to discuss it at all. The committee chair often makes the decision whether a bill does or does not move forward.

Another group or individual can affect the legislative process at this point: lobbyists. A lobbyist employed by an interested party or business meets with the committee chair or other legislators to convince them of the need for passing the bill. At the same time, a lobbyist from another group opposed to the bill may be trying to convince the committee to drop the bill. Lobbyists can be hired by any group with an interest in the outcome of the legislation. Associations, coalitions, businesses, and special interest groups often fund the proposed legislation and lobbyists. Massage associations too have worked with lobbyists to affect the outcomes of legislation.

While the committee is considering a bill, it may hold hearings. In a public hearing anyone with an interest in the bill can make a presentation to the committee to argue for or against the bill. In addition, if committee members see a need for a change in the bill, they may rewrite a portion of the bill.

Once the bill is final, if the committee decides to bring it to the full Senate or House of Representatives, the bill then passes to that legislative body for discussion and a vote. At this stage the media often report on legislative debates about bills that involve some controversy. If the bill passes the first legislative body, it then goes to the other body. For example, a bill that passes in the House of Representatives then goes to the Senate for consideration. In the Senate it is assigned to another committee, which goes through the same process again. Often the full process from proposal to enactment of a law can take 3 to 5 years. In any given year, most state legislatures consider 100 to 200 bills. This process involves a considerable amount of information, especially since most state legislatures meet only 3 or 4 months of the year.

If changes are made to the bill while it is in the second house, it may be sent to a committee made up of legislators from both houses, called a conference or consensus committee. This committee tries to work out the differences, and if they do, the revised bill is then sent back to both houses for a vote. Lobbyists are often involved in all aspects of trying to get the bill passed.

Once a bill passes through both chambers without additional changes, it then goes to the governor to be signed into law. The governor has the right to veto

the bill if he or she disagrees with it. The legislature then may or may not attempt to override the veto with another vote. If the governor signs the bill or the legislature overrides a veto, the bill becomes law.

Listed below are some examples of laws governing massage therapy:

- The state of Missouri requires a minimum of 500 hours of massage training in a state-approved school. This includes instructors who have been approved by the State Board of Therapeutic Massage.
- Florida law states a license can be denied or disciplinary action can be taken for fraudulent representation in the practice of massage.
- Some states now require all massage therapists to have continuing education hours for license renewal.

On the local city or county level, governing bodies establish regulations, generally called ordinances. An ordinance adds to existing federal and state laws to meet the specific needs of the community. For example, a business license is required in most communities. Local ordinances may also require a building inspection, business applications, and a business fee to open a business.

Elected officials at the local level may be called city councilors, aldermen, or selectmen. They perform in much the same way as legislative officials do at the state and national levels. An interested party who sees a need for guidelines brings a proposal before the city council or board. The board may consider the proposal or may refer it to a special group or committee for a recommendation. Public hearings may be held to hear the community's opinions, followed by further debate or a vote.

Local requirements for massage therapists, like state regulations, can be quite diverse. In some communities, old ordinances and regulations can hamper massage therapists today. Many of these ordinances were enacted to restrict massage parlors. For example, in some cities it is illegal to operate a massage business within 500 feet of a school, church, or bar. Many massage therapists have worked to help update such outdated regulations.

Listed below are some examples of local ordinances that still affect massage and bodywork:

- Any person engaged in the practice of massage must submit to a background check for a criminal record.
- A person wishing to practice massage within the city limits must undergo a health examination by a licensed doctor.
- A massage therapy practice must keep a log of all clients for a minimum of 2 years.

## EXERCISE 4-1

Contact two therapists in your area and ask if you can interview them. Ask questions such as these:

1. What state laws and local ordinances affect you and your practice?
2. Were these laws in place when you opened your practice or did they come about after you were already in business? If the latter, what changes did you have to make?
3. Have these rules affected your practice in a positive way?
4. Have these rules affected your practice in any negative way?
5. Should additional rules be made to protect you or your clients?

Report back to your class what you have found.

- A window must be present in any massage room.
- A person wanting to practice massage must undergo a check for sexually transmitted diseases.

## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS

Once a law is passed and is on the books, that law must be enforced. The law itself specifies who is to enforce it. For example, **criminal laws** are enforced by the police and court system, which act upon violations of that law. People who break the law are arrested and brought before a court to determine if they are guilty or innocent and what the appropriate punishment should be.

In cases such as the regulation of a profession, a state board may oversee enforcement of the law. A state board is usually made up of people in the profession, who work to help therapists follow state laws and regulations and who respond to violations. For example, if a bodyworker is practicing without a required state license, the board may send a cease-and-desist order stating the person must stop the practice of bodywork until he or she has applied and been accepted for licensure. If this person does not stop practicing, he or she could be subject to a fine or other penalty, again according to what the law prescribes. The law or regulations related to it generally define what the board has the power to do when a violation takes place.

All professional boards must work within the requirements of the laws. If a law states a board can fine a person for practicing without a license, the board can do so upon evidence that this violation has happened. Boards work with legal council, often a state attorney, when enforcing laws and regulations. A practitioner who has questions or concerns about a law should always address the state board for clarification.

### Key Points

- Most laws are made to protect the public.
- Currently, laws, rules, and regulations affecting massage and bodywork are passed and enforced at the state and local levels.
- Laws, rules, and regulations vary at the state, county, and local levels.
- It is important to know what rules apply to you in your practice.

## CASE STUDY

Judith had graduated from massage school about a year ago and had been working at a local spa several days a week. Then because of her husband's job relocation, they had to move to another town a few hours away. Since massage therapists can move fairly easily, Judith was confident that she could start another practice in their new town. After moving, she looked for a good location for her practice. She decided to open her own office and have space for other therapists to work.

She checked with the city offices to obtain copies of any rules or ordinances that applied. She had found a great location and was getting anxious to get a lease signed and open for business. She read the ordinances and found that a massage practice could not be located within 500 feet of a church, school, or bar. The ordinance seemed rather archaic to her, and as it happened, the office space she wanted to use was close to a small church. When she called city hall and inquired about this, she was told this ordinance had been on the books for over 25 years and would be enforced.

Judith contacted one of the alderman in her town and asked about the possibility of changing the ordinance. The alderman listened to her arguments and asked her to state her case at an aldermanic meeting. She was put on the agenda for the next meeting. Judith did some research, including contacting the national association that she belonged to. The association provided her with information about why these ordinances had originally been passed and how many communities had changed or updated such rules. Judith

appeared before the board and presented a valid case for changing these rules. The board agreed with her and thanked her for her education about massage therapy. This rule was then changed, and Judith opened her practice a month later.

## RULES AND REGULATIONS

When a new law is enacted, the governing body may set up a state board to oversee the law. In many states, the board is appointed by the governor. The board generally has 5 to 10 members, most from the profession involved, but many states also appoint a member of the public or someone from a related field. For example, some states may require that a nurse or chiropractor sit on the state board of massage.

The board's goal is to make the law work in practical ways for the profession. This requires a set of rules and regulations, often called the "rules and regs." The rules and regulations expand on the law itself, including explanations for how practitioners should do what the law requires. The board cannot go beyond what the law states it should do, and in most cases one of the state's attorneys helps the board determine where this line is. Typically, once a law has passed and the board is seated, it can take more than a year to write the rules and regulations. Checks and balances are important, and in most states once the rules are written, a public hearing is held to allow practitioners and the general public to respond to the proposed rules. After the public hearing, the board may rewrite the rules and regulations as needed to work more efficiently.

Rules and regulations are important to help delineate the law. Most laws involve general principles and contain general language that may seem vague in certain areas. If laws were left to individual interpretation, opinions would vary about what they mean. Rules and regulations, therefore, help define the intent of the law. For example, a law may generally state that massage therapists must practice the principles of safe sanitation, and the rules may more specifically state that a 10% bleach solution must be used to disinfect all equipment that comes in contact with clients and that massage therapists must wash their hands with an antibacterial soap between clients. As simple as this may sound, it is important for the rules and regulations to be clear and specific guidelines so that there is no room for varying interpretations. For example, if a client complained that a therapist did not use good sanitation, unless the rules and regulations clearly defined good sanitation, the board could have difficulty determining whether the

therapist was sanitary or not. Clearly defined rules can prevent varying interpretations of the law.

Another example is a clarification of the exact amount of training needed for licensure. The law may state that 500 hours of training are required. The rules may further state that certain numbers of hours are required in certain categories such as anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, massage theory and techniques, pathology, ethics, health and safety issues, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

## WHY RULES AND REGULATIONS ARE NECESSARY

Rules and regulations are extensions of the law intended to guide those affected by the law in practical applications. The rules and regulations help to guide persons in the specifics of what is acceptable and unacceptable in their practice. It may take a long time and considerable effort to change a law, but a rule or regulation that is not working can generally be changed with less effort.

More importantly, the rules are there for those whom they affect. They protect both the public and the therapist from harm with clear-cut guidelines. For example, if a client files a complaint against a therapist about insufficient draping and the state regulations clearly define what the minimal draping should be, the state board can then work with the therapist to use draping practices that are appropriate for clients. If the regulations did not clarify the specifics of required draping, however, board members would then have to determine what they felt was appropriate—an issue that, again, is subject to a great deal of interpretation. Rules and regulations are necessary to reduce the amount of interpretation needed to determine whether a violation has occurred.

From an ethical viewpoint, rules and regulations can help prevent ethical questions and situations from arising in the first place. With the draping example, some therapists may not see it as an ethical issue if a client is not draped, yet the client may feel violated. But if a regulation states that certain areas of the body must be covered during massage, then the rule is very clear. If a therapist ignores this rule, the client has cause to file a complaint. Regulations are also helpful in the opposite case. If a client does not want to be draped, it is easy for the therapist to tell the client that not using draping is against the state law.

Another example is a regulation that requires the client's informed consent for treatment. Some states specifically state what information is required for massage treatments. An additional example is a requirement of confidentiality for all clients.

### CASE STUDY

A new state law was enacted, and the state board began writing rules and regulations for a public hearing. This state law defined massage. Chair massage was not specifically mentioned in the law or the regulations, and some therapists assumed that licensure was not required if they performed only chair massage. The state board heard about this interpretation and decided to revise the regulations to include language regarding chair massage to clarify that therapists who performed only chair massage were also affected by the law.

It is important not to interpret laws, rules, and regulations on your own. When in doubt, ask your governing body.

## ENFORCEMENT AND CONSEQUENCES

Laws specify who oversees enforcement and the consequences of violations. When a criminal act is committed, for example, law enforcement agencies are directly involved with arresting suspects and pressing charges. A trial and possible sentence may follow. If a regulatory law is violated, the state board accepts a complaint, holds a hearing, and makes its determination. If a therapist is found at fault, the law or the rules and regulations provide the board with enforcement guidelines. For example, if a therapist performs a technique not within his or her defined scope of practice according to state law, a client could file a complaint with the state board. Following the rules and regulations, the board would then determine what action to take against the therapist. Actions could include a letter of reprimand, or suspension or revocation of a therapist's license to practice.

## CIVIL LAW

**Civil law** is another type of law governing people's behavior. In a lawsuit, one party feels that he or she has been harmed in some way by another party. There may not have been a clear violation of a law or regulation, but the person could still be harmed. Rules and laws address as many issues as possible, but there can be gaps that allow for civil actions to take place. Unethical behavior may be involved. In civil law, one party (called the plaintiff) files suit against another party (called the defendant), seeking damages or restitution. For example, a client may feel a therapist has injured him or her in some way during a therapy session, causing pain and suffering. If the client feels the therapist caused this injury, the client may seek financial damages from the thera-

pist. In civil cases law enforcement agencies and the state board may not be involved. Instead, both parties are represented by lawyers. The case may end with an out-of-court settlement, or the parties may go to court to settle their differences. If so, a judge or jury weighs the arguments of both sides and reaches a decision about whether the defendant did in fact cause an injury and the amount of damages to award the plaintiff.

In reality, anyone can file a lawsuit against anyone else at almost any time. Being sued does not mean you are guilty of anything, nor does a lawsuit automatically lead to any penalty. The legal system is set up to protect the innocent as well as to provide compensation for injured parties. **If you practice massage therapy as you have been trained and within your scope of practice, you should not be afraid of lawsuits.**

### Key Points

- Rules and regulations define areas of the law.
- Rules and regulations clarify the practical specifics of laws.
- Rules and regulations provide guidelines for both therapists and the public.

## SPECIFIC LEGAL ISSUES

### SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The scope of practice for a massage therapist can be defined by a state law, professional association, or local ordinances. The scope states what a therapist can or cannot do while practicing as a massage therapist, technician, or bodyworker. These parameters help therapists understand what the public expects from massage therapy and, more importantly, states the boundaries for therapists. For example, a state law may include in the scope of practice that a therapist can use certain mechanical devices.

Scope of practice can vary somewhat between a state's law and a professional association's statement of scope. Although they may be very similar in many ways, therapists must be aware of any differences and must practice under the definition enforced by state law. It is important therefore to read and understand your state's scope of practice regulations.

### MALPRACTICE INSURANCE

Malpractice insurance is a type of insurance for professionals that pays the damages a professional

may face if sued by a client. Medical malpractice lawsuits are often in the news, and most medical professionals purchase malpractice insurance. Medical malpractice premiums are generally expensive because lawsuits are common and juries often award large sums for damages. In massage therapy, few lawsuits are filed against therapists are low, and malpractice insurance premiums. Malpractice insurance can be purchased through professional associations or a private insurance broker. One should do some research to choose the best and most appropriate policy. Several insurance companies offer policies specifically for massage therapists and bodyworkers. Some states now require massage therapists to purchase malpractice insurance.

## CONTRACTS

Massage therapists enter into contracts with employers, employees, clients, landlords, insurance companies, and other businesses, depending on the type of practice. For example, therapists working in a spa may have a contract with the spa that spells out the expectations for both parties. In many situations only a verbal agreement takes place between the two parties.

A contract is a legal document, and as a general rule it is good to seek legal advice before signing any contract. Both parties should agree on all terms of a contract. If someone pushes you to sign a contract, such as an employment contract if you are hired by a facility, do not be intimidated to sign without reading the document. Thoroughly read the entire contract and have someone else help you determine if the contract is fair before signing. If needed, changes can be made to help both parties come to an agreement.

## SPECIFIC ELEMENTS WITHIN LAWS

State laws may include a great variety of specific legal issues. When you are preparing to become licensed or to practice in an area, obtain copies of laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances pertaining to your practice. Many therapists are surprised to discover how many details are contained within these documents. A state law may address client confidentiality, for example, or issues such as employer liability and responsibilities. Do HIPAA (**Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act**) regulations referring to client records apply in the state? Could certain antidiscrimination regulations affect a massage practice? If you have any questions concerning any part of a law or ordinance, contact the governing body and don't be afraid to ask questions. Understanding the expectations before beginning practice is much better than having to make changes

later when a problem arises because you did not know about a specific regulation or ordinance.

Laws and regulations do not apply only to those who run their own business. Even if you practice within someone else's business, the state laws and local ordinances still apply. For example, if you work in the office of a chiropractor, you are not exempt from laws and ordinances within your area. Being informed and educated about the law is all part of being a professional.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN THE KNOW

When you decided to begin a career as a bodyworker, you took on the responsibility of learning how to practice appropriately. This involves not only being well trained in massage techniques but also knowing the expectations of governing bodies. "I didn't know" is not a legal defense—and is not an excuse that any professional should ever use. Both the general public and those who enforce the law expect you to know the laws that apply to your practice.

Before you begin your practice, it is crucial for you to learn about any laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances that may pertain to your practice. You may need to check at the national, state, and local levels. If your state requires that you take the National Certification Examination, for example,

## EXERCISE 4-2

1. Obtain a copy of your state's law regulating massage therapy. If your state does not currently have a law, research whether legislation is currently in process. Using the Internet, look for the Web site of your state government. Most state sites allow a search using key words for proposed and passed legislation. Obtain a copy of any legislation or laws that will apply to you and your massage therapy practice. Note: If you do not have access to a computer, you can also call the secretary of state's office, which should be able to guide you to the appropriate department or documentation.
2. Go to city hall in the city where you think you may establish a practice. State that you will soon be graduating from massage therapy school and want information about local ordinances that apply to practice. Obtain copies of any local ordinances or regulations along with a business application.
3. Show and tell. Tell classmates what you have learned about your state's and community's requirements.



and a local ordinance states that you must have 750 hours of training in order to practice, you cannot practice until you meet both of these criteria. Most massage programs teach their students at least the state-level requirements. It may be up to you, however, to learn what is expected at the local level. Take the time to get all the specifics—it's better to be safe than sorry. There have been cases of therapists who set up a practice only to find out they did not meet the requirements in their local community.

Therapists should also stay networked within the massage community to stay current in the law. Laws, rules, and regulations change sometimes, and such changes can affect how you practice or your whole career. For example, if your state increases the number of continuing education hours required for license renewal, you would need to make plans to meet this requirement.

### CASE STUDY

A therapist who had been in practice at a hospital for a number of years decided to venture out on her own. She found a great office location in a community where no other therapists were practicing and rented the space. She had to put down a sizable deposit as this was a very good neighborhood and available spaces were hard to find. She bought furniture and hired a receptionist and had 5,000 brochures printed along with cards, gift certificates, and stationery with her new address. She put an ad in the paper for her grand opening, which cost her more than \$1,000. She was excited about her new place of business and her grand opening.

Then she got a call from City Hall asking when she was going to apply for her business license. The city clerk had seen her ad and knew she had not processed an application. She immediately went to City Hall, thinking she would probably have to pay \$100 and fill out some paperwork (Fig. 4-1). When she arrived, she found that the city required a building and fire inspection, which would take about 2 weeks to complete. Her grand opening was already set for the following week. The city clerk tried to help her meet her deadline, but the fire inspector found a couple of code violations and the building inspector also found some problems. The landlord was willing to make the fire inspector's changes, but the building inspector was asking for more changes than the landlord felt he could afford from the rental income generated by her space. The former tenant had run a one-person private office and did not meet with the public. Her public business would require the landlord to add two extra parking spaces and handicapped access into the office. In the

end, the therapist had to forfeit a great deal of money, because her lease stated that the landlord did not have to make improvements and that deposits would be forfeited if she left before the lease expired.

This mistake was a hard lesson for this therapist to learn, but is a valuable one for all therapists to hear. If the therapist had first checked with city hall and had the inspections before putting a deposit on the office space and spending money on printing and advertising, she could have saved a great deal of time and money.

