

# **Ethics for Massage Therapists**

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**The Body Mechanics/Body Balancing**

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## NOTES and DISCLAIMERS

This course was developed to further the knowledge and skills of massage therapists and bodyworkers on the subject of Professional Ethics. The information in this course was obtained from various sources and through over 15 years experience as a Licensed Massage Therapist both in Florida and Pennsylvania. The content herein is in keeping with my classroom teachings. A list of references is included at the end of this course.

It is the responsibility of the massage therapist or bodyworker to apply this information appropriately within their practice.

The information contained in this course has been researched based on the references and listed at the end of this course and is generally accepted as factual at the time of publication. The Body Mechanics and Paula J Kaprocki, LMT claim no responsibility for any contradictory data that may be corrected or changed in any subsequent releases of this course.

In this coursework and test, the use of the words patient and client can be interchanged as they will sometimes change based on your practice. Additionally, massage therapist, therapist, practitioner and healthcare professional can be interchanged.

The test contained in the back of this course must be submitted in order to receive CE credits.

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## **Course Instructions**

### How to best proceed

Relax, take your time, and go at your own pace. Since 2 CEUs are awarded after successfully completing this course, the reading of this manual and completion of the test questions should not take less than 2 hours. Only after you have successfully mastered all the material in the course should you proceed to the test questions.

Complete the test and mail your answer sheet.

Before beginning, please clearly write your name, address, zip code, and license number on your test answer card. Read each question carefully before answering. Please use a #2 pencil to fill-in your answers on the answer card by completely shading your choice. Keep in mind that each question has only one correct answer. The test consists of 15 questions. For a passing grade, you must correctly answer 12 questions.

We encourage your input and would welcome any suggestions to improve this course or the test questions. Please feel free to note your suggestions or comments on the course evaluation sheet.

### Information for CEU Requirements

In order to receive your 1 hour of continuing education credit, you must submit your correct Name, address and license information for the course. Please notify us of any address or name changes as we must keep records for submission of credits to CE Broker.

## **Mailing Instructions**

Please send your completed test answer sheet and course evaluation to:

Please send your completed test answer card and the course evaluation to:

The Body Mechanics

660 Andersontown Road

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Or email the pdf sheet to:

[tbm.massage@gmail.com](mailto:tbm.massage@gmail.com)

If you have any questions regarding this course, please contact Paula Kaprocki via email at [tbm.massage@gmail.com](mailto:tbm.massage@gmail.com) or call 717.818.7633

If you mail your answer sheet you will receive your certificate within 10 days of the receipt. If you email your answers you will receive a certificate that you can print for your records.

All CEUs will be submitted to CE Broker weekly.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Define professional ethics as it relates to the healthcare profession and massage therapy in particular.
- Define standards of practice.
- Define informed consent.
- Define effective communication.
- Define dual relationships and recognize them in dealing with clients.
- Define professional boundaries.
- Recognize the importance of client confidentiality

## **Ethics for Massage Therapists**

### **What are Ethics?**

Ethics encompasses social, professional and personal perspectives; areas that are not easily separated. We behave according to continually shifting rules, customs and expectations. The application of ethics is a dynamic process involving reflection and possibly revision in some cases. Ethics in its most simple form is "what is right" and is determined by society. But what is right? What are the fundamentals of ethics?

The dictionary defines ethics as a system of moral principles of conduct or values established by a group. Most professions adhere to a code of ethics in order to establish guidelines for behavior and decision-making. Ethical principles guide professional ethical behavior. They are broad concepts that direct the development of standards of practice within a profession. These standards of practice then provide specific guidelines and rules to form a concrete professional structure. As massage therapists, we are frequently faced with legal and ethical issues and our code of ethics and standards of practice determines how we manage within the scope of our practice.

### **Principles of Ethics**

Some authors list such principles as respect, autonomy, veracity, beneficence and justice as ethical principles. All quite important but the Five Fundamental Principles of Ethics given by Bruce Weinstein, Ph.D, better known as The Ethics Guy®, are straight and to the point. They are:

- Do No Harm
- Make Things Better
- Respect Others
- Be Fair
- Be Loving

In a nutshell, these are the basics. Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, taught that in all things do no harm and this should be the greatest lessons for all massage therapists. Ethically, it refers to doing the right thing for the client/patient or even the customer or others in all situations. Never willfully harm your client. If what you are doing causes pain, stop.

To make things better is also a great code for massage therapist. In most instances we all called upon by the client to do just that. Stressed, overworked muscles need the ministrations of a good massage. We can improve circulation, loosen tight muscle and improve a stressed client's outlook, if only for the hour they are on our tables.

Respecting others applies to all areas of life but especially with regard to boundaries when it comes to massage therapy. We will discuss this topic later in further detail, but briefly is the respect of another's emotional, physical and professional "space".

The principle of fairness was something that we should have been taught in elementary school. Choosing everyone to play kickball on the playground and not just the good players shows fairness for all people. The same is true for ethical behavior when we choose to provide massage service to all individuals regardless of their limitations.

Touch is a loving experience. For those people who have never had loving touch, massage becomes a way for them to connect with humanity. Professional touch by a trained massage professional results in a specific outcome for the client/patient. Touch is a powerful form of communication and as such can be a loving experience for most clients. This is a tactile, sensory experience not to be confused with a sexual experience, which we talk about later.