It is the responsibility of all massage therapists to become educated in legal matters and understand what laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances apply to them (Fig. 4-2). **It is also important to not interpret any laws, rules, and regulations on your own.** When in doubt, ask the people in charge. Talk to your state board or your city government. Students sometimes feel frustrated in having to deal with officials, but this is part of the educational process and there is much to be said for knowing just what you have to do. The Internet is often a valuable resource for getting information and applications when needed. In addition, check with your school and other therapists in your community to see what they have done, but be careful when acting on personal information because not



**FIGURE 4-1** ■ A new therapist should research local ordinances that apply to her business.



**FIGURE 4-2** ■ It is the responsibility of all therapists to know what laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances apply to their practice.

everyone follows all the appropriate guidelines. When in doubt, ask. If you are the first therapist in your community, don't be surprised if your city officials are unsure about appropriate guidelines for massage therapists. In this case, you may need to meet with the officials to help create guidelines for your community. Find ordinances and regulations from other communities to help the process along. Be patient, and remember the person you are talking to may become a client or someone who tells other people about your new practice.

### Key Points

- Know your state and local regulations and laws.
- Not knowing is not an excuse.
- Research and ask questions.

## SUMMARY

Knowing the legal requirements for practicing as a massage therapist or bodyworker makes it much easier to attain that goal. State laws and local ordinances will likely affect your practice, and it is your responsibility to know what these are.

Laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances may seem overwhelming at first, but realize that they are there for your protection as well as the public's protection. During your career as a therapist, at times a law or a rule will provide safety and helpful guidelines for dealing with a difficult situation or client. Laws and rules help to define many areas, but a therapist must also take the responsibility to act ethically when the rules leave room for interpretation. In some cases old rules or ordinances on the books may seem irrelevant, archaic, or old-fashioned. Be proactive and help educate those who can help update these rules. Being aware, setting your boundaries, and knowing the importance of acting ethically will be a tremendous boost for you as a therapist and for your clients as well as the general public who may become clients in the future.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

After you and your classmates have a sense of what laws and rules apply to a massage therapy practice in your area, have a class discussion to answer these questions:

1. What areas of the law or rules protect clients?
2. What areas of the law protect therapists?
3. Do any areas of law restrict the practice of massage or cause hardship for therapists?
4. Do any areas of law need more definition?
5. How many of the therapists you and your classmates interviewed were well educated about laws and regulations?
6. How would you go about changing a law or rule that needs revision?

# BOUNDARIES

## CHAPTER PREVIEW

- The importance of boundaries for both the client and the therapist
- Why boundaries are sometimes crossed
- Defining and maintaining boundaries
- How to manage a crossed boundary

## KEY TERMS

**Boundaries:** limits between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors

**Emotional boundaries:** limits for keeping therapeutic sessions focused on the client's body rather than emotions

**Physical boundaries:** the physical lines or limitations in relation to a client's body that a therapist should not cross

**Professional boundaries:** the limits of acceptable professional behavior

**Sexual boundaries:** limits to prevent ever sexualizing any aspect of bodywork

**Social boundaries:** limits for keeping the relationship with clients professional rather than social

**B**oundaries are one of the most important dimensions of the practice of massage therapy and bodywork. Issues involving boundaries are among the most frequently discussed topics by professionals in practice and are also often an area of concern for new and potential clients.

What exactly are boundaries? The word itself is often used in two different ways. First, there are personal boundaries between you and the client: **physical boundaries, emotional boundaries,** and so on. If you have ever been unexpectedly touched by a stranger in a public place, you know what it feels like to have someone cross your personal boundary. Obviously, massage therapy involves touch, but there are still boundaries between the therapist and clients in terms of where the body is touched and how.

A second meaning of the word boundaries involves limits of behavior. We often speak of “crossing the

line” or “going too far” when issues of acceptable or unacceptable behavior are involved. In this sense the boundary is the limit, the line between acceptable and unacceptable. Often in massage therapy both meanings of boundaries are present at the same time. For example, a boundary issue occurs if a therapist touches a client in a sexual way, because the therapist has crossed a boundary between self and the client and has also crossed the line from acceptable behavior to unacceptable behavior.

Laws, rules, and regulations define many necessary boundaries, such as **sexual boundaries** and physical boundaries. In other areas, however, boundaries are not always so clear-cut, and there is no simple set of rules that everyone in the profession follows. New and even experienced practitioners can have difficulty defining and understanding where exactly the boundaries are. It is often challenging for new practitioners to know exactly

where lines need to be drawn. The standards of the profession leave some things open to interpretation about what is acceptable or unacceptable for both the therapist and clients, sometimes causing confusion. It is not always clear what guidelines should be followed.

In the therapeutic relationship, a therapist also cannot always know precisely what the client may view as acceptable or unacceptable. How can you know if you are crossing a line if a client does not bring it to your attention? Establishing your own general guidelines and discussing and defining them individually with each of your clients would seem to take a great deal of energy and time. Nonetheless, you can start your career with a strong foundation of your own principles, knowing where your boundaries are and accepting the guidelines of the profession. This chapter explores why boundaries are important for both the therapist and clients, what happens when lines are crossed, and how to manage boundary issues in your new practice.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BOUNDARIES

There are several different types of boundaries in the therapist–client relationship. These include physical boundaries involving issues such as draping, what areas of the body should or should not be worked on, and the types of work performed. Emotional boundaries between the client and therapist are also important. As Elliott Greene and Barbara Goodrich-Dunn write in *The Psychology of the Body*, “Boundaries of behavior serve to facilitate the therapeutic process, create safety, and protect the integrity of the client and therapist.” The therapist and client should agree where the appropriate boundaries lie in the bodywork relationship. From the time you enter into a professional relationship with a new client, the client should expect you to maintain the parameters of that relationship.

Yet all too often, the professional relationship can begin without clear definitions of the parameters or boundaries that both parties feel are acceptable. To help prevent this potential problem, some therapists include a brief section on their intake form that states their scope of practice, and other therapists ask new clients to read their written policies before sessions begin. In these ways therapists can describe their boundaries for clients. But clients, too, come into the professional relationship with their own expectations regarding physical and professional boundaries, and it is similarly important for the therapist to know what these

expectations are in order to work effectively with the client. The therapist and client both need to communicate their expectations and parameters to each other to begin a productive therapeutic relationship.

## DEFINING BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are based on guidelines that help you maintain a professional image for your clients and others in the profession. Establishing and maintaining your own exact boundaries is an important step in the practice of bodywork. Still, most therapists eventually face unanticipated situations or situations in which the usual rules do not seem to apply. In situations like this, you may need to be somewhat flexible while remaining strong within your beliefs and foundation. For example, if a state regulation states that clients should be provided privacy while dressing and undressing but a disabled client needs assistance undressing, the therapist will need to still maintain as much privacy as possible for the client while assisting.

### BOX 5-1 *Types of Boundaries*

**Physical boundaries** involve physical limits that neither the therapist nor client should cross. In some states, laws, rules, and regulations spell out clear-cut boundaries in this arena. Where there are no rules to follow regarding physical boundaries, clients generally expect the therapist to have guidelines that help them feel safe.

*Example:* When you are working on a client’s inner thigh, the draping creates a line that a therapist should not cross. A client who feels unsafe or unsure about you working in this area may react by saying something or showing discomfort by tensing up, moving away from your hands, or fidgeting on the table. Even though the sheet is the physical boundary, a client can still feel uncomfortable while the therapist works on different parts of the body.

**Social boundaries** are boundaries between a therapist and client that prevent the relationship from becoming too social rather than professional, including the expectations by each that the other will follow acceptable standards of behavior.

*Example:* A client enters into the therapeutic relationship expecting to receive services from you. The client does not expect you to make the sessions a socializing experience to form a social relationship. But if you were to talk continually about your personal life or feelings during the client’s sessions, as you might with a friend, you would have crossed the social boundary line. This can also happen with a client trying to make the therapeutic session a social event.

**Emotional boundaries** involve limits between the therapist and client related to emotional issues or problems. Therapists

should focus on working on the client's body, for example, rather than trying to address emotional problems a client may seem to have. Although there certainly is an emotional component of bodywork, most clients do not expect to become emotionally involved during the massage session. Clients mostly think of the physical relief that they will feel at the end of a session. Even clients who are aware of their emotional response after receiving a massage do not expect a therapist to provide counseling to address this aspect of their lives.

*Example:* You may easily cross an emotional line when a client exhibits an emotional response to bodywork you are doing. It is natural to try to nurture your clients, but stepping over the line and trying to address issues usually considered in the realm of counseling or psychotherapy is dangerous for both you and the client and is beyond your scope of practice.

**Sexual boundaries** are limits that prevent sexualizing bodywork. These limits are generally defined in laws and regulations. Massage therapy professionals all agree that massage and bodywork must not be sexual in nature.

*Example:* Sexual boundaries include more than the obvious transgressions involving sexual behavior. A therapist whose thoughts or emotions become sexually oriented during a session, going beyond the purely therapeutic aspects of massage, is crossing a boundary line. If while working on a client you begin to feel an attraction to the person, your touch will likely change and the client may notice that something else has entered the relationship. This can also happen if the client is attracted to the therapist. In either case, problems are inevitable.

**Professional boundaries** involve guidelines and expectations related to professional behavior. Governing bodies, associations, and peers have definite expectations for what the therapeutic relationship should be. The laws of many states specifically define the scope of practice for massage therapists. Many laws also state what a therapist cannot do. Some practice areas are clearly defined, although others may leave room for individual interpretation.

*Example:* Clients frequently look to massage therapists for advice on a wide range of health issues. For example, clients may ask you what vitamins they should take. Unless you are specifically trained in nutrition, you would be crossing a professional line if you gave advice in this area. Many clients also confuse chiropractic therapy and massage therapy, and may ask you to perform spinal manipulation. This would also be crossing a professional boundary unless you are also licensed as a chiropractor.

When working with the public, you need to be aware of all types of boundaries. In some cases you may have to find a balance between your own professional expectations and the expectations of an individual client. Finding a middle ground requires thought and practice. For example, a client may not feel comfortable removing any of their undergarments, which can be challenging to work around in certain areas such as the back. Explaining any

limitations this may have during the session will help the client understand the work being done and the boundary issues involved. Knowing when a client is deliberately or unconsciously testing the boundaries of your relationship is also often important in maintaining a successful practice. You cannot expect all clients to know where all boundary lines lie. Most clients assume that you, as a professional, know where the lines are and will keep them in a safe therapeutic relationship.

On the other hand, most therapists have other clients who do not know the boundaries and may consciously or unconsciously challenge the limits. It can be a challenge to keep the professional relationship intact in such cases, as in the common situation described in the scenario.

### SCENARIO

You are shopping for groceries on Saturday and encounter one of your clients in the checkout line. Unfortunately, the store is busy and you both have to wait a few minutes in line. Looking into your grocery cart, the client casually says that it looks like you are having a barbecue and asks if you are having a party. You say you are just having a few friends over, but she continues to ask questions about where you live and other aspects of your personal life.

1. Would this situation make you feel uncomfortable?
2. What would you say to this client?
3. How can you maintain a professional relationship without appearing cold to this client by refusing to answer her questions?

It is not possible to be prepared for all possible client situations that you may encounter in your professional career, but the better you understand the different boundaries you need to maintain, the more clearly you will know when lines are being crossed and what to do about it. If you begin to feel uncomfortable in a situation with a client, boundary issues may be at the root of the problem. It is then important for you to assess what, if any, action to take or not take to preserve the therapeutic relationship.

### SCENARIO

You are performing bodywork on a client who has been a wonderful client for several years. She is always happy and upbeat, and your sessions always end on a happy but professional note. During this session, however, she mentions that she is having a party and would love for you to come. You have a professional policy against socializing with your clients. You try to change the subject gracefully and

avoid having to tell her no, but she keeps talking about it and insisting that you should come to her party.

1. How would this make you feel?
2. What would you say to this client?
3. How do you maintain the therapeutic relationship in this situation?

### Key Points

- Boundaries help set parameters for your practice.
- Boundaries help assure your clients they are in a safe environment.
- Some boundaries may be defined by laws, rules, or regulations.
- When boundaries are not clearly defined by laws or a governing body or association, therapists should define their own.

Your personal boundaries are directly related to your values and beliefs, as discussed in Chapter 2. The strength of your commitment to your boundaries may also depend on your past experiences. Before beginning Exercise 5-1, you may want to look back at what you wrote in the Chapter 2 exercises.

Professional boundaries are generally defined by associations, groups, laws, and rules. For example,

## EXERCISE 5-1

List two boundary principles in each of the four areas that you feel strongly about.

*Example:* Physical boundaries: I feel all clients should disrobe only as far as they are comfortable.

Physical boundaries:

- 1.
- 2.

Social boundaries:

- 1.
- 2.

Emotional boundaries:

- 1.
- 2.

Sexual boundaries:

- 1.
- 2.

many association codes of ethics state that practitioners must work only within their scope of practice. Scope of practice is defined by several massage associations as well as many state laws. These documents also help the public know the professional expectations for practitioners. In your own practice area, if you find aspects of practice you feel are not covered well, you can formulate your own additional policies to address those areas. If you do not agree with the established boundaries, you may need to look for other practice options, such as joining a different professional association, moving to a different state, and so on.

## BOUNDARIES FOR THE THERAPIST

As you prepare to enter practice in the massage and bodywork profession, you should consider your comfort and professional boundaries when working with clients. In an earlier chapter you explored how your personal belief system evolved and what your beliefs and values are today. These beliefs and values form a foundation for your guidelines related to boundaries with clients. At the same time you have seen that your fellow students have many diverse beliefs. Likewise, your clients will bring their own beliefs, values, and boundary issues to the professional relationship.

It is important to know where your boundaries lie and what to do when they are questioned or crossed. Therapists who enter practice without thinking through these issues can get into trouble because of unclear parameters when working with clients. Or the client may feel or sense that the therapist is not steadfast and therefore feel uneasy during the session.

### CASE STUDY

Cindy was looking forward to a massage session she had booked with a new massage therapist in town. Her previous therapist had moved away recently, and Cindy really liked receiving a massage every other week to reduce stress. Her previous therapist had been in business for 8 years and always kept her sessions very professional, always addressing the areas Cindy wanted worked on.

The new therapist gave Cindy a good massage, but she also spent much of the massage telling her about her personal problems. Her car wouldn't start that morning, and her boyfriend had been a total jerk, and she just wanted to go home and have a nice dinner.

Cindy felt good physically after the massage, but she was not as relaxed as she usually was in the past because of all the therapist's talk during the massage. When she left she did not book another massage and was unsure if she would ever come back to this therapist because of all the chatter.

In a situation such as Cindy experienced, the therapist had not set effective boundaries to prevent inappropriate behavior or conversation with the client. Social boundaries that restrict sharing personal information are an important component in any therapeutic setting. Is the client paying for a massage session that includes hearing your personal problems or other personal information? Unfortunately, it is a common complaint among clients that their massage therapist spent most of the session talking about all sorts of things, when all the client wanted to do is relax.

Boundaries are also needed for the techniques you perform. Through your career as a bodyworker, you will learn new techniques and skills to enhance your sessions with clients. Your clients expect you to perform all techniques with expertise and not use them to practice skills you have not yet mastered. It can be a difficult situation when you have just learned a new technique but are still not very good at it, yet you want your clients to benefit from this technique. In such a case, it is generally better to practice on a family member or another therapist until you have mastered the skill.

### SCENARIO

Bill recently attended a weekend class in craniosacral work, an area in which he has been interested since he graduated from massage school last year. This was the first in a series of classes, and he planned to attend others as his budget allowed. He learned a great deal of information during the lecture portion of the class, but because of the size of the class he had only a few hours of hands-on time with these new techniques. He had told several of his clients that he was taking this course, and the next week several clients asked him to use the new techniques on them.

1. Should Bill practice these new techniques on his clients?
2. Should Bill tell them he has not had much practice yet, but will spend a few moments using the new techniques?

3. Should Bill charge them for this new service?
4. Should Bill practice only on other therapists and family members until he becomes proficient in the new techniques?

Deciding when to practice new techniques on clients is a subjective issue. Especially when you are a new therapist, it is difficult to be sure when your skills are good enough to use on paying clients. Following are a few suggestions to help you determine what is best for your clients and yourself:

1. Ask the person who taught you the skills when he or she thinks you can begin to use them on regular clients.
2. Check to see if a set or standard number of hours or series of classes is normally required in this technique. Your instructor may suggest a minimum number of hours of practice before using a new technique on clients.
3. Check to see if any certifications or examinations are used to determine proficiency in a new technique or skill.
4. Research and practice new techniques until you feel you know a great deal about them.

Another type of boundary, which is very clear-cut in most codes of ethics and state laws, is the rule against sexual contact or any sexualizing of massage. Some members of the public still associate massage with prostitution, and even all the regulations against sexual behavior do not convince these people. This boundary issue arises if a client requests something beyond this boundary. Many therapists have reported that, at some time in their career, a client either came right out and asked or subtly hinted at wanting the therapist to cross over this boundary. Having clear-cut boundaries helps you out of this situation, and the client will understand that you have a strong foundation.

### EXERCISE 5-2

This exercise is a personal journal exploring where you are today.

1. I know I will never \_\_\_\_\_ with a client.
2. I know I will always \_\_\_\_\_ with a client.
3. I think I will never \_\_\_\_\_ with a client.
4. I think I will always \_\_\_\_\_ with a client.

Try to expand on your thoughts and write a sentence or a paragraph for each of the items above.

### CASE STUDY

A therapist who has been in business for 2 years repeatedly had clients try to overstep her boundaries against any form of sexual relationship. On average, at least one client a month hinted about wanting to take her out and have an intimate relationship with her. Finally she had enough and asked one of her teachers at her massage school for advice. After talking for awhile about these clients and asking questions about how the sessions went, the teacher asked her what she wore to work every day. The therapist said she dressed for work much like she was dressed today. She was wearing tight black pants and a

low-cut top that was somewhat revealing. The teacher explained that her clothing might be interpreted by some as suggestive, somewhat as some bar waitresses dress to attract good tips. The teacher suggested that she wear more professional attire for her practice in the spa setting. After trying the different clothing for a month, this therapist found that clients had all but stopped approaching her in inappropriate ways.

A therapist's boundaries are even more important than clients' boundaries. You are expected to be the professional. As an old saying goes, if you like something you will tell five friends about it, but if you hate it you will tell ten. If clients feel you do not have a strong foundation, they may think your practice is not ethical—and they may say that to many others.

Your boundaries help keep both you and your clients safe. Maintaining clear-cut boundaries also lets the public and potential future clients see that you are serious about your business and maintaining a professional practice.

## BOUNDARIES FOR THE CLIENT

A client may cross a boundary with a request or behavior that is innocent or that the client knows is inappropriate. Your job as a professional is to handle both situations in an appropriate and business-like manner. Ideally, you should be prepared to handle almost any situation that may present itself.

An example of an innocent request is a client asking for advice on nutrition or to be shown strengthening exercises, when you are not trained in these areas. Many clients believe that bodyworkers are trained in all aspects of the body. They may not understand the difference, for example, between a massage therapist and a physical therapist. Simply explaining to your clients that this kind of advice or work is beyond your scope of practice should help them understand that you are not trained in this area. Clients who persist with such questions may be referred to another health care professional.

In situations in which a client deliberately and inappropriately crosses a boundary, being prepared can help you handle the situation in a professional way. Learning to say no in a professional yet firm way is an important skill to manage a client who asks you to cross a boundary. The professional way to address this situation is to explain that the requested action or information is not within your scope of practice or

## EXERCISE 5-3

Practicing how to talk to a client who makes an inappropriate request should be an important part of your training.

Pair up with another student. One is the therapist and the other the client. Use props as needed (desk and chair, massage table, massage chair). Different pairs of students use the following scenarios. Take the time to compose your scenario and present it to the class. Afterwards, the rest of the class should offer suggestions for how to handle the incident.

1. A new client calls to make an appointment for a massage. He asks a lot of questions including what the therapist will be wearing.
2. A female client tells her male therapist that she would like to have lunch with him sometime soon.
3. A male client asks his female therapist for advice about a problem in his marriage. He keeps bringing it up during the session.
4. A male client does not like to be draped and keeps taking the draping off during the session.
5. A female client breaks down and starts crying while the therapist is working on her back. She seems to have experienced an emotional release and tells the therapist she has been abused.
6. The therapist has been working with both a husband and wife. Now the wife asks a lot of questions about her husband, including what he talks about during sessions.

Try to avoid the temptation to turn these scenarios into humorous situations. It is important to practice what you may have to say to a client in situations like these when asked to overstep a boundary.

would violate state laws, regulations, or your own practice policies. If the client persists, you need to end the session—or never make the appointment in the first place if the client requests it in advance. You have the right to refuse to treat a client for just and reasonable cause.

If you are unsure how to cope with a client crossing boundaries in your practice, and you want to keep this client, it is appropriate to consult with a mentor or ask a teacher for advice. Often another person can see the situation more clearly from a different viewpoint and can help dispel the emotional response often evoked by situations involving boundary issues.



### Key Points

- Clients generally expect a therapist to have set boundaries.
- Clients are less likely to try to test your boundaries if they know you are a professional committed to maintaining your boundaries.
- Believe in your boundaries. Clients will feel your firm commitment to your profession.
- Be prepared for instances of intentional or unintentional boundary crossing by clients.

## CONSENSUS BETWEEN THE THERAPIST AND CLIENT

It is important for a therapist and client to reach an understanding of each other's expectations for the therapeutic relationship. Each party begins this relationship with expectations, and unless they communicate to each other their expectations, it may be more difficult for this relationship to be successful. Effective communication should begin with the first phone call to make an appointment and should continue throughout each session.

When a potential client calls to make an appointment, that person is in a sense checking you out to see if you will give the treatment he or she is seeking. The person also wants to feel safe. If you say anything that makes the person feel uncomfortable, he or she may not make the appointment or may not show up for the appointment. For example, if a potential client asks what clothing is worn during the session and the therapist simply answers that the standard policy is to remove all clothes, this could make the person feel very uncomfortable. A better answer would be that clients are encouraged to disrobe only as much as they are comfortable and that draping is used throughout the session to keep them feeling safe and comfortable. If the potential client still hesitates, the therapist can then explain what happens during the massage session and ask if the person has any concerns. It is important to listen carefully to the client to learn what concerns and issues may be present. In the example above, the fact that the client asked about clothing suggests the client could be uncomfortable with disrobing, and a therapist who is listening carefully will take note of this and respond appropriately.

During the intake process, try to identify any fears or concerns that a client may have. Often these issues are very subtle, and if you are not paying close attention to what the client is saying and how the client is responding, you may miss the cues. Pay attention to questions that clients ask

### BOX 5-2

### A Conversation With a Prospective New Client

Since you are new in business, every new phone call may make you nervous. It is important to be professional and maintain your boundaries from the very beginning. The call might begin like this:

- Therapist:** Thank you for calling The Massage Connection.  
**Client:** Yes, I'd like to know what types of massage you offer and the prices.  
**Therapist:** Well, we offer several types of massage. Our techniques include Swedish, sports, reiki, aromatherapy, hand and foot reflexology, and Thai massage. The prices vary from \$65 to \$90 per hour.  
**Client:** Which one is best for relaxation?  
**Therapist:** For general relaxation, many clients like Swedish massage or aromatherapy massage.  
**Client:** What would I wear during the massage?  
**Therapist:** Well, you take off your clothes and we have sheets for you.  
**Client:** You mean I have to take off everything?  
**Therapist:** Yes, we usually don't have any problems with that.  
**Client:** Well, I'll have to call you back.

Observe where this client begins to feel apprehensive about what the therapist is saying. The first call is a time to engage your client and listen for concerns. When you hear the client begin to sound nervous or question something you have said, take action to make the client feel more comfortable.

At the point where the client asks what he or she will wear, the therapist could better have proceeded like this:

- Client:** What would I wear during the massage?  
**Therapist:** Your comfort level during your massage is very important to us. During the session, you will be fully draped with only the area that we are working on uncovered. We respect your privacy and ask that you undress only as much as you are comfortable. We use sheets and towels to cover you during your massage. If you have any concerns, we'll talk about them before your session.

In this case, as the person begins to trust the therapist and the session, the new client may more readily feel at ease and not get nervous removing clothing for the session.

and to their body language. If clients still seem to have concerns after you have answered their questions with full explanations, ask them if they still have concerns. Be gentle and open in your conversation. It is important to watch and listen to a person's reactions during conversations at the beginning of the therapeutic process and relationship. You must provide a safe ground for the relationship to become established and build.

Although this verbal communication is very important, the physical communication that occurs during a session is one of the most important aspects of

bodywork. You are being trained to receive messages from your client's physical body so that you can most effectively treat the body. These physical messages tell you about are problems such as adhesions, spasms, triggers points, and scar tissue. Clients may or may not be aware of such problems. Likewise, clients may not realize that their bodies are reacting physically to emotions and feelings from the past or that they feel now during the bodywork session. For example, if a client has an area of injury from a minor fall, you may find some adhesions or restrictions in that area that can be effectively treated by different forms of bodywork. But if that minor fall was associated with some type of emotional pain, the client's emotional reaction may be much more significant than the physical trauma. A client may tense up or even cry while you are working on an area, but probing the client in an effort to discover what is causing the emotional response would be crossing a boundary outside the scope of practice of bodywork. At such times communication, understanding, and nurturing the relationship can be very critical. Working within your scope of practice, you help clients within their comfort level and work toward the healing process as bodyworkers are trained to do. Pushing clients to explore their emotional or personal response is not within your scope of practice.

Clients may not feel comfortable discussing an issue with you that may be revealed during a bodywork session. For example, while you are working on a client's shoulder, you feel the client tensing up and pulling away from you while you work. You should check the client's pressure and pain levels to make sure that you are not hurting the client. If the client says that the pressure is fine and the pain not significant, there could be an emotional reason why the client is responding in this manner. The client may not even realize that it is happening. Asking clients if they feel any discomfort is appropriate, but it would not be appropriate to ask more questions in depth about why they seem to be responding emotionally. Sometimes a client goes home and thinks about what happened, and may tell you about the injury or event during the next session or two. Another client may never want to talk about such issues at all. Still other clients will open up and tell you everything and want you to solve their emotional problems. Working within your scope of practice and professional boundaries is very important in situations like this. It may also be important to refer such clients to other health care professionals to assist them in the healing process. If a client seeks help for emotional trauma, it may be appropriate to refer the client to a counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist. Explaining to the client that this is beyond your scope of practice helps the client know why you cannot offer advice in this

area and that you have the client's best interests at heart to promote healing.

Verbal and nonverbal communication should be an ongoing process with all your clients. Communication needs are unique for each client and every session. It is important to stay open to changes that can happen and know that your boundaries will keep your professional relationship safe.

### **Key Points**

- Two forms of communication take place with any client during therapy sessions: verbal and physical.
- Verbal communication is the conversation that you and client have before, during, and after a session.
- Physical communication involves energy that is exchanged between a client and a therapist. It is crucial for a therapist to be aware of this during a session because this information can be critical for the care of the client.

## **HOW BOUNDARIES ARE CROSSED**

Clients and therapists can cross boundaries in a variety of ways. It may happen unintentionally, such as when a client does not understand your scope of practice. It can also be intentional, such as therapists going beyond their scope of practice and performing techniques or procedures they have not been trained to do. Because the practice of massage and bodywork is so diverse in this country, it is important to know your scope of practice within any rules, regulations, laws, and guidelines applicable to your practice.

## **CROSSING A BOUNDARY WITH TOUCH**

As discussed earlier, all clients come into the therapeutic relationship with their own expectations and possibly even apprehensions about what will happen during the session. A new client may have had massage sessions with another therapist and may expect you to follow a similar format. Other clients may have never received any type of bodywork and do not know what to expect other than they want to feel psychologically and physically safe during the session.

This can be a delicate topic to discuss with new clients, but it can be handled professionally through the intake process. Your intake form can ask what areas of their body they do or do not want worked on. Some intake forms have boxes listing all parts of the body, and clients simply check what they feel comfortable having worked on. Without use of such

intake information, it can be difficult to discuss this openly with a new client during the initial interview. Nonetheless, it is important for your clients to know that their feelings of safety are important during the session and that if anything concerns them at any time, they should feel free to speak up.

As you train in the bodywork profession, you naturally let go of some of your own inhibitions as you realize the need to work on parts of the body that some people are sensitive about. For example, most new therapists at first have difficulty addressing the gluteal region, but when you see the positive effects of work in this area, it seems only natural that this part of the body in many cases needs work. Your clients may not feel the same way, however, and have not had time to address the issue. If you do not have permission to work here and you undrape the area, the client may not feel comfortable with work in this area. Sometimes you need to take a more conservative approach and slowly educate the client about work on sensitive parts of the body. Clients should have the choice to allow you to work on sensitive parts when they feel ready. Clients may give you blanket permission for bodywork when they come to you, but it is important for you as a professional to ensure they always feel safe with what you are doing. Forcing clients to accept something they feel uncomfortable with can be very intimidating and is not taking care of the client. If they do not feel safe and their needs are not being met, they may not return. In the worst possible scenario, a client who feels he or she has been touched inappropriately may file a complaint with a state regulating agency, local authorities, or other entities such as an association in which you are a member. Verbal and physical communication can help prevent this situation from happening.

A client too may cross a touch boundary. A client might touch the therapist in a way that is not appropriate for the therapeutic relationship. This can be very surprising when it happens, in which case it is important to consider whether it was purposefully done. Talking with the client and explaining that the act was inappropriate will help the client understand the importance of your boundaries. You may need to be careful with this client in the future, and if the client persists in acting inappropriately, you may need to end the therapeutic relationship.

### CASE STUDY

A female therapist has worked on a male client weekly for the past 2 years. He has repeatedly come close to pushing personal issues, such as by asking her if she has a boyfriend or what she was planning for the weekend.

On several occasions the therapist reminded him what her professional parameters were. He then backed off and made no advances for a while. Now, however, during a session while in the prone position, when the therapist was working on his shoulder from the side of the table, he grabbed her leg and made a playful comment about how smooth it was. The therapist stopped her work and told him that this type of touching was not appropriate. He commented that a little innocent grab did not hurt anyone. The therapist then stopped the session and told him that they were done for the day. Even though he then apologized, the therapist felt it was important for this client to get the message that he had crossed an important boundary. When he asked about his next appointment, she stated that they would not be having any future sessions. The therapist felt she could no longer maintain the professional relationship and took control by ending their work together.

Even though a professional relationship is a joint venture between two parties, it is important to understand that you have the responsibility for setting important parameters for your safety and the client's safety. Clients who are truly interested in a therapeutic relationship will understand that boundaries should not be crossed.

### CROSSING A BOUNDARY WITH WORDS

How and what you say during your career as a bodyworker can have a profound effect on your success. You have likely noticed how people take interest when you are talking about your new career as a bodyworker. Many people are keenly interested in this field and want to understand more about it. That is in part why it is important to choose your words carefully when talking about massage so that friends, family, and potential clients see that you work with professional parameters.

Remember that some people still feel massage involves some sort of sexual overtones. Some students of bodywork react with anger when hearing such comments, while others say nothing at all. It may be better to consider this an opportunity to educate someone who has the mistaken impression that massage is wrong or unsavory. Talk to the person in a calm and effective way. Avoid becoming defensive, and find a way to guide the person to a new thought process. What you say can have a tremendous effect on what people think. Learning how to approach people with a variety of different ideas is an important skill in our profession.

### CASE STUDY

A therapist had been working on a client for the last several months. During the last session he mentioned to this client that she really had a great tan. The client thanked him for the compliment. He then asked if she was tan all over—in other words, did she tan in the nude. This question could certainly make the client feel uneasy. Commenting on the tan may be okay, and being concerned about the risk for skin cancer is certainly important to anyone interested in health. The client could have accepted comments from that point of view but likely began to feel uneasy about discussing tanning in the nude.

Inappropriate conversation during a session can also become an important issue in a therapeutic relationship. Clients expect you to be the expert and often look to you for advice. **Always think about what you are saying to a client and be careful to stay within your scope of practice.** Giving advice on topics in which you have not been trained is inappropriate. Even simple things like telling a joke may be inappropriate if the client may misinterpret it or find the joke offensive. A joke involving any aspect of sexuality may make a client feel uncomfortable. Always consider what you are saying before you say it, and be responsible to maintain the therapeutic relationship.

There are many boundaries that we must be aware of when working with the human body. Comments about body types or parts can offend someone very easily. Stay aware of what you are saying and how you phrase information to your clients to ensure that they are not offended or hurt by what you say. For example, rather than saying to a client who is overweight, “It is hard to work through fat,” it is more appropriate to refer to working in “areas where there is more tissue.”

Although it seems like you are always having to think about what you say and what you do, many of these aspects will become natural as you gain more experience in the bodywork field. Awareness of the responsibilities and the consequences is an important part of your training now.

### CROSSING A BOUNDARY WITH NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication scares many but is discussed by few. It can cause more problems than many other issues discussed so far. Nonverbal communication may involve a simple look, smile, or even

touch that is intended or perceived differently by the therapist and the client.

Clients look to their therapist for relief from pain or stress. Most clients really like and appreciate their therapist and look forward to their sessions. But if a therapist smiles at a client or gives a casual hug, the client may feel the therapist is flirting. A client may see more meaning in something as innocent as a smile if the client is looking for the therapeutic relationship to provide more than it should. Therapists need to be aware of the power differential with clients (discussed in the next chapter) and understand why it is important never to take advantage of that type of behavior.

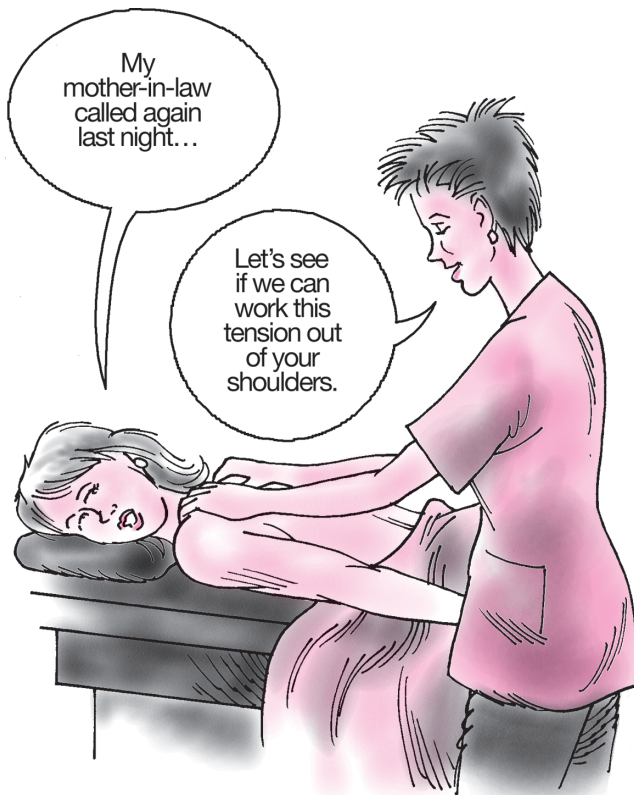
Another potential problem is touching the client in a way that the client may perceive as something other than a massage technique. Clients receive the therapeutic effects of massage, but allowing the massage to mean something else is dangerous. For example, if you feel a client is very good looking and you are thinking about that during the massage session, your thoughts can influence how you touch the client, who may then feel that the massage is taking on a more seductive feel. Massage and bodywork involve an energy exchange between two people, and energy from your thoughts too can be transferred to another person. Consider the different ways clients can feel your touch while you are giving a massage. Clients can feel your emotional state, such as anger, complacency, impatience, sexual attraction, or love. Therefore, your frame of mind during the session is just as important as the skill in your hands.

### FLEXIBILITY OF BOUNDARIES

Many boundary issues involve solid rules that should be followed in the bodywork profession. As you have seen in the ethical codes of professional associations, some behaviors such as sexualizing massage are clearly viewed as wrong. But in certain aspects of the therapist–client relationship, such as the social arena, you can be somewhat more flexible in your practice. Your behavior in this respect may depend on the individual client. Adapting to each client can be challenging for a new therapist, but you can do this without much stress or thought. For example, many clients would like you to be personable rather than always strictly businesslike in your relationship. Some clients may want to tell you about their kids or an upcoming special occasion that is affecting their stress levels. When you see clients regularly, it is good to show an interest in their lives. But when the social aspect of the relationship starts taking time or energy away from the

sessions, it becomes necessary to draw a line. It is not difficult to casually step back into the therapeutic role by simply saying that you need to focus on what is going on physically with the client's body. Clients sometimes lose track of the purpose of the therapeutic relationship and may just like the fact that someone is listening to them. Remembering that it is your responsibility to make the therapeutic relationship work for both of you, find a comfortable way to do your work so that clients leave the session feeling their needs have been met (Fig. 5-1).

With some clients you may need to be stricter with social barriers because the client is unable to distinguish between a social and therapeutic relationship. You usually know when this happens because you begin to feel frustrated or uneasy in the sessions. If you lose your focus on the session and the work you are doing, this is a sign that the therapeutic relationship is at risk. Refocus the client on the work that you are doing by asking appropriate questions about his or her reaction to the massage. If a client persists with social comments or questions, simply saying something like “Let’s concentrate on this shoulder right now” or “Tell me what you are doing at work that causes your lower back to hurt” is a way to let the client know that you are



**FIGURE 5-1** ■ You may have to help clients focus on issues related to the massage rather than their social or emotional life.



**FIGURE 5-2** ■ It is possible to have a pleasant, personable relationship with clients while remaining professional.

trying to focus on your work. If the client still persists, you may have to be more direct and say that you need to focus your attention on the session.

Flexibility with your clients allows you to have a professional yet personable relationship. It is a very good feeling when your clients feel right at home with the sessions and leave feeling better both physically and mentally (Fig. 5-2).

## MANAGING CROSSED BOUNDARIES

Maintaining boundaries in the bodywork profession is a continually evolving process. You could not easily write a clear-cut document defining what all your parameters will always be. Yet you know your own expectations at the present.

Because you already have a belief and value system in place, you have a good sense of what your practice parameters will be. As you complete your education and gain more experience in the field, you will continue to develop those parameters in a comfortable fit for you and your clients.

Regardless of your own sense of boundaries, however, clients may unintentionally cross a boundary and you may have to decide how best to handle the situation. For example, a client may tell you a joke

about religion. The client may think there is nothing wrong with the joke, but you may find it offensive. Is it appropriate to say something to the client and risk making the client feel bad about telling the joke, or is it better just to let it go? You may face such boundary issues almost daily, and that is why it is important to understand your own foundation. A therapist should weigh the client's potential response if you tell the client the joke offended you. Sometimes it is more appropriate to let something like this go, unless the client continues with offensive remarks or jokes. In this case, telling the client that this type of conversation is offensive may be appropriate. Another example is a client who unintentionally lets a drape fall off and does not realize what has happened. Adjusting the sheet would be the appropriate action. If the client constantly lets the sheet fall off, you may need to say something about staying covered during the session.

### CASE STUDY

A new client has come to you for some work on a sore back. You take the client through your normal intake process and explain how the session will proceed. You ask the client to lie on the table in the prone (face down) position under the sheet. When you enter the room, the client is lying face up with no sheet. What would you do?

A simple solution is to exit the room and ask the client to please turn over and get under the sheet. The client may have been nervous and unsure about positioning on the table.

Clients may also ask you to step outside your scope of practice. This usually happens because they do not know the exact scope of practice for bodyworkers. They also may not understand the nature of your training. A brief explanation of the types of work you do would be helpful during the intake and interview process and allow the client to ask questions about things they may not understand. Some clients may think we have the same training as physical therapists or chiropractors and that we can perform the same techniques. One example that is quite prevalent is a client asking a massage therapist to perform a spinal manipulation. This is usually a chiropractic technique that is outside the scope of practice of massage therapists. Simply telling the client that this technique is outside your scope of practice is usually enough, or if not, just say you are not trained in this area. These boundary issues do not involve repercussions when handled in a professional manner.

Some clients intentionally ask you to cross boundaries. First, explain to the client what your boundaries are. If the client persists and continues to ask you to step outside your boundaries, you have the right and responsibility to end the session or no longer see this person as a client.

### CASE STUDY

Tanya had a client who had come for two massage sessions appointments in two weeks. During his third session he began to ask a lot of personal questions. He asked if she was married or seeing someone. Tanya explained that she did not discuss her personal life. He quieted for awhile but then said he noticed that she was not wearing a ring, so he just wanted to know what her boyfriend thought of her working on men not wearing clothing. She again stated that her personal life would not be discussed during the session and that if he kept pursuing this, she would have to end the session.

Near the end of the massage the client told Tanya that he found her very attractive and wanted to take her out. Tanya decided that it was best to end the session early, and told the client she would see him in the outer office when he was dressed. When he came out, Tanya told him that it was against her policy to date clients and that he should seek another therapist for future sessions.

Whenever you face a situation like Tanya's, you have to choose whether to terminate the therapeutic relationship with a client. Often clients will understand that you have boundaries that you will not cross, and once you have explained this, they will stop asking you to cross those boundaries. If a client continues to push, you can end the session and, if necessary, choose not to see that client in the future. These can be hard decisions to make, but once you have crossed a boundary line, your self-confidence and reputation will likely be affected.

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF BOUNDARIES ARE CROSSED

If boundaries are crossed by either you or the client, any of the following may occur.

1. The client may not return.
2. The client's needs may not be met.
3. You can refuse to see the client again.
4. A client may file a complaint against you.
5. You can lose your license (in states with licensure).
6. You can lose membership in an association.
7. You may gain the reputation of not being an ethical practitioner.

None of these options is a good experience for a bodywork practitioner. Somewhere along the way, someone is going to lose. The cost can be as simple as losing a client or as high as losing your career. Because the stakes can be so high, it is important to address boundary issues continually in your practice.

### **Key Points**

- Boundaries may be crossed by the therapist or client through touch, words, or nonverbal communication.
- Some boundaries are absolute and not open to interpretation, whereas others are more flexible depending on your relationship with a client.
- If a client intentionally or unintentionally crosses a boundary or asks you to do so, you must manage the situation before a problem results.

Paying attention to your client's needs while providing a quality, ethical service will help clients see you are a professional. A strong foundation and

preparation to address any problem that arises are the tools to handle any situation that you may face.

## **SUMMARY**

---

As you worked through this chapter, you have learned how to address more of the issues that you will face in your bodywork career. At first, it may seem there are many different issues to prepare for, but it really comes down to basics. Acting ethically should be a part of who you are and what you do. Knowing your boundaries and having a strong foundation will help you every day in your practice. Clients will know and feel that you have their best interests in mind and will provide them with an ethical service. Clients need to feel safe, and respecting boundaries helps provide this safety. Communicating with and educating your clients are continual processes that will evolve as you gain years of experience. But if a problem arises, do not hesitate to consult a mentor to help you through a tough situation.

# CLIENT AND THERAPIST RELATIONSHIPS

## CHAPTER PREVIEW

- Understanding the dynamics of the power differential in a therapeutic relationship
- Managing the transference of thoughts and feelings from the client to the therapist and from the therapist to the client
- Problematic and successful dual relationships

## KEY TERMS

**Countertransference:** a therapist attributing thoughts or feelings about another person to the client

**Defense mechanisms:** behaviors that unconsciously protect a person from feelings or awareness

**Dual relationship:** a situation that occurs when two roles or relationships overlap or interact

**Power differential:** the shift of authority that can exist in the client–therapist relationship

**Transference:** a client attributing thoughts or feelings about another person to the therapist

The dynamics of the relationship between and therapist and client can be diverse and complex, and attending to these is just as important as the techniques used during a bodywork session. Successful bodyworkers pay close attention not only to the techniques that they use but also to the many details involved in the relationship with clients. Marketing, physical client comforts, music, and follow-up are all important business aspects a therapist must pay attention to, but more important is the nature of the relationship that you form with your clients. Ethical issues play an important part of this relationship, and the therapist should maintain a constant awareness of this relationship. Variables involved in this relationship are discussed in this chapter along with suggestions to help make sometimes challenging situations workable for both parties.

## POWER DIFFERENTIAL

A client who seeks you out as a massage therapist does so because he or she believes that you have had training in your field and are considered reliable to provide the services desired. Clients want to trust that professionals know what they are doing and look to them to provide a quality service. For example, when you take a ring to a jewelry store to be fixed, you assume that the jeweler knows how to fix the ring correctly. But what guarantees do you have that your ring will be fixed properly? You simply assume that this person has the power or ability to fix it. The same holds true when you see a doctor or dentist, or have someone fix your plumbing or work on your car. Our society assigns this power to professionals, and in turn many professionals act upon this power because it is the



expectation of their clients. This power develops from a psychological expectation in many cases rather than from actual facts. For example, many clients assume that a bodyworker can evaluate their range of motion. A bodyworker can assess that there is a problem, but a full evaluation of the nature and degree of the malfunction in most cases is beyond the scope of practice for bodyworkers.

The client's assumption gives a therapist a great deal of power, psychologically trusting that the therapist will know what type of work should be done. Clients believe and trust that they will receive the service the therapist has promised. When you ask a mechanic what is wrong with your car, you most likely will believe what he or she says and trust that what is wrong will be fixed. In other words, we grant that the mechanic has the power to fix the car and we do not. Likewise, your clients look to you for professional advice about what you think is wrong with them and trust that you will provide a therapy that will be helpful to them.

A client takes on the role of being cared for in a therapeutic relationship. For example, when you see a doctor because you do not feel good, you are seeking the doctor's advice and treatment. The doctor will diagnose your condition and possibly provide a medication or other treatment to help you get better. You accept that the doctor has the power to take care of you and help you get better. A client who receives bodywork also assumes the therapist has power to determine what is wrong and provide an appropriate type of treatment in order to feel better. Relative to the professional who provides the treatment, clients feel "powerless" to treat themselves. This powerlessness is an important component of a therapeutic relationship. The difference between the professional's power and the client's powerlessness is called the **power differential** in the therapeutic relationship. A responsible therapist is consciously aware of the dynamics that can happen with this power differential and takes care not to take advantage of the client.

### HOW THE POWER DIFFERENTIAL AFFECTS CLIENTS

Clients look to you as the professional who understands bodywork and should know everything about techniques and their problems. It is very common for clients to look to you for advice regarding what you think is wrong with them. They essentially are asking you to diagnose what ails them. Most state laws and many ethical codes state, however, that massage therapists and bodyworkers do not diagnose any type of disease, symptoms, or

maladies of clients. Yet clients often ask bodyworkers for their opinion and seek some idea as to what is wrong with them. This can be a very difficult situation for a new therapist in two ways. First, you most likely do not know enough about medical conditions to understand fully the cause of their symptoms. Many symptoms can be caused by any number of problems, and figuring out what their disease is or the cause of their problems requires more training than bodyworkers receive. Second, it can be difficult to explain to a new client that you cannot diagnose health conditions. Therapists really do want to help, but explaining to your client that diagnosing any type of medical condition is beyond your scope of practice is the best thing to do.

The power differential has many dimensions in addition to expectations about disease and symptoms. Clients may also look to you as someone that they can confide in or someone who can soothe their emotional pain. You are working on tissues with a great deal of memory, and doing bodywork can bring other psychological or emotional issues to the surface. Clients may then look to you to help soothe their feelings or just listen to what they have to say. This in itself adds an immense amount of responsibility to the therapist's role in the therapeutic relationship.

As the therapeutic relationship develops over time, a therapist will understand more fully why a client wants to receive massage, why the client has pain, and how the client deals with problems and pain. It is much like fitting together the pieces of a puzzle to form a picture that makes sense. The client looks to the therapist to understand what is happening to his or her body and use therapeutic skills to make it better. Clients come for a massage with a purpose and give the therapist the power to make them feel better. Some clients may simply need relaxation, while others need pain relief, corrected posture, or simply a positive touch. Some clients may be able to tell you at the initial interview what they are seeking to achieve, while others may have a hard time verbalizing why they are there and only over time will you begin to understand why they have become clients. But all clients want a therapist to take on the role of being the one with the "power" to meet their needs through the therapeutic relationship.

The therapeutic relationship takes time to develop, and over time clients will begin to trust you if you are sincere and focused on attending to their needs. Because of the power differential, you have the responsibility to shape and maintain the therapeutic relationship. Clients take on a passive role in most cases while receiving massage. For example, a

client feels pain in one shoulder, and as you begin to assess the situation, you may ask questions about how the client uses that arm and shoulder. The client feels comfortable telling you that the shoulder was injured while playing soccer with some friends. If you say that the client may be getting too old to play soccer, the client may assume that with your knowledge about the body, you are giving him or her expert advice. The words a therapist uses are important, and we must be careful not to abuse our power as a therapist by judging a client's lifestyle. This client came for pain relief from a shoulder that hurts, not to be criticized for his or her actions leading to the injury.

### HOW THE POWER DIFFERENTIAL AFFECTS THERAPISTS

The power differential also affects therapists in a variety of ways. First, it is a large responsibility to develop and maintain the therapeutic relationship in addition to knowing what techniques to use and how to treat the client. Having to pay close attention to all the small details of the therapeutic relationship is difficult for most new therapists, but it is an important component of being a successful therapist. These details may include following up with a client the day after a tough session, following up with a client whom you have referred to another health care provider, gathering information that a client has asked for, or checking into other types of therapies that may help a client.

Second, it can be difficult for a therapist to figure out what the client needs, particularly if the client does not initially give the therapist much information. It can be difficult to read between the lines of what the client says, and this often leads to incorrect impressions. A simple but successful solution to this problem is to check in with your client as frequently as possible. Obtaining feedback from your client throughout a session helps you know how your techniques are working and encourages the client to take part in the healing process. The power differential also gives you the responsibility to care for and maintain the therapeutic relationship, which means that you should seek information from the client and use that information in a responsible way to help meet the client's needs.

It can also be difficult not to take personally what happens with your client. It is not unusual for a therapist to continue to think about something a client said and later feel responsible for some aspect of the client's condition. Most therapists cannot simply end a session and abruptly stop thinking about what the client revealed during the session.

For example, if a female client tells you something personal about her bad marriage and how stressful it is, is it your responsibility to help her fix the bad marriage? Your professional boundaries should limit the extent to which you can help a client, and in a case like this you are limited to helping resolve the client's physical manifestations of the stress caused by the bad marriage. Yet because of the power differential, clients may make you feel like you should provide advice or options related to their personal lives. A better alternative is to help the client through massage therapy to feel better and to offer suggestions such as exercise or meditation to help deal with the stress. It is important to maintain a proper perspective in such cases and know that your job is to work with clients to help them feel better. By helping clients physically, you are also helping them mentally and emotionally.

### FINDING THE SAFE AND PROFESSIONAL GROUND

Massage therapists are responsible for learning their clients' needs and trying to meet them. Maintaining a constant connection with the client and obtaining feedback are very important components of the therapeutic relationship. **Assumptions about what we think our client needs, in contrast, can be one of the most dangerous aspects of the power differential with clients.** Every client comes with a need to receive massage, and this need is unique for every client. Some clients may need to achieve a better range of motion, others are recovering from an injury, while still others simply find the relaxation of massage the most positive benefit. A therapist needs to address the client's needs session by session. For example, if a client has been working on increased range of motion during the previous four sessions and comes in after a really stressful week, it may be more advantageous for the client to receive a gentle relaxation massage instead of really vigorous work in this session. Seeking feedback from your clients can help you address what they feel is needed. Most clients come to a session with a goal for how they would like to feel like after the session. Simply asking clients about their goal for the session helps you to begin to understand it.

Ethically speaking, it is not acceptable for you to decide what your clients need. If you have suggestions for a client, an open dialogue is important before the session begins, to help you and the client reach a mutual agreement about the goal for the session. Clients will appreciate you asking and realize you are focusing on them during the session.

**CASE STUDY**

Jessie has been receiving massage once a month at a spa over the last 2 years. She has had a number of therapists, and she generally feels most of them have given her good massages. This month, Jessie booked an appointment with a new therapist at the spa. She was told the therapist had been doing bodywork for 12 years, and she felt confident that this would be a good session. When she arrived, she met the new therapist, who escorted her to the treatment room. She was used to talking with the therapist for a few minutes about the goals for the session. But this time the therapist seem distracted and simply told Jessie to get on the table and she would return in a few minutes. After a really tough week, Jessie planned to ask for a simple relaxation massage, but the therapist started the session without talking to Jessie and performed a deep tissue massage. The therapist commented that Jessie's back was really tense and said she would work it out. Jessie felt too intimidated to say anything during the session.

The session ended with Jessie feeling like she had been beat up; she did not feel relaxed at all. Other therapists at the spa had always addressed her needs in their sessions, but this time Jessie was disappointed that her session did not meet her expectations.

On her way out she told the receptionist that she did not want to book any further appointments with this therapist. The spa's manager followed up and asked her for a written evaluation of her session. Jessie felt less intimidated filling out the form than she had talking with the therapist during the session.

In Jessie's case, the therapist did not pay attention to the client's needs but rather had her own agenda for what she felt the client needed. This is a case of a therapist abusing the responsibility implicit in the power differential with a client. The therapist thought she knew what was best for the client. The problem could easily have been avoided if she had talked to the client and listened to the client's goals and needs for the session, then following through with the appropriate work. Ethical principles include making decisions with your clients that will benefit them in a positive way.

As you become more skilled in bodywork, you will more readily understand how to determine what clients need. It will become easier to communicate with your clients and reach a mutual understanding about the goals and techniques for a session. Clients will look to you as the professional to provide information about skills and techniques to be used during the session. Working together

with your clients helps them become more involved in the therapeutic relationship and lessens the risk that the power differential may become a problem.

The most effective way to find the safe and professional ground is to communicate well with your client. Verbal feedback from the client is imperative for a good therapeutic relationship. Asking clients about their needs and goals before the sessions starts, checking in with clients during the session, and asking them how they feel near the end of the session will help you address their needs. Clients may also give nonverbal signs of a problem, such as fidgeting on the table, being restless, clenching their fists, or bouncing a foot on the table, when they feel distressed or unhappy with the session. Many clients are not comfortable telling the therapist they are uncomfortable with techniques being performed, because of the power differential. When a client begins to reveal any type of discomfort, it is important for the therapist to check in with the client. Simple questions such as "How are we doing?" or "How do you feel" can open communication lines for clients to tell you what they are feeling. If a client still seems uncomfortable talking about how he or she feels, simply easing up on the techniques you are performing may help the client feel better.

Clients often have trouble communicating with massage therapists during the initial sessions, but showing continual interest in and focusing on the client's needs help form a successful therapeutic relationship. During the interview process it is important to gather information that will help effectively treat the client. It is easy to assume that you understand the information the client has written on an intake form. Asking open-ended questions helps you obtain valuable information that the client may not have written on the intake form. For example, you might make a statement such as this: "You indicated on your intake form that you have headaches. Are these migraines?" A better open-ended question would be, "Can you tell me about your headaches?" The difference in how you ask the question is that the client is encouraged to give you more information than just a simple yes or no answer. Many intake forms are fairly generic, and therapists should take the time to clarify any information needed to effectively treat clients. Likewise, during the session itself, ask open-ended questions to give the client the opportunity to give you more information. For example, instead of saying, "Do you want deeper pressure?" say, "How is the pressure?" and give the client the opportunity to give more meaningful information than just a yes or no answer. Clients do appreciate your interest in meeting their needs.

## CASE STUDY

A client named Rosita was referred to a therapist for injury recovery work after a fall at work. She had suffered lower back injury, and the chronic pain was making it hard for her to stand for any period of time at work. She loved her job and was anxious for her back to feel better.

After the initial intake, the therapist performed some deep work on her back and hips. That evening and next day after the session, Rosita was in intense pain. She called the therapist and asked what she should do. He stated this was a normal reaction and said that she should feel better in a few days. She returned later that week for another session and asked the therapist to work a little lighter so that she would not be so sore. The therapist again performed deep work, and that evening the client could barely move. She called the therapist the next morning to tell him about the pain and was told again that she was having a normal reaction and she would just have to deal with it after each session. She then decided to find another therapist who would be more willing to work within her pain tolerance.

In the case of Rosita, the therapist used the power differential in an inappropriate and unethical manner. The therapist felt that he used techniques that were better for the client over the long term and did not pay attention to or address the client's concerns. The client felt powerless to change the direction of the sessions and therefore ended the therapeutic relationship. This unfortunately can easily happen when a therapist abuses or does not pay attention to the power differential.

### Key Points

- Clients look to professionals as experts in what they do.
- Responsible therapists use the power differential in a responsible and ethical manner—serving the needs of clients.
- Communication is an important tool for maintaining a therapeutic balance with the power differential.

## DEFENSE MECHANISMS

As mentioned previously, a client or therapist may unconsciously exhibit defensive behaviors during a bodywork session. Clients or therapists may not realize how they are reacting to the work being

done or something that the other person has said or done. A client may fidget on the table or move slightly away from the therapist's hands. A therapist may unconsciously begin to feel frustrated with a client. **Defense mechanisms** are involuntary behaviors that unconsciously protect a person or help minimize unwanted or unacceptable feelings and thoughts. When an act, word, or emotion leads to discomfort, we may unconsciously protect ourselves in a variety of ways.

Denial and resistance are two common defense mechanisms for dealing with unwanted feelings. A client may act out toward the therapist, or a therapist may act out toward a client, with neither consciously aware of this. For example, during the session a client might tell a therapist about a friend who is overweight and comment that it is hard to believe that the friend cannot lose weight. The therapist, who has also been trying to lose weight, may react by thinking that the client is in no position to talk because she herself is a little chubby. In this case the therapist displaced his feelings back onto the client, not realizing that he unconsciously felt the client was talking directly to him.

It is important to be aware of the constant interchange of feelings, thoughts, emotions, and energy between you and a client. This interchange begins with the first conversation you have with a new client on the telephone and continues throughout each session. At times you may feel uncomfortable or not at ease with a client, and you might naturally feel that the client has done something wrong. In such a case it is important to examine your feelings and look a little deeper to discover whether it is your own reaction that has led to these feelings.

The interchange between a client and therapist is both physical and psychological. An example of a physical interchange is the work a therapist performs along with the client's reaction to areas that are painful or have reduced range of motion. The therapist may feel spasms or adhesions and then physically adjust the technique being used. The client may feel more pain in a certain area and react by pulling away or saying something. An example of a psychological interchange occurs when the therapist thinks about why the client has a problem or becomes frustrated with a client who is not following suggestions for improving his or her condition. The client may not understand why the therapist cannot significantly improve his or her condition in just one session.

Remember that tissues have memory and store emotion. Some people call these "tissue issues." For example, a client has had a very bad shoulder for the last 2 years, and even with continual therapy the shoulder never feels 100% functional and pain-free

for any length of time. The therapist may suspect that some emotional issue is associated with the shoulder, but emotional issues are beyond the scope of practice of massage therapists. It may be appropriate to refer the client to a psychotherapist, but approaching the client about this matter is often difficult. Bodywork can bring a great deal of emotion to the surface, and if a client raises emotional issues during a session, the door may be open for you to make a referral to another health professional. Clients may respond to treatment by crying, seeming sad, giggling, or showing anger, or a client may physically act out and fidget or grab the table. If such a reaction begins, it is important for a therapist to communicate with the client (Box 6-1).

Any time the client shows an emotional and physical reaction, it is important to work only within the client's comfort level. Check in with the client about pressure, pain, and comfort levels. If an area is too emotionally charged or painful, the client will generally tell you that it hurts or does not feel good to have work done in that area.

Clients may also deny that they are having a physical or emotional reaction during a bodywork session. Denying that the work is causing a reaction is a signal that the client is not prepared to deal with the situation. In such cases the therapist should respect that the client is not ready to deal with an issue. Trying to force a client to confront an issue is dangerous and beyond the scope of practice of massage therapy. For example, a client may have a history of some type of abuse, and when certain areas are touched, the client can react emotionally to the physical touch.

A client can become aware that something is causing a reaction. The client may then deny the situation, or may begin to address the issue. Resolving or understanding this can be an ongoing process that may take several days, weeks, or months. If this process hampers the therapeutic relationship, it may be best to refer the client to another health care provider such as a psychologist or psychotherapist to assist the client with emotional issues. Bodywork can still continue through this time as long as the client feels okay with this arrangement.

#### BOX 6-1 *Tips for Checking in With Your Client*

When a client appears upset or uncomfortable, you may ask one or several of the following questions:

- Is that area really sore?
- What is your pain level right now?
- Have you had a recent injury to this area?
- Are you feeling pain anywhere else?
- Would you like me to work lighter?
- Would you like me to stop working in this area?

Remember that a client's reactions to emotional issues are often unconscious, and give the client time to work through the issue. This is an important component of a therapeutic relationship. Forcing clients to cope with their feelings can be very detrimental to the clients. Often clients will feel uncomfortable and not know why, and may not return for future sessions.

Not all tissue memories are related to bad or negative thoughts or feelings of the client. Many memories are very positive. For example, many people just like having their back rubbed because they remember a family member like their mother or grandmother rubbing their back to put them to sleep. There will be many times when clients will relate these to a therapist during a session.

The therapist's defense mechanisms too can cause a client to feel concern or cause misunderstandings. For example, a therapist may be uncomfortable working on a person of another race or ethnic group but may be unaware of his or her own feelings. In such a case the therapist may act out by not focusing on the client or by acting nervously during the session. The client could perceive the therapist's discomfort and may even ask if there is a problem. Typically the therapist would deny that anything is wrong, and both the client and therapist would end the session feeling uneasy.

It is important for a therapist to know that defense reactions such as these are just that—reactions. Yet the client will often notice that something is wrong and will not feel comfortable with the relationship, even though the nature of the problem is unclear. This is a frequent cause for clients not returning for future sessions. Therefore, individuals who practice any type of massage therapy need to be in touch with their own feelings and emotions and thereby prevent defense mechanisms from occurring. This will lead to more successful therapeutic relationships.

#### **Key Points**

- Defense mechanisms are involuntary acts that help minimize unwanted or unacceptable feelings or thoughts.
- Bodywork can easily trigger defense mechanisms.
- Communication with clients and feedback from clients can help both parties cope with defense mechanisms.

## TRANSFERENCE

**Transference** is a client's projection of thoughts and feelings about another person onto the therapist. This is a common occurrence and may happen

with your clients in many ways. Transference can occur in any relationship in which you are involved and is generally an unconscious process. Psychologists have suggested that transference behavior grows out of relationships we had in our early lives. Relationships with parents, teachers, siblings, and others close to us in the early years of our lives set the stage for how we react in relationships throughout the rest of our lives. For example, if you greatly respected your father, who was very strong and set all the rules in your household, you may many years later look to a male boss as a father figure who should always be in charge and should be respected in this position. On the other hand, if you had a bad relationship with your father, you may later on react negatively to anyone with that type of influence over your life. In either case, you would have transferred your feelings and thoughts for one person to another.

The very nature of the therapeutic relationship allows transference to happen easily. Bodywork can trigger a variety of emotions from clients such as anger, frustration, sadness, fear, or joy. These feelings are generally the result of some emotion the client felt in the past toward another person. Often these emotions are always present just below the surface of our awareness. Massage can trigger some of these emotions to come to the surface, but also the interaction between a therapist and client can also bring these emotions to the surface. Recognizing that a client's reaction may be the result of transference may help you understand why a client acts a particular way. This understanding can help you maintain a healthy professional relationship. Therapeutic relationships can become unhealthy and negative for either the client or therapist if the therapist cannot cope with this type of situation.

### SCENARIO

Angie recently learned about a new massage therapist in her area named Jim, and several friends recommended him to her for massage for her sore shoulder. A college student, she worked part-time on a computer in a small office, and her shoulder ached sometimes when she was tired.

She made an appointment and felt quite comfortable with Jim from the first session. He was about 50 years old and reminded her of her father in a number of ways. This led Angie to believe that Jim could be trusted. After her first session, she felt pretty good. Jim talked to her about some stretches she could do. Jim felt she needed to book at least 8 to 10 more sessions, 1 week apart, to slowly work out all her problems with her shoulder. She could not afford to pay for that many sessions in such a short period, but she really respected and trusted Jim's expertise in this area. She made an appointment for the following

## EXERCISE 6-1

1. Think of an important relationship that you currently have (such as with a significant other, friend, or co-worker).
2. Write a brief description of the relationship.
3. Consider what other relationships from your past may have an effect (positive or negative) on that relationship.

*Example:* "The relationship with my current boss is strained. She is a very hard boss to work for. My past relationships with bosses have always been bad. They just like to push people around."

week, but ended up canceling later in the week. Angie trusted Jim but felt confused by the whole situation.

1. Why might Angie have made the appointment instead of just saying she couldn't afford it or saying she would call back later?
2. Were there other options Angie might have explored?
3. Might Jim have been using his father figure "authority" to take advantage of her?
4. What other approach could Jim have taken?
5. Think of a scenario in which both Angie and Jim could have had a healthy therapeutic relationship.

## TRANSFERENCE BY CLIENTS

Transference can bring about a positive or negative response from a client. For example, you may respond positively to a person who reminds you of another person who brought you joy or happiness. If during a bodywork session you rub the scalp of a client in a way that reminds the client of his or her mother's touch, the client may feel joy and contentment. Sometimes a client realizes that this is happening and may say something like, "That reminds me of how my mother use to put me to sleep." In most cases, however, the transference is a subconscious feeling or reaction to your touch or something that you say in the session. The client usually exhibits signs that let you know some type of transference is occurring (Box 6-2).

### BOX 6-2 Signs of Transference

- The client's voice may change (soft, loud, shaky).
- The client's attitude may change.
- The client may begin to laugh or cry.
- The client may tense up or pull away.
- The client may sigh and relax and begin to breathe more quickly or tense up.

Areas of the body that you are working on, the pressure that you are using, or the sound of your voice may remind clients of something from their past. For example, if you talk in a soothing tone that reminds the client of the way his or her grandmother use to talk when she was rocking the client to sleep as a child, this may evoke very positive transference patterns in the client. The client would then likely find it easy to relax on the table during the session. On the other hand, if your voice reminded the client of a teacher that he or she disliked, the client may have a much harder time relaxing while listening to your voice. The tone of your voice during a bodywork session can also trigger a response in the same way. For example, if you talk very abruptly to your client, you may trigger a memory of someone who talked this way to the client at a younger age. If the other person was hurtful, the client may react by drawing inward and not responding well to the session.

Clients generally do not tell a therapist when they are having a negative response during a bodywork session or may not themselves be aware of it. However, they may begin to show signs of retreating, acting uncomfortable, or becoming very quiet. This is why it is important for therapists to check in frequently during the session to learn how the client is feeling. Feedback is essential. Clients are more likely to tell a therapist when a positive transference occurs. If your soothing voice reminds them of a positive time, they may say something like, “Your voice is so comforting—it brings back memories of my dad reading to me at bedtime.”

The therapist’s thoughts and attitudes can also evoke a response from a client. If you reveal your thoughts and attitudes about a subject about which the client is sensitive, the client may show signs that he or she is uncomfortable. Most of the time, this happens on an unconscious level. Many clients will be aware that they feel uneasy but may not know why. This can lead to the client afterwards feeling the session did not go well or not wanting to continue to work with you.

Knowing that many different situations and scenarios will happen with your clients, you need to be aware of the responses that your clients may have at any time during bodywork sessions. Focusing on your clients’ reactions and communicating with them to ensure their comfort will let clients know that you are concerned about their well-being. The therapeutic relationship, therefore, is often the most important aspect of a massage session. The techniques you use and your focus on the client intermingle to help shape the therapeutic relationship.

Receiving positive transference from a client can be very flattering to a therapist. It feels good to receive

## EXERCISE 6-2

Answer the following questions as if you were a client receiving bodywork sessions from a therapist: How would you feel if the therapist:

1. Talked to you with a harsh tone?
2. Talked in a soothing and soft voice?
3. Talked about a political position that is opposite from what you believe?
4. Made some biased remarks about another culture?
5. Rubbed your abdomen?
6. Massaged your scalp?
7. Rubbed your neck really hard?
8. Hummed during your massage?

After answering these questions, review your answers and consider whether the reason you answered as you did evokes any memories of something or someone in your past. Share some of your answers with your classmates. It can be revealing to see how these different situations can lead to different responses from others.

praise and compliments from your clients. Nonetheless, it is still important to manage this aspect of the therapeutic relationship, and this can be challenging for even the most experienced bodyworkers. For example, if you have a client who constantly tells you how good he or she feels after each session and how you are a wonderful therapist, might you unconsciously give better treatment to this client than to your other clients? A situation like this could also become problematic if the client begins to have unrealistic expectations of the therapist. The client might expect to get an appointment at the last minute or on your day off, extra session time, might ask advice on other issues that are beyond your scope of practice, or might step over boundaries by trying to build a more personal relationship.

## MANAGING TRANSFERENCE

Transference by the client may occur naturally in the therapeutic relationship in a positive or negative way, and managing both reactions can enhance the therapeutic relationship. Understanding that the transference is taking place and that the client’s reactions are related to another person or event can help you avoid taking the reaction personally. For example, if you are working on the upper back and the client suddenly tenses up and

becomes very agitated, this reaction may not be from your work at this time but may be a reaction to some past event such as being abused by another person who hit his or her upper back. Words and touch can evoke a dramatic response from a client, and in most cases the therapist has no previous warning that such a response will occur. Most clients do not even realize what is happening when transference occurs. They may feel that the therapist did something or may even deny that they are reacting at all.

Managing these reactions can be challenging for a therapist. The situation should be handled with care. Box 6-3 lists some suggestions when a client begins to show signs that transference is happening.

### BOX 6-3 *Managing Transference*

#### WATCH FOR:

1. Changes in the client's body (tensing up, fidgeting on the table, making a fist, turning the head from side to side).
2. Changes in the client's emotional state (crying, laughing, suddenly starting to talk or quitting talking).
3. A client asking for special considerations such as changing your schedule or fees.
4. A client trying to socialize the therapeutic relationship, wanting a more personal relationship with you.
5. A client crossing a physical boundary such as touching you too much or needing a hug at the end of a session.
6. A client becoming too personal—telling you too much information.

#### WHAT TO DO:

1. Check in with the client. Ask how he or she is doing.
2. If the client is physically pulling away, ask the client if you should lighten the pressure or work in another area.
3. If the client is exhibiting an emotional response, ask if the client needs a moment to relax. Sometimes changing the work you are doing will give the client time to process what is happening.
4. If the client is having a serious response, you may ask if the client would like the session to stop and continue another day.
5. If you suspect the issue is overwhelming for the client, a referral to a counselor or psychological therapist may be appropriate. Having a network of referral sources for your clients can help in situations like these. Place brochures or other information in a public place to make it accessible for all of your clients.
6. Keep the relationship professional. When a client starts to cross professional lines, such as asking for your home phone number or wanting an appointment outside your regular schedule, explain to the client what your schedule is and say you can be reached at your office number.

7. If a client becomes too physical, you can avoid being touched. For example, after the session is over, wait behind a desk so that the client does not have the opportunity to hug you. Or, during the session itself, if a client crosses a physical boundary, place the client's hand back into the position needed to continue the session. Usually this physical movement quietly lets the client know you are focusing on the session. If it continues, simply ask the client to stop.

#### WHAT NOT TO DO:

1. Do not try to help the client resolve an emotional issue. This is beyond the scope of practice for massage therapists.
2. Do not tell the client to forget about the issue for now. It may be important to allow the client to work through a response brought to the surface by bodywork. Be supportive but not nosy.
3. Don't be abrupt in your response. In many cases, clients do not realize this is happening. Subtle changes in your approach and demeanor can let a client know that your boundaries have been crossed. If a client does not get the subtle approach, then a direct approach may be needed.

In most of the relationships you form with clients, some type of transference will take place. It is important to realize that this is happening and maintain a proper perspective about the manifestations of transference. Keeping the therapeutic relationship healthy for both the client and therapist is the goal.

#### Key Points

- Transference takes place in most therapeutic relationships.
- Do not take a client's transference reactions personally.
- Focus on your client's reactions and work in a place that feels both safe for the client and you.
- Communicate with and obtain feedback from your client.

## COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

**Countertransference** is similar to transference, except that transference occurs from the therapist to the client. Countertransference leads to reactions of the therapist to something the client says or does. For example, if as a child you spent time with an aunt who constantly complained about her boss and you hated listening to her, you may react with the same attitude toward a client who complains about her boss during massage sessions.



**BOX 6-4** *Signs of Countertransference***NEGATIVE COUNTERTRANSFERENCE**

1. Not looking forward to a client's session
2. Feeling drained after a client's session
3. Not being able to focus on a client
4. Wanting the session to be over with quickly

**POSITIVE COUNTERTRANSFERENCE**

1. Really looking forward to a session
2. Feeling excited or overly happy during a session
3. Becoming too involved with a client
4. Not wanting a session to end

The same factors that can trigger a client's transference reaction can also be triggers for a therapist. A client's voice, tone, and attitude all influence how we react to the client. It is important to be aware when this is happening. Box 6-4 lists some very simple signs that suggest countertransference is the reason we may be reacting to a client in either a positive or negative way.

Although the signs in Box 6-4 may seem extreme, countertransference can happen very easily to massage therapists. For example, if you realize that you want to do more for one client than for others, it would be important to examine your reasons for this. If a particular client reminds you of your father and you are going out of your way to receive the client's approval, the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship have changed. Your focus would no longer be on the client, as you become more focused on what makes you feel better. Recognizing that countertransference is happening is an important first step and is something you should consider whenever you feel that something is not right in the therapeutic relationship. The personality of the therapeutic relationship can change a great deal because of this dynamic. The client may begin to feel the sessions have taken on some new dimension and may feel uneasy. Pinpointing the reason for a problematic therapeutic relationship can be difficult unless the therapist is aware of what transference and countertransference look and feel like.

Countertransference can have either positive or negative influence. An example of the positive side is a client who reminds you of someone you care about. In this case your sessions may be more nurturing as long as you stay objective and focused on the client, assuring that the sessions are what the client needs. But if the warning signs listed in Box 6-4 occur, you need to stop and ask yourself if the therapeutic relationship has changed and

whether the focus on the client is being interrupted by your own thoughts and needs in the sessions. This does not mean that all positive instances of countertransference result in a negative outcome. Being aware of your reactions and keeping them in check can prevent a negative result. The client may feel he or she is receiving your close attention, and this would feel good. Yet you may actually be paying attention not to the client but to an image of another person in your mind. In this situation your focus on the client has been diverted. What then happens when you become aware of the countertransference and move back in the other direction? Will the client then begin to feel neglected? That is why it is important to pay close attention to your thoughts and feelings about your clients and realize in the very early stages that countertransference could be happening. Knowing that we all often project feelings onto others should help you stop and think before your therapeutic relationship with clients is affected.

Even more than positive countertransference, negative countertransference can be very damaging to the therapeutic relationship. This is a common reason for losing clients. Clients come to receive bodywork sessions to feel better, and if a therapist reacts to a client in a negative manner, the client will likely feel that his or her needs are not being met and may not return for future sessions. For example, a client may remind you of a former friend with whom you are still angry because of some past conflict. Unconsciously, your feelings for this former friend affect your attitude toward the client you are now treating. Your feelings will influence the movement and pressure of your hands on the client. The change may be very subtle. The client may become aware of something negative or may just feel that the session is not what he or she had expected. Although no one can be the perfect therapist for every client who comes into the office, it is important to understand what could be happening in a case like this. Potentially every client you see could remind you of someone from your past. Many psychologists say that all relationships involve transference of some kind. Yet the public expects professional treatment and should not have to be concerned about issues such as boundaries and countertransference. New clients generally do not question what issues you may have unless they have had a bad experience in the past.

Knowing that all relationships can involve transference or countertransference helps you know when something in the therapeutic relationship is not right. Step back and look at why the relationship is no longer focusing on the client, and try to see what behaviors may have triggered your response to the client (Box 6-5). If you do not feel

**BOX 6-5** *Steps for Managing Countertransference*

When the therapeutic relationship is not working, take the following steps:

1. Take inventory of your relationship with a client. List the reasons this person is your client.
2. Write down any emotional issues you are having with the client. For example, “This client makes me angry when he whines about his pain.”
3. Think about whether you have had similar emotional issues with someone in your past life. For example, “Aunt Sally always complained about her pain.”
4. Try to separate out your feelings or emotions so that the treatment plan is attainable. Aunt Sally may have made you mad, but your client is truly in pain.
5. Remember why the client has come to you. Write down some positive affirmations to use when you work with the client in the next session.

you can handle the situation, talk with a mentor or appropriate health care provider about what steps to take to improve the therapeutic relationship.

We never want to lose a client, but it could happen if a client feels something is not right during the session. Talking with the client may be another option, but be sure first that you have figured out why you respond to a client in a certain way. Using the client’s time to work out your own problems is not a good option.

**CASE STUDY**

A new client had been referred to Samuel for injury recovery work related to a fall a year ago. The client explained to Samuel that she had a great deal of back and leg pain, and bed rest was the only thing that seems to relieve it. She described her back pain as constantly aching with periods of pain down her legs. While Samuel worked on her, she sometimes cried out, saying that the area was really painful, and fidgeted on the table. Samuel began to find his patience wearing thin when working with this client. She constantly complained about both her pain and other aspects of her life. Many of his suggestions to help her improve were met with opposition, and he felt she could improve much more quickly if she followed his advice. Samuel began dreading his sessions with this client, realizing he always felt physically and emotionally drained after each session. He also found that he had stopped communicating with her and was just doing basic bodywork, thinking that the client just did not want to improve.

Samuel realized that this was not a good attitude to have with a client and decided to talk to his mentor about what to do. After he explained the case, the mentor asked him if Samuel had dealt with anyone like her in the past, such as a family member. Samuel described how his mother had become very ill and lay in bed for months in pain during his teenage years. His mother not been able to spend much time with him, and he had always resented that she had been sick. Then Samuel realized that he was having similar feelings of resentment toward this client. Knowing that this client had nothing to do with his mother, however, Samuel gained a different way of looking at his client.

In the next session Samuel approached the client with a new attitude. When a feeling of resentment began to creep back in, he easily put it aside, knowing that this client had nothing to do with his past.

Both transference and countertransference can be managed when the therapist is aware of what is happening. As therapists we need to understand when and why it happens. Anytime we lose the focus on our clients, we should consider whether these dynamics may be the reason. Often a simple realization of what is happening can redirect the therapeutic relationship back in the proper direction. If you feel that you cannot manage it, talk with a mentor or health care provider. A healthy therapeutic relationship is rewarding to both the therapist and client.

**Key Points**

- A therapist may transfer negative or positive feelings to a client.
- Negative or positive feelings are unconsciously projected to the client through the therapist’s hands.
- The therapist should do a self-inventory when the therapeutic relationship is not working or is at risk.

**DUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

A **dual relationship** occurs when two people have two different kinds of relationships overlapping. Typically, two people have both a social and a professional relationship. At some time during their careers most professionals will experience dual relationships with other business people, clients, or patients. For example, a doctor may meet someone

at a social function and form a social relationship. That person may then realize this doctor is appropriate for the treatment of a particular condition he or she has, and then becomes a patient. The doctor and patient thus now have both a social and professional relationship.

Such social relationships are common with professionals and often are very casual. For example, a professional may simply see a client or patient occasionally at social functions. Other social relationships may become more personal, however, potentially causing conflicts between the two relationships. At such times it is good to have guidelines in place for handling situations that can arise, in order to maintain a professional relationship with the client.

### CASE STUDY

For the last year, Tom, a massage therapist, had been attending a support group for survivors of cancer. He had met a number of people with whom he related well and had much in common.

One of the members of the group recently injured her back, and her health care provider recommended massage therapy for a couple of months. She remembered Tom from the support group and called for an appointment. Tom asked her to fill out the intake forms as usual. After two sessions he reviewed these forms and realized that she seemed not to have given him full information regarding her back injury. He asked her to provide additional information on the form, but she said that certain information could hurt her case with the insurance company. She asked him to cooperate and withhold some information, adding that the support group members should stick together.

Tom told her that he was ethically and legally obligated to give the insurance company the correct information. She did not return for any future sessions, and later on he found out that she told other support group members he was not a good therapist.

In a case such as this, it is important to inform a client of your responsibilities as a therapist. Withholding information or giving incorrect information to an insurance company is insurance fraud. Your license could be put in jeopardy or a complaint could be made to a therapists' association.

## PROFESSIONAL DUAL RELATIONSHIPS

In many types of business, professionals find it is important to network with other professionals in related fields. As you begin to build your own massage practice, you will see that many professionals rely on other professionals in different businesses

to help build their own. Most professionals join business groups to network and gain exposure with others who may need their services in the future. One professional forms a business relationship with another, and each may choose to use the services of the other. Frequently a dual relationship begins to develop as two professionals form a professional relationship after having first met socially and establishing a social relationship. With dual relationships it is important to have clear boundaries. Without boundaries, there is a greater potential for problems to occur that may eventually disrupt the relationship. For example, another professional with whom you also have a social relationship may ask you for a favor or expect a discounted fee from you as a "professional courtesy."

It is always necessary to maintain your boundaries in a business situation. Often this is not problematic. The other person is generally aware that he or she is both your client and a professional associate, and often both of you realize problems can result if boundary issues become cloudy. If the boundaries are not clear, both relationships may end and the other professional would no longer be either your client or your business associate. For example, if you have a friend who is a physical therapist and you have been having problems with your arm, you may ask the friend to take a look at it. That friend, the physical therapist, may request that you see your doctor first. Although such requests may seem innocent, some people do try to take advantage of dual relationships. To prevent problems, professionals generally have to maintain clear boundaries that apply to everyone. This makes it simple and others will see what your boundaries are. This in turn helps you as a therapist avoid decisions that can cause problems later.

### CASE STUDY

Gina, a massage therapist building a new practice, joined the chamber of commerce in her town and really enjoyed the regular meetings. She got to know other local business owners and hoped they would recommend her to their customers and associates. She also used local business services as much as possible for printing brochures, maintaining her work space, providing supplies, and so on.

At a monthly chamber meeting she met Veronica, a local bank vice president who seemed to have considerable influence in town. At the next couple of meetings Veronica again talked with Gina, and they seemed to have formed a good friendship. Veronica called her to schedule an appointment. Her back had been bothering her, she said, and she needed some work.

Gina was very aware that a dual relationship had now developed and that she needed to keep the session focused on the client. Yet while Veronica was on the table, she clearly wanted to keep chatting about the chamber meetings and what was going on with other businesses in town. Gina was having a hard time keeping her focus on her work on Veronica's back. She felt pressured to remain friendly and chat with Veronica, but she also wanted to do a good job and thereby keep her as a client and a referral source. Gina knew that if she did a good job, Veronica would feel better and most likely would tell others about her services.

After awhile, Gina told Veronica that she needed her to focus on the massage work they were doing, explaining that she needed feedback regarding her levels of pain and stiffness. She said she enjoyed chatting with Veronica but that now she wanted to make sure they addressed her back problem.

When the session ended, Gina checked in with Veronica to see how she felt. She kept her focus on her client, maintained their professional relationship, did not drift back into their social relationship, which could easily have overshadowed the work. Veronica left feeling her back condition had been addressed and was not upset by the change in focus during the session.

All of your clients, including other professionals, will understand and appreciate it when you stay focused on providing the services they request. Remaining conscious of your clients' priorities will help keep you focused. If you find yourself experiencing a conflict of interest and are unable to keep your focus on the session, as in the case of Gina, you may need to clarify the dual relationship. Communicating with the other party then becomes an important issue before the relationship becomes problematic. For example, if you spend time during sessions talking about the client's business problems, you will not be focused on the bodywork, and eventually this will affect your work and how the client feels about it. Unclear dual relationships can impair your professional judgment and also increase the risk that one party may unintentionally take advantage of the other. The basic guidelines in Box 6-6 can help you avoid situations that become uncomfortable for either party.

Always remember that in dual relationships, each party is seeking something. You may be seeking networking opportunities or using another business for services you need. The other person may also be seeking networking or may need your massage therapy services. This is a give and take situation. Quite often professional dual relationships serve a very good purpose for both parties. Yet, because

## BOX 6-6

**Guidelines for Successful Professional Dual Relationships**

- Identify the nature of both relationships (business, social, personal).
- Identify why you have each of the relationships (e.g., a business relationship for networking, and a social relationship since you both belong to the same social group and enjoy each other's company).
- Determine the importance of both relationships to both you and the other professional.
- Identify any potential risks or problems that may arise in the future.
- Work with the client to determine what the focus of your sessions should be.
- Determine ways that you can remain objective and exercise good judgment.

sometimes the dual relationship does not work, you should always be alert for the warning signs of a troublesome dual relationship (Box 6-7). If the dual relationship becomes burdensome and cannot be resolved, it may be time to gracefully back away and learn from the experience.

If you feel a dual relationship is becoming problematic, develop a plan to work it out with the other party before the situation gets out of hand. Effective communication is needed to maintain a healthy dual relationship that remains objective, to clarify the relationship, and to meet the needs of both parties. If the other party is not open to communication about problems you have identified, one or both of the dual relationships may have to be discontinued. A common problem, for example, is feeling that the other person is taking advantage of you. This usually leads to resentment that threatens the professional and social relationship. As always, prevention is better than cure: as you enter a relationship that may become dual, establish boundaries to prevent problems from developing. If they do, try to address them from the start before they become insurmountable.

## BOX 6-7

**Warning Signs of a Troublesome Dual Relationship**

A dual relationship may not be working if any or all of the following signs are present:

- The relationship seems one-sided to you.
- You feel you have lost your objectivity.
- A conflict of interest has developed.
- You question whether you are providing competent care.
- You feel vulnerable.
- You have begun to resent the other party.

## PERSONAL DUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Dual relationships that involve a more personal relationship are generally more complicated than business relationships because of their very nature as a personal matter. People generally invest much emotion in their personal relationships. Yet it is still important that you set your boundaries clearly for the professional side of the relationship. More often than not, this is a problem for new therapists. As you begin your practice, you may rely on friends and family to help get you started. These people with whom you have personal relationships may become clients and may also offer to help you market your practice by talking with others. This is a great way to get your practice going, but unhealthy dual relationships may develop that could lead to hard feelings with family and friends. Family and friends in some cases will test your boundaries on dual relationships. Be firm but fair, treating everyone the same to avoid problems.

The same basic principles hold true for business relationships and personal relationships. Knowing that there is a risk for conflicts, set your boundaries initially to help prevent problems. Family members may have unrealistic expectations of you and your practice. It is a common problem of massage therapists for friends and family to expect favors. People often assume that because your hands are always with you, they are ready to give massages at all times. Hairdressers often experience the same expectation and are frequently asked to “just do a little trim” while visiting family members. Box 6-8 lists other areas where friends and family members may ask you to cross your professional boundaries.

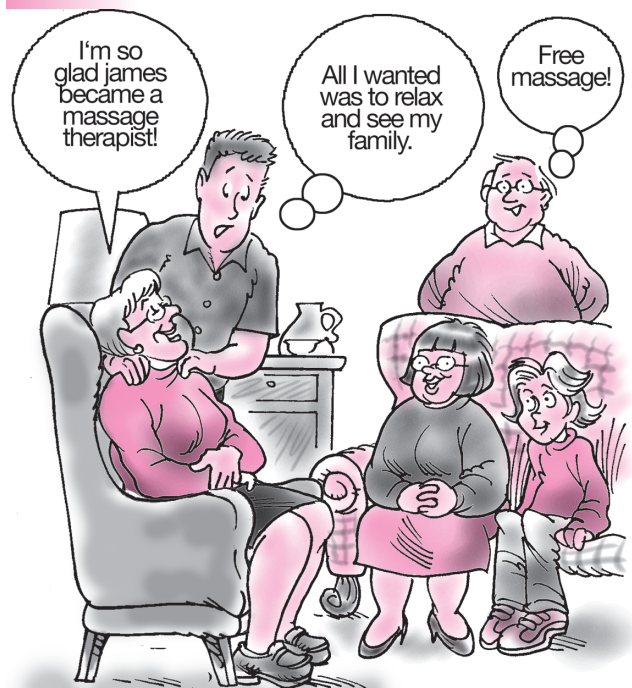
It is important to address all the boundary issues listed in Box 6-8 with family members and friends. Communicate your boundaries to these individuals and explain that these are important issues not only for you but for the profession. Let them see it is not a personal issue but a professional one.

Discounts for family, friends, and colleagues is a special issue. Many therapists do in fact give such

discounts. To prevent problems, should you decide to give discounts, one approach that seems to work well is to give everyone the same discount, such as 20% or 30% off for family members and friends. With a consistent approach no one becomes angry on learning someone else got a better discount.

### CASE STUDY

James had moved out of his hometown to attend massage school. After graduation he began working in his new city doing on-site chair massage. Many months later he was looking forward to returning home to see everyone at a family reunion. James put in a very busy work week so he could have an extra day off for a 3-day weekend for the trip home. He had to drive most of the night to make it to the reunion.



That afternoon, shortly after arriving at the party, an aunt told him she was having problems with her shoulder and neck and asked if he could help her. She said she was miserable but wanted to enjoy the party. James got his massage chair out of the car and worked on her for about 20 minutes. He was anxious to join the party again and see his many relatives, but just as he finished with his aunt, a cousin asked if he could work on her for a few minutes. He could not think of a way to say no, so he started work on her. As others noticed them, a line formed of others also wanting a chair massage. Everyone said they had a special need, and James felt bad for them and could not say no.

#### BOX 6-8

#### *Boundary Issues With Friends and Family Members*

- Asking you to give them extra time
- Asking you for a discount
- Asking you to work on days or at times when you normally do not work
- Asking for techniques in which you are not trained
- Asking you to change their records
- Asking you for a massage at their house or other settings
- Asking advice on other health issues outside your scope of practice

Over the next 4 hours James did nothing besides work on family members. When the party ended, he was physically exhausted and had not been able to spend any time socializing with family members except briefly while some of them were in his massage chair. Feeling tired and somewhat cheated out of the reunion, he expressed his disappointment to his mother. She had good advice for him: “Just say no.” She advised him to separate his business and personal lives so that people could not take advantage of him.

Most therapists will make exceptions for friends and family members sometime during their career, and often problems do not occur. But if any of the warning signs listed in Box 6-7 become evident, the dual relationship is at risk for failure. This does not necessarily mean that you have to terminate your relationship with the other. Talk with the other party and explain the problem and some possible solutions. If talking about the problem does not resolve it, the relationship may have to be terminated. Terminating a business relationship is difficult, and terminating a personal relationship involves many ramifications on a different level. It may be better to try to maintain your personal relationship and suggest the person see another therapist. Reaching an equitable solution when dealing with family and friends can be difficult unless both parties understand that business and personal relationships are two different entities.

Another dilemma may arise when bodyworkers work with a spouse or significant other. It can be challenging for many therapists to set boundaries with someone who is so close. Students of massage often ask about what to do when they encounter problems. Students frequently report boundary issues with friends, relatives, and significant others. For example, a new therapist wants to show her boyfriend what she has learned at school. The boyfriend wants to talk about personal issues during the massage, and she has difficulty focusing on the session. Often students report that their partners do not understand the true nature of bodywork and try instead to use it as a platform for intimacy, as in the case of Ginny.

### CASE STUDY

Ginny came to massage class one day very upset. She told the class that her boyfriend, Andy, was having a real problem with her becoming a massage therapist. Andy felt threatened by the fact that Ginny would be working on other men and wanted her to work only on women. But Ginny wanted to work with athletes and felt such a restriction would be very limiting for her career.

Ginny’s teacher asked her what experiences Andy had with massage. It turned out that Ginny was the only one who had ever given him a massage. The teacher asked her how the massage sessions had gone, and Ginny giggled. She said that Andy really felt good and usually ended up wanting to be intimate with her. Ginny admitted she found this fun and sometimes encouraged it.

The teacher then explained that Andy most likely developed his opinion of massage from their own sessions. He probably assumed that Ginny touched all men in the same way. Now that he had formed this attitude, Ginny knew she would have a hard time convincing Andy that things were different with other men.

### MAKING DUAL RELATIONSHIPS WORK

Many dual relationships can last a long time and can be very helpful to you and your business, as long as you are aware of them as such and are careful to make them work. Many professionals work within the parameters of dual relationships every day and do not give it a second thought. For example, you may work in the same place as some of your classmates and socialize with them on the weekend. This is a dual relationship. Some dual relationships are very casual, while others involve a great deal of complexity. Competing for clients and tips, scheduling types of treatments, and discounts can all become issues if not handled with care. The same basic guidelines apply in almost all situations to prevent problems from occurring (Box 6-9).

Once you understand that any relationship can develop into a dual relationship, you can see the importance of setting clear boundaries and beginning the dual relationship with those boundaries in place. It is not usually a good idea to make new boundaries, or change existing ones, as you go along. For example, you might give a \$25 discount to your first family member who requests a massage. Later you realize you cannot make a living if you give out too many big discounts, so you give the next family member only a \$15 discount.

### BOX 6-9 *Tips for Maintaining Dual Relationships*

- Know that dual relationships can and will happen.
- Set your boundaries clearly.
- Keep consistent in your policies and actions.
- Communicate your boundaries.
- Be alert for the warning signs of problems.
- Find solutions as soon as problems occur.
- Don’t wait and hope a problem will resolve itself.

**EXERCISE 6-3**

1. Make a list of potential dual relationships that may occur as you begin your business (e.g., relatives, friends, co-workers).
2. List boundary issues that you may need to address (e.g., money, time).
3. List some ways that you can prevent potential problems in dual relationships.

When the second finds out she is getting a lower discount than the first, she is naturally upset. Now do you decide to give them both the \$25 discount, along with any other family members who ask in the future, or use a standard \$15 discount that may anger the first who had a higher discount? You can see how such an issue can develop gradually or suddenly snowball out of control. To prevent potential problems, start your business with a consistent plan. If warning signs occur, do not wait before looking for a solution. Address the problem as quickly as possible. If you are unsure what to do, talk with a mentor for help finding a solution that is workable for all parties.

**Key Points**

- Dual relationships will occur.
- Successful dual relationships require boundaries.
- Family and friends may inadvertently test your boundaries and policies in regards to dual relationships.

**SUMMARY**

Each time you face one of the relationship problems described in this chapter, you will learn a new way to approach similar situations ethically in the future. Some problems can be avoided simply by knowing that the potential exists and setting boundaries to prevent the problems and conflicts from occurring. If a problem does occur, communication is usually your most important tool. Clients look to professionals to be knowledgeable and ethical in all areas involving the power differential, transference and countertransference, and dual relationships. Clients expect to receive bodywork and feel better. It is your responsibility as the therapist to work on all other aspects of the relationship and keep your clients safe in the therapeutic process.

**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES**

1. Pair up with one of your classmates. One is the therapist who is giving a massage to the other, a client. During the massage, the instructor writes different emotions or feelings on the board. No one should speak. For each emotion, the therapist should think about that word and emotion while performing the massage. Experiment with three or four different feelings. After the massage, ask the student who was the client to talk about what he or she felt during the massage. Was there a difference in the massage at various times? How did that make the student feel?
2. While performing a massage on a classmate, try using different tones of voice. Try talking to the client in a soothing manner, a matter-of-fact manner, and possibly even an angry or frustrated way. After the massage, ask the student who was the client how he or she felt at different times during the massage.

# SEXUALITY

## CHAPTER PREVIEW

- Historical perception of sex and the bodywork community
- Need for professional boundaries
- Intention and meaning of touch
- Differences between sexuality and sensuality
- Client and therapist issues involving sexuality

## KEY TERMS

**Sensuality:** a feeling of pleasure gained from the stimulation of one or more of the senses

**Sexuality:** the emotional, physical, cultural, or spiritual actions or reactions related to sexual arousal

The massage and bodywork profession was in the past associated in some people's minds with undesirable or illegal sexual activities. The general public is now more educated about massage and bodywork, but as a new therapist you are likely to eventually encounter a few people who believe you are involved in something illicit or illegal, such as prostitution or other sexual acts. Learning how to help others to understand what your profession is and stands for is an important part of your education.

It is also important to understand the dynamics of touch. Touch has many meanings. Your intention as expressed in your touch is an important component in all the bodywork you do. The essence of a massage changes when your thoughts or intentions change. In this chapter, you will explore how your thoughts can affect others.

## THE ISSUE OF SEX

The mere mention of the word "sex" evokes many different thoughts and emotions in different people. Our society has strong attitudes about sex, and

how and when you were raised influence your own thoughts about sex. It is important to discuss sex and **sexuality** when studying ethics in bodywork because sex is closely linked to touch. Having clear boundaries is an important component of a massage practice.

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As recent as two decades ago, when someone mentioned the word "massage," others generally associated the word with an illicit act. There were legitimate practitioners of massage, of course, generally called masseuses or masseurs, who often worked in resorts or bathhouses. It was not unusual to get a "rub-down" at the gym, for example. Most of these practitioners worked only with clients of the same gender. At the same time, however, advertisements for massage directed at males, showing female masseuses, were very suggestive—and most people generally assumed that sexual activity was included. Sex for pay was and is illegal in most places, and even when not, referring to prostitution as massage in advertising seemed less obvious.



Legitimate massage therapists who started their practices years ago had to overcome many obstacles caused by this attitude of the general public and law enforcement. Even applying for a business license involved hurdles because local authorities often assumed massage therapists actually wanted to open a house of ill repute. Early practitioners pioneered the way for therapists today, but local and state officials are now more educated about the nature and legitimacy of massage therapy.

### CASE STUDY

A group of therapists in Missouri were drafting legislation regarding licensing for massage therapists. When they felt they had a viable proposal, they hired a lobbyist to represent them in the state legislature. The lobbyist did his homework and found that a state senator had recently proposed restrictive legislation about massage. It seems that in his town a number of businesses provided massage, but unfortunately these businesses were fronts for a sexual trade. His proposed legislation would give each county the right to ban any type of massage from being performed in that county, as he wanted his own county to do. This senator truly believed that the word “massage” meant sex.

The group of therapists and lobbyists asked for a meeting with the senator to discuss his bill. After a 2-hour meeting, the senator had a completely different view about the practice of massage therapy. He learned about the education required for becoming a therapist and the important role of bodyworkers in the health care system. The therapists agreed in turn with the senator that businesses should not be allowed to use the word massage to cover for sexual trade. Together they vowed to pursue legislation to allow legitimate massage therapists to work and to require anyone using the words “massage” or “bodywork” to be professionally trained and certified. That legislation passed and now stands as a law good for the public and massage therapists alike.

Movements to pass legislation and educate the public about massage have dramatically changed the public’s view of massage. Advertising in newspapers, magazines, television, and radio describes the benefits of massage. To attract the public to their facilities, resorts and day spas advertise massage as one of their key features. Mention the word “massage” now, and most people will think of how they could really use one to relax or feel better. Associations such as the American Massage Therapy

Association (AMTA) receive more than 5,000 calls per month from the public and therapists requesting information about massage. The AMTA media center has become a well-known source for information about massage. This group and others like it help educate the public not only on the benefits of massage but also on topics such as the qualifications of therapists, differences among massage modalities, and current legislation and ethical issues. Both experienced therapists and new massage students will continue to change the public image about massage and bodywork.

Every bodyworker has the responsibility to act professionally and ethically at all times. Practicing in health care carries a great deal of responsibility. Being a bodyworker is not simply a job—it is who you are. For example, when you see your doctor in a social setting, you still relate to him or her as your doctor. In many professions individuals have a professional persona they carry everywhere. Doctors, accountants, nurses, managers, and business owners all relate professionally to others in many settings. Massage therapists fall in the same category. This is why it is important for all therapists to understand past attitudes toward massage and know that with each bit of education we give others, we are furthering the profession for ourselves and others who follow.

Although the past poor reputation of massage has generally faded, sexuality still remains an issue in the massage community today. Touch can evoke sexual feelings and thoughts in both the client and the therapist, and therapists need to be aware how this can happen and how to handle such situations professionally and ethically.

### PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES AND SEX

Because of past attitudes toward massage, professional therapists see the need to maintain clear boundaries regarding sex. In the past, legitimate therapists wanted to distinguish themselves from others who performed illegal acts under the name of massage, which resulted in associations writing codes of ethics and states including wording in laws and regulations addressing the sexual issues. Boundaries help therapists know where the line is between professional and unprofessional behavior, and boundaries have also helped the public understand what massage therapy really is. The codes of ethics discussed in Chapter 3 all set boundaries regarding sex. Most ethics codes state that therapists will have no sexual contact with clients. Many states have rules and regulations further defining what specific contact is or is not allowed. For example,

a law may state that no massage can be performed that involves touching the genitals of a client. This is a fairly clear rule to follow.

State laws, rules, and regulations also define the process by which a client may allege that sexual touch occurred and the consequences of such allegations. For example, the rule may state that a person can file a complaint in writing. The complaint will be heard and investigated by the state board, and if the therapist is found in violation of a rule, the board may suspend the therapist's license to practice. State and local ordinances similarly define the parameters in which a therapist can practice. Some of these definitions involve ethical issues to help therapists and the public know the boundaries.

Boundaries can involve sensitive issues, but many professions have boundaries related to ethical issues. Mortgage brokers, for example, have associations and state laws that address ethical issues. Because of past infractions involving clients' money, these issues are controlled through codes and rules. Boundaries remain a public issue in the bodywork profession because some individuals still try to hide behind the words massage or bodywork to perform illegal acts. This happens more frequently where laws or ordinances are lacking or are not enforced.

Acting responsibly, educating the public, and feeling comfortable as you work in your profession all help others who may still be skeptical understand that massage is a valuable and integral therapy for maintaining health and well-being.

### Key Points

- The public image of massage and bodywork has significantly changed over the last two decades.
- Legislation and education have been key factors helping the public understand the massage profession.
- Every therapist should be part of the process of continuing to educate the public.
- Boundaries help to clarify sensitive issues.

## THE DYNAMICS OF TOUCH

Touching another person always involves an intention of some type and evokes a response. You may express happiness or sorrow by hugging someone, or playfulness by tickling or wrestling, or nurturing by rubbing someone's shoulders. The other person

knows the meaning you are transmitting not only by the type of touch but also by your intention expressed in the touch. When you are happy and hug someone, for example, the hug is generally uplifting, but when you are sad the hug may be more clinging and involve other motions such as rubbing. Generally the other person can feel your intention and responds to that intention along with the touch itself. Sometimes, however, the other person may not understand your intention and may react in a way that shows he or she is not in sync with you. When this happens, the other person may have difficulty handling what you are offering or may reject feelings of any kind at that moment.

Massage is generally considered to be a nurturing type of touch. People make appointments for massage in order to feel better or reduce stress and to take care of themselves. Therapists convey to clients through touch and words what their intentions are. Unfortunately, some individuals may confuse the nurturing with other thoughts or actions that could be sexual in nature.

## THE MEANING OF TOUCH

How a person responds to touch involves the individual factors discussed in Chapter 2, Values and Emotions. People react to touch and intention according to their own values and beliefs, which are mostly formulated during their early years. Someone who was brought up in a home where touch was a part of everyday life may naturally feel very comfortable receiving a massage. An individual who was raised in an environment where touch was not prevalent, or where touch may even have been associated with punishment, may not feel comfortable receiving a massage. Remember that not everyone thinks of massage in a positive way. Some people may object to having someone else touch their body, especially in situations such as occur with massage. Clients who are new to massage can be unsure and hesitant about the experience. It is important for therapists to recognize this reaction and treat clients with respect. Every person has a comfort zone, and clients should never be forced to go beyond their comfort zone. Undressing and having another person touch their body can be very uncomfortable for some. They may understand that a massage would feel good but cannot get beyond their emotions about getting undressed. Such clients may be good candidates for a chair massage, allowing them to receive positive touch under conditions they feel more comfortable with. Others may not feel comfortable at all having another person touch them in any

way, perhaps because of past experiences of abuse or punishment or because of their own perspective of their body.

Remember too that body tissues can hold memories of pain, emotions, or trauma. A therapist should never force a client to go beyond what the client feels comfortable with. It is important to respect clients' thoughts and feelings during a massage.

Therapists encounter a wide variety of reactions to touch from clients during bodywork sessions. Some clients may perceive the therapist's touch as sexual even though the therapist does not have any such intention or feelings. A client may, for example, find being touched on the abdomen or thigh a trigger for sexual feelings. Therapists can be surprised by a client's sexual reaction and need to be prepared if it happens. This does not mean that a therapist has to constantly be aware of touching all parts of the body in fear that a client will react. Rather, therapists should be aware of any shift in the client's behavior, and if it becomes evident that the client is reacting negatively or sexually, the therapist should change the work, pressure, or area to avoid embarrassing the client. The client's reaction may surprise the client as much as it does the therapist. Changing the routine can help eliminate the reaction in many cases. If an inappropriate response continues, the massage session may need to be stopped.

It is also important to recognize differences in how men and women sometimes relate to their feelings and to touch. Men tend to associate touch and sexuality more commonly than females. Some men have issues with other males touching them and may request a female therapist. A new therapist may feel uncomfortable when a male client specifically requests a female therapist. Touch is a personal experience for the client, however, and the client should feel comfortable with the gender of the therapist. Some therapists too may feel more comfortable working on one gender because of their own safety zone. It is important for therapists to explore their own feelings about clients of both genders and their own preferences.

### EXERCISE 7-1

Think back to your first days in massage school and try to recall if you felt some hesitation with any gender issues. Respectfully discuss with your classmates how you and they felt then, and try to understand how your clients may feel the same way. Discuss ways that you can address these issues with clients.

### CASE STUDY

Veronica had received three massages from John over the last couple of months and had really begun to enjoy the effects of the massage. At her next appointment, she mentioned to John that she had a stiff neck and shoulders and would like to concentrate the work in that area this session. As he worked, she began to feel her upper body let go and begin to relax. When John began work on the front of her neck and shoulders, using deeper pressure right under her jaw line, she felt her shoulders tense up. John also noticed it and asked Veronica to take some relaxing breaths. He again worked along the jaw line and noticed that Veronica was much more relaxed and even had a slight smile on her face. She seemed to cooperate much more this time and even commented that touching that part of her neck felt really good. John assumed that he had just touched a sensitive spot and that she reacted to that sensitivity. He continued to work in the area. Veronica began to breathe a little heavier and even moaned a little when he worked up by her ear. John then realized that Veronica's reaction to his touch had become more sexual than therapeutic and knew he needed to change the course of the massage. Not wanting to embarrass her, he moved back down to the shoulder, changed his pressure, and worked on trigger points in her shoulders. Slowly Veronica returned to the focus of the session and likely did not realize that John had noticed her earlier reaction.

As the dynamics of touch are wide and diverse, it is important to always be aware of the client's emotions and reactions to touch. The therapist's intention may be to eliminate tension in a certain area of the body, but the client could respond to touch in a more sexual way. Therapists cannot know in advance what may trigger a client's reaction, but it is important to take notice of a client's change in demeanor or attitude. Changing the routine, pressure, or area generally eliminates an inappropriate reaction. If an inappropriate response continues, the session may need to end.

Sometimes a male client may react to touch by developing an erection. The first time it happens, most therapists are usually very uncomfortable and unsure how to handle the situation. The client may be embarrassed by the reaction and not understand why it occurred. Some may not even realize that it has occurred. Changing the focus of the routine to incorporate a different pace, area, or pressure can help. In some cases it may be appropriate to explain to the client that touch can lead to many different reactions and that working in

some areas can evoke responses. It also may be appropriate to say nothing at all, particularly with a client who seems unaware of this response.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEXUALITY AND SENSUALITY

The words sexuality and sensuality are often linked in our society. **Sensuality** is a feeling of pleasure gained from stimulation of one or more of the senses. People find different things sensual, and they also vary in how strongly they respond to sensual stimuli. Sensuality is only partially under conscious control—we can choose to have a sensual experience, but we cannot “choose” to feel pleasure from it. That is a result of a person’s past experiences and is part of what makes us human and an individual. For example, smelling the aroma of a food that you really love can be a sensual experience. Movie scenes of a beautiful waterfall can evoke sensual feelings. Touch can also be a sensual experience because touch is one of the senses. An aromatherapy massage given in a warm room with soothing music involves three of the senses, and many find this a sensual experience.

Sexuality can be similar to sensuality in that it involves pleasurable feelings that may be directly or indirectly related to the senses, but it is different in that sexual experiences generally evoke sexual arousal whereas sensual ones do not. An experience may be both sensual and sexual at the same time, such as a certain kind of caress, but the sensual dimension itself although pleasurable doesn’t cause arousal—that comes from the sexual dimension. Exercise 7-2 can help you understand differences between sexuality and sensuality.

### EXERCISE 7-2

For each action, write down whether you think it could evoke a sensual or sexual response.

1. Touching a baby’s face
2. Looking at a beautiful painting
3. Holding hands with a significant other
4. Receiving a note thanking you for your kindness
5. Kissing your significant other
6. Massaging a good friend
7. Smelling your favorite dish cooking
8. Massaging a client’s back
9. Hugging your best friend

All the actions in Exercise 7-2 generally evoke some type of response. Understanding such responses relates to therapists’ responsibilities during bodywork. Some clients find all touch sensual. Touch often evokes a response that is sometimes emotional for some people, sometimes sexual for others.

## COMMUNICATION THROUGH TOUCH

When students are asked at the beginning of their bodywork training why they want to work in this field, most say it is because they want to help others. That is truly a good beginning. What most students do not realize at first is how much attention needs to be paid to the multiple dimensions of massage to become a good therapist. An important component is the communication between the therapist and a client.

Throughout a massage session several types of communication occur. Verbal communication occurs when you interview your clients, talk with them about different massage modalities and techniques, and check in with them about their comfort level during sessions. Therapists may also explain massage modalities or boundary issues they feel are important.

People respond to touch much as they do to words: they may understand exactly what the therapist intends or they may react differently because to them the words or touch carry some other meaning. Touch is a form of nonverbal communication, involving what some call “gut feelings” or intuition. Nonverbal communication occurs both from therapist to client and client to therapist. If your intention during a massage is to provide a totally relaxing session, your hands will convey that to your client with long, soothing strokes that nurture the client’s well-being. Most clients find this very relaxing, but a client could respond to this massage sexually. Attentiveness to the client’s nonverbal communication is just as important as the techniques you are performing (Fig. 7-1). Being proactive and focused on the client help you stay tuned to the client’s nonverbal communication, which can help you prevent uncomfortable situations from happening. For example, if you feel a client is reacting inappropriately to a certain technique or area you are working on, you can change to another technique or area to change the client’s reaction.

The therapist’s intention is also important. What is your intention when you hug your best friend? You are not trying to evoke a sexual response but are simply sharing your feelings with a friend, such as showing that you care. But even



**FIGURE 7-1** ■ Paying attention to the client's nonverbal communication will help you know how the client is reacting and when changes are needed in your technique.

when you do not intend to evoke a sexual response, another individual might respond in that way. Both intention and response are involved in a complex dynamic in bodywork. The therapist and the client both come to a session with a goal in mind. The therapist should ask the client what his or her goal is for the session, and this helps the therapist set his or her own intention for a session. The client then responds to that intention and the work being done. The intention and responses are present before, during, and after the session. Constant verbal and physical communication helps the session be successful. Therapists who do not stay in “sync” with a client, whose intentions do not evoke the appropriate responses, often find that the client leaves the session feeling that the massage was not very successful.

Ethically, a therapist has stepped into a danger zone when his or her intentions become tainted. If a therapist steps outside professional boundaries and begins to think in an inappropriate way about a client, the client can feel that intention. For example, if you begin to think about how attractive a client is, your hands and thoughts will have a changed intention. Your hands may begin to move in a more seductive way, perhaps even without you realizing what is happening. Negative emotions and thoughts can also affect intentions.

For example, if you are frustrated by a client who is always a few minutes late, those feelings can be transferred to your hands and the client may feel something different during the massage. The client may feel that you are rushing or being a bit rough with your strokes. The intention of your touch can be influenced by even the most subconscious thoughts and feelings.

An integral part of training in massage is to learn to be in touch with your own thoughts and feelings and to understand that at times you will need to refocus your intentions. Problems and feelings from the world outside can affect your touch and therefore what a client feels in the massage. Train yourself, before each massage, to take the time to focus on your intention for that massage. It can be challenging to stay focused throughout the session, but whenever you realize that you have lost your focus, make the effort to bring yourself back to the session and focus on your therapeutic intention for it.

### CASE STUDY

Jamie had already performed six sessions today and was feeling quite tired. She had a busy evening planned with her family. A few minutes after the scheduled time, her last client still hadn't arrived, and she felt her frustration rise because she knew she had to leave the office right at 5:30. Her client finally showed up, late due to traffic, and while doing the massage, Jamie found herself thinking about having to hurry to the store because she was running late. She would fix a quick dinner because she had to be at a school play by 7:30 for her oldest daughter's first acting performance. She was very excited to see the play. Then she suddenly realized that she was in the middle of a massage and could not remember if she had done both of the client's feet yet. With effort she refocused on her client, feeling bad that she had for a while lost her intention for the massage. At the end of the session, the client remarked that she did not seem herself today. Jamie commented that she had had a long day and must have been tired. Jamie knew her client had felt her loss of focus during the session.

### Key Points

- Every form of touch has an intention behind it.
- Clients can unconsciously or consciously feel your intention.
- Intention is just as important as the techniques or routine.

## SEXUALITY AND TOUCH

New therapists are often very surprised when a client responds sexually to their touch. For example, working on the inner thighs may evoke sexual arousal in some clients. How do you prevent this? First, refocus on your intention for the session. If you feel the client is still reacting inappropriately, changing the pressure or technique can help. Otherwise, leaving the area is appropriate. Many areas of the body may evoke a sexual response. Therapists cannot always know when this will happen and should therefore be flexible enough to change the routine or move to another area as needed. Most clients would be embarrassed by their response and would prefer it if you did move on with the routine.

Although this is a delicate topic, it is important to consider what happens when a client becomes sexually aroused. A female who becomes sexually aroused may begin to move her torso or hips on the table. She may rock back and forth. A male may respond similarly and may develop an erection. Depending on the client's position, you may or may not see this happening. Both males and females may sigh or moan. If any of these signs appear during a massage, change the area where you are working or take a short break from the routine. It may be enough just to check in to see how the client feels. If necessary, talk with the client to see if he or she is aware what is happening. The client may not be consciously aware of how he or she reacted to the massage, and will likely be embarrassed. If the client is aware of the sexual response and wants to continue, this is the time to explain boundaries. If you feel the session is no longer under control, stop the session.

After such an experience you may feel shaky and unsure if you handled the situation in the most appropriate way. If you experience a situation like this and have difficulty coping with the feelings and thoughts that result, talk with a mentor.

## SEXUAL ATTRACTION

Sexual attraction can happen anywhere and at any time—this is simply a part of human nature. A human response such as sexual attraction to another person is natural and can happen even when the focus is on bodywork. It is important, however, to recognize when sexual attraction is appropriate and when it is inappropriate. Many professional ethics codes state what is considered inappropriate. Similarly, many companies have policies that personal relationships between employees in the workplace are not acceptable. Sexual harassment has become a

major issue in our society and leads to many lawsuits. Doctors and health care practitioners are especially vulnerable to being accused of inappropriate behavior. If a client pursues a more intimate relationship with you, it is important to remember your professional and sexual boundaries. Do not allow the massage session to become a forum for pursuing any type of relationship other than a therapeutic one. Likewise, if a therapist has feelings outside the boundary of a therapeutic relationship, pursuing these feelings during massage sessions could be considered sexual harassment by the client.

Touch is associated with sexuality and a bodyworker's job is to touch others—in an appropriate way. Again, consider that your intention for a session can and will be felt by the client. If you find a client attractive and begin thinking about that during a massage, the intention of the massage may change from one of relaxation and healing to involve a more sexual touch. Your hands will reveal what your mind is thinking. Because bodyworkers are in close physical contact with clients, it is easy to admire a client's body whose characteristics you find attractive. Professional therapists can understand that the client's body has physical beauty but still maintain their focus on the therapeutic goal of the bodywork and the tasks for the session. Focusing on techniques and outcomes helps maintain the ethical relationship. If you find you cannot control your feelings, however, it would be important to talk to your instructor or a mentor before the situation gets out of hand. When a therapist cannot control his or her feelings, the therapeutic relationship should end. The therapist should explain to the client the issue of professional boundaries and refer the client to another therapist.

During a session, conversation may take place. In most cases such conversation with the client should be limited, allowing the client to relax. A client who does not understand what is going on during a session may talk out of nervousness. If so, you should pay close attention to a client's state of mind and try to reassure the client about the session. For example, a client who has never before received a massage and who feels nervous while you are draping the leg may start talking about something completely out of sync with the massage to avoid thinking about your actions. The client may just be feeling nervous and vulnerable about having the leg exposed. Explain to the client that you will be working the top part of the leg and that the draping will prevent uncomfortable exposure.

Therapists should always be aware of what they are saying during a session. Even a casual remark can be taken in the wrong way and lead a client to incorrect conclusions about your intent or actions. Jokes and comments about sexuality are

inappropriate in the therapeutic relationship. Part of your training involves learning to filter your comments carefully so that the client feels comfortable. Even long-time clients can become uncomfortable with a therapist because of an inappropriate comment.

Either the therapist or client may feel sexual attraction in a bodywork session. Recognizing your own feelings or those the client is exhibiting is an important first step for acting responsibly and ethically. Focusing on the intention of the session is the second step. If you cannot control your thoughts or feelings, the ethical and responsible thing to do is refer the client to another therapist.

## EXPLORING YOUR OWN SEXUALITY

Talking about sex and sexuality is often uncomfortable for massage students and beginning practitioners. But examining your own thoughts about sexuality helps strengthen your foundation and make any needed changes in order to practice ethically.

Chapter 2 discussed the values and morals with which we were raised and how these have a tremendous influence on how we act and react to clients. In Exercise 7-3 you are now asked to write down your thoughts about certain aspects of your own sexuality. Many of these thoughts are very private, although you may choose to share them with your classmates. You may be surprised to find that others have similar thoughts.

### EXERCISE 7-3

Write a sentence or two about how you feel about each of the following actions, situations, and thoughts.

1. Being touched in areas such as the lower back, upper legs, and gluteal region
2. Touching others on the lower back, abdomen, chest, and gluteal area
3. What makes touch sexual?
4. At what point does touch become inappropriate?
5. Can I hide my feelings from a client?
6. How do I feel if a client is attracted to me?
7. Have I ever had inappropriate thoughts about others while performing a massage?
8. What did I do about it?
9. What should I do about it?

Exploring your own thoughts about touch and sexuality can be very helpful for beginning a career in bodywork. Students who do not understand this part of their psyche can end up not being prepared to handle thoughts and feelings they may feel at times as well as clients who may react to touch in a sexual way.

### Key Points

- Sensuality and sexuality are often linked with touch.
- Perception of touch is influenced by a person's background, upbringing, and past experiences.
- Recognition of inappropriate thoughts, feelings, words, or touch is an important step for professionals.
- Talk with a mentor to understand your feelings or the reactions of clients.

## ISSUES INVOLVING SEXUALITY

Issues involving sexuality that a bodyworker may encounter are those involving a client's action or sexual reaction to bodywork and those involving the therapist's own thoughts and feelings about a client during bodywork.

### MANAGING CLIENT ISSUES

A client's reactions during massage may occur very innocently and naturally. The massage therapist's gentle, nurturing touch could be unconsciously misinterpreted by a client. For example, if a client's husband often rubs the back of her neck while expressing affection, she may respond to that touch as being sexual in nature. Most therapists would not think that touching the client's neck could be a trigger for an emotional response, but you should constantly monitor a client's reactions during bodywork sessions to become aware of such responses. Being conscious of the client's responses to your touch is an ongoing process. If you feel a client is reacting in a way that is not appropriate, for example, simply changing the technique, pressure, or area usually stops the reaction. If the reaction continues, it would be appropriate to talk with the client to bring the client back to an awareness of the goals of the session. But if an inappropriate reaction occurs that cannot be managed this way, the session should be ended. A therapist has the right to refuse to treat a client if the therapist determines that the therapeutic relationship cannot be maintained in an ethical manner.



**FIGURE 7-2** ■ The effects of a gentle touch may lead a client to feel attracted to a therapist. The therapist needs to be aware of the client's response and adjust the technique accordingly.

A more problematic issue occurs when a client is sexually attracted to a therapist. This may be a natural attraction or the result of transference. The transference of a feeling for another person or the effects of a gentle, nurturing touch could lead a client to feel attracted to a therapist (Fig. 7-2). The client may reveal his or her feelings through subtle or sometimes blatant remarks or movements. Once the therapist is aware of this happening, a change of the routine or techniques may prevent the problem. But if the client continues to show an attraction to the therapist, it is appropriate to talk with the client and suggest a referral to another therapist. Because the therapist and client are alone in a room together in most cases, it is imperative to take precautions to prevent any improprieties from happening. Improprieties include a client making a sexual suggestion or comment, touching the therapist, or making any type of advance.

The most extreme issue is a client who consciously expects bodywork to be a sexual experience. This may happen with a client who has had no experience with massage therapy and who naively believes the old myths that once associated massage with prostitution or illicit sex. Obviously, a massage session with such a client will be problematic and should be ended immediately when the client's expectations become evident. Box 7-1 lists safeguards to help prevent an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation from happening.

#### BOX 7-1

#### **Safeguards to Prevent Problems With Client Expectations**

1. Always screen your clients initially over the phone. Questions to ask:
  - a. Where did you hear about us?
  - b. What type of work are you looking for?
  - c. Have you had a massage before?
  - d. If so, what type of work did you receive?
2. The client's answers on the intake interview and forms should match the original telephone responses.
3. When in doubt, have another person in your office during the session. This could be receptionist or another therapist. Make the client aware that you are not alone in the office.
4. When going on an out call, take another person with you or call another person right before you begin the session, giving the address and what time you will be done. Do this where the client can hear you.
5. Be firm. Let the client know you have a firm foundation in your profession; this will help reputable clients feel safe and nonreputable clients know they picked the wrong person.

Usually you can screen out inappropriate clients over the phone. A potential client who asks questions about things like what clothing the therapist wears or makes suggestive comments about feeling especially good after a massage may have a different expectation for the session. Simply tell the client you do not do that type of work and hang up. It is not professional to call the person a name or make other inappropriate remarks.

If a client seeking sexual stimulation does happen to make it into your facility, trust your intuition when you begin to feel something is wrong. If you feel uncomfortable with the client, remember your foundation. If you stay strong, the client will not be able to intimidate you. If a client makes suggestive remarks, tries to remove the draping, or makes sexual movements with his or her body, simply tell the client the session has ended and the client must leave. Taking payment for a session that you end this way is at your own discretion. Some feel that this person has taken their time and should pay for the session, while others feel that would be accepting money for what the client intended to be inappropriate behavior. Therapists should follow their own guidelines with which they feel comfortable. Ideally, other people are present in the office or nearby, making it unlikely that such a client will cause trouble. But if you truly feel threatened, call the police. Avoid seeing a new client late in the evening or when you may be alone in the building. Take steps to keep this from happening, and maintain some control over your schedule. For example, if you work in a salon where a receptionist books your appointments, you can let that person know



that you do not work on a new client for your last appointment of the day without prior approval if there is any chance you will be the last one in the salon and might be left alone with the client.

As well, keep in touch with other therapists in your facility. Often they can tell you about a client who has behaved inappropriately, because some clients go from therapist to therapist to see what they can get away with. Note, however, that many laws, rules, and codes state that information about clients must be kept confidential, and sharing this information may be against the rules. To help protect therapists, facilities may maintain a list of clients who are not welcome to return for therapy. If you have had a problem with a client, it would not be ethical to tell others about it; this is unfortunate because this client could try the same thing with other therapists. The problem is becoming rarer as the public becomes better educated about what massage therapists do.

### CASE STUDY

Josh had opened his massage practice in a chiropractor's office a couple of months ago and was seeing an average of 15 clients a week. He practiced 3 days a week when the doctor was in the office and had begun to see clients also on Saturday when the doctor was not there. The doctor referred a woman who expressed an interest in massage. Josh made an appointment for 2 o'clock on Saturday afternoon.

After the intake, he showed the new client the massage room and explained his routine. The client was very friendly and commented that she was lucky to have such a handsome therapist. Josh thanked her but thought to himself that this was not appropriate. During the massage, the woman talked a lot, often putting her hand on Josh's arm while she spoke to him. Josh asked her several times just to breathe and enjoy the massage and said that he was having a hard time focusing on the session while talking so much. Eventually the woman asked Josh if he would be interested in having a drink after the session. Josh knew she was crossing the line and told her that he could not socialize with his clients. She again touched his arm and said she had not been touched like this in a long time. Josh told her that comments like that were not appropriate. The woman commented that just the two of them were there and no one else would ever know what happened in that room. The session then ended, and Josh was relieved.

Then the woman asked to book another session for the following week. Josh declined. He said that she would have to find another therapist. He did not feel comfortable working with her and understood that another session with her could lead to trouble.

### BOX 7-2 *Managing Attraction to a Client*

1. Change your focus. Your client is there to receive bodywork.
2. Think about your ethical obligations. Your clients and your peers expect you to follow ethical codes and guidelines.
3. Talk with a mentor. Talking through your feelings and thoughts with another professional can help you understand what is happening. A mentor can also be more objective about the situation.
4. Refer the client to another therapist. If you cannot work through your feelings, referring the client is the most professional thing to do.

## MANAGING THERAPIST ISSUES

An issue that does not get media attention is how to approach your own sexuality when working with another person (Box 7-2). With a significant other, you may already have a history of sexuality that most likely involves touch. In other words, you yourself may sometimes associate touch with sexuality. This can be especially difficult if you have given massage to your significant other that led into sexual activity, making the association still stronger. A related potential problem is that your partner may associate the touching of massage with sexual touching and therefore assume that things might get out of hand when you are giving massage to others. It is important to educate friends, relatives, and significant others about the intention that therapists need to maintain a therapeutic relationship with clients. Others may joke about what happens on a massage table and even have suspicions about inappropriate behavior. Helping others understand the seriousness and focus that is required can take some work, but in the end they should understand what is required of a therapist. Sometimes you may need to invite them to receive bodywork in order to see the professionalism that occurs while a client is on the table.

Box 7-3 offers some suggestions to help others in your life understand your work and the professionalism you need to be successful.

### BOX 7-3 *Maintaining Professionalism*

1. Have a clear understanding with others that this is your work and your profession. Socializing and personal feelings are not part of a session.
2. Think of your table as your office.
3. Concentrate on your work and not on other issues.
4. You can control the session. If you feel you cannot, stop the session.

Inappropriate feelings, thoughts, and behaviors can occur with any client in your practice. Acting on such feelings or thoughts is dangerous and an ethical problem. Some state regulations and codes of ethics include guidelines therapists must follow in this area. Even having inappropriate thoughts during a session is problematic because your hands may naturally communicate such thoughts to your client. It is important always to stay focused on the session and therapeutic relationship.

At present, most states do not have clear-cut laws, rules, and regulations that specifically address the issue of massage therapists dating clients, although some ethical codes do refer to this behavior. It is a difficult situation when an attraction develops between a client and therapist. If you really are attracted to a client, your mentor may suggest talking with the client and referring the person to another therapist.

### CASE STUDY

Jana had been practicing massage for 8 years, and her full-time practice was thriving. She saw as many as nine clients a day, and she loved her work. It was rare to find a spot for a new client, but a client had recently moved away, and a regular had referred a man named Mike to her. She instantly liked Mike's sense of humor. After their third session, Mike asked Jana if she had time to go to lunch. She told him she was fully booked that day and did not have time. She knew she could not go out with a client but was just trying to get herself off the hook and let him down easy. She did think, however, that if the circumstances were different, she probably would go out with him.

During the next session, Mike again pursued the issue of going out. This time he asked her to dinner. Jana told Mike that she did not date clients. Mike said nothing for a few minutes and then jokingly told Jana that she was fired—so now he was not her client. She did not know what to do. He told her that although he really liked his massages, he would be willing to find another therapist so they could see what happens.

Jana did not work on Mike anymore. She did begin to talk with him on the phone, but still did not feel comfortable going out with him. After about 6 months, Jana felt she could begin a relationship with Mike, and they then dated for 3 years.

Consider the case of Jana and Mike. Why did Jana feel she had to wait a while before beginning a relationship with Mike? She had two reasons.

### BOX 7-4 *Best-Kept Secrets*

If you find any of the following happening to you, talk with a mentor or instructor:

- If you have mixed feelings about a client or begin to question your intentions in the massage session
- If you find yourself thinking about a client in any way other than in terms of massage techniques and the treatment of the client
- If you talk to someone else about a client in any but the most professional way

First, she did not want other people to view her actions as an impropriety. Some people might think, for example, that getting a massage is a good way to get to date a massage therapist, and this attitude would likely encourage inappropriate behavior. Second, Jana wanted to make sure of her own feelings for Mike. She understood that a momentary emotional attraction felt for a client might not be a true basis for a relationship and that it was too easy for her simply to rationalize her feelings. We humans can always easily justify those actions we want to take, if we're not thinking about the ethical consequences.

Sexuality and socialization are part of who we are, and learning to separate our personal and professional lives is important. People in many professions have to face this issue, but bodyworkers are especially vulnerable because touch is an integral part of what we do. Bodyworkers are not alone, however, in facing the challenges of working with others. Psychologists work with the human mind, and doctors and nurses also work with the human body. Many health care professionals frequently face dilemmas with their clients. Personal values and morals, as well as the effects of the power differential in the therapeutic relationship, can make that relationship very complex at times. It is natural and human to have thoughts and feelings about others, but it is professional to know how to act and react when such situations arise.

### *Key Points*

- Touch evokes a large array of issues.
- Be aware of any client reaction.
- Be proactive in handling a situation.
- Talk with a mentor or other professionals if you need guidance.

## SUMMARY

---

The therapeutic relationship involves a wide array of complex variables that may develop. Being aware of potential problems and knowing how to manage issues that may arise help a therapist handle situations that could become inappropriate or unhealthy for either the client or therapist. Talking with a mentor or instructor in the early stages of a potential situation helps prevent problems from developing. Approach every therapeutic relationship with a mind-set focused on what is appropriate, and you will find it easier to create a healthy therapeutic relationship for both you and the client.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

---

1. Look up a code of ethics for another profession, including other specialties in health care. Look for any references to dating clients or related inappropriate behaviors.
  2. Ask friends and family members if their profession has an ethics code. If so, how has this code affected their behavior? Have they ever experienced a situation with the potential to violate their code of ethics?
  3. Of the ethics codes that you have seen thus far, write down two code statements that seem the most important to you to prevent inappropriate behavior involving sexuality.
-