Dr. Weinstein also talks about ethical intelligence, which he defines as understanding the difference between right and wrong and then choosing to act accordingly, especially under pressure. Many times in society both personally and professionally, we are called upon to make decisions that go along with society rather than our own good judgment. It is how we respond to these situations that define our own ethical intelligence. In massage therapy this could be the difference between referring a patient to another more suited therapist or continuing to see a client based on the income generated. Or it could be the difference between allowing a client to make sexual innuendos during a session or using our own right of refusal to stop seeing this client. We will use our ethical intelligence later when we review Ethical Situations.

Nearly all state licensing authorities, national certification or accrediting agencies such as NCBTMB (National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork and our professional associations such as AMTA (American Massage Therapy Association) establish their own standards or codes of ethics. You will need to refer directly to the ones that you belong to to review the ethical guidelines that apply to you. The following are examples based on the AMTA and NCBTMB codes as posted on their websites.

#### Example Codes of Ethics

The Code of Ethics published by the American Massage Therapy Association®:

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

#### **Massage therapists shall:**

1. Demonstrate commitment to provide the highest quality massage therapy/bodywork to those who seek their professional service.
2. Acknowledge the inherent worth and individuality of each person by not discriminating or behaving in any prejudicial manner with clients and/or colleagues.
3. Demonstrate professional excellence through regular self-assessment of strengths, limitations, and effectiveness by continued education and training.

4. Acknowledge the confidential nature of the professional relationship with clients and respect each client's right to privacy.
5. Conduct all business and professional activities within their scope of practice, the law of the land, and project a professional image.
6. Refrain from engaging in any sexual conduct or sexual activities involving their clients.
7. Accept responsibility to do no harm to the physical, mental and emotional well-being of self, clients, and associates.

The Code of Ethics of the National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (as revised October of 2008)

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NCBTMB certificants and applicants for certification shall act in a manner that justifies public trust and confidence, enhances the reputation of the profession, and safeguards the interest of individual clients. Certificants and applicants for certification will:

- I. Have a sincere commitment to provide the highest quality of care to those who seek their professional services.
- II. Represent their qualifications honestly, including education and professional affiliations, and provide only those services that they are qualified to perform.
- III. Accurately inform clients, other health care practitioners, and the public of the scope and limitations of their discipline.
- IV. Acknowledge the limitations of and contraindications for massage and bodywork and refer clients to appropriate health professionals.
- V. Provide treatment only where there is reasonable expectation that it will be advantageous to the client.
- VI. Consistently maintain and improve professional knowledge and competence, striving for professional excellence through regular assessment of personal and professional strengths and weaknesses and through continued education training.
- VII. Conduct their business and professional activities with honesty and integrity, and respect the inherent worth of all persons.
- VIII. Refuse to unjustly discriminate against clients and/or health professionals.
- IX. Safeguard the confidentiality of all client information, unless disclosure is requested by the client in writing, is medically necessary, is required by law, or necessary for the protection of the public.
- X. Respect the client's right to treatment with informed and voluntary consent. The certified practitioner will obtain and record the informed consent of the client, or client's advocate, before providing treatment. This consent may be written or verbal.
- XI. Respect the client's right to refuse, modify or terminate treatment regardless of prior consent given.
- XII. Provide draping and treatment in a way that ensures the safety, comfort and privacy of the client.
- XIII. Exercise the right to refuse to treat any person or part of the body for just and reasonable cause.

- XIV. Refrain, under all circumstances, from initiating or engaging in any sexual conduct, sexual activities, or sexualizing behavior involving a client, even if the client attempts to sexualize the relationship unless a pre-existing relationship exists between an applicant or a practitioner and the client prior to the applicant or practitioner applying to be certified by NCBTMB.
- XV. Avoid any interest, activity or influence which might be in conflict with the practitioner's obligation to act in the best interests of the client or the profession.
- XVI. Respect the client's boundaries with regard to privacy, disclosure, exposure, emotional expression, beliefs and the client's reasonable expectations of professional behavior. Practitioners will respect the client's autonomy.
- XVII. Refuse any gifts or benefits that are intended to influence a referral, decision or treatment, or that are purely for personal gain and not for the good of the client.
- XVIII. Follow the NCBTMB Standards of Practice, this Code of Ethics, and all policies, procedures, guidelines, regulations, codes, and requirements promulgated by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork.

The Code of Ethics of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) and the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) requires certificants or members to uphold professional standards that allow for the proper discharge of their responsibilities to those served, that protect the integrity of the profession, and that safeguard the interest of individual clients. Many massage organizations at each state level also have their own set of codes.

To apply ethics we need to know more than a set of guideline and what to do in a particular case but rather to develop a set of priorities and way of thinking. We need to be able to reason about what we know about those guidelines in order to BE ethical. Our Ethical Intelligence, as Dr. Weinstein calls it.

Morals and values are a personal concern and a reflection of your professional and social character. The main purpose of ethics in any profession is to promote and maintain the welfare of the client. Ethics has to be what is best for the client.

What is best for the client is often times written into laws in some states. Laws reflect the minimal standards while a code of ethics represents the ideal standards set by a profession. Therefore we abide by both the law and professional codes. Those ethics motivated by compliance with the law are called mandatory ethics while those ethics motivated by the highest possible benefit and welfare for the client are called aspirational ethics.

An example of aspirational ethics is the referral to another professional when your own qualifications are no longer helping the client, even though mandatory ethics would allow you to continue treating the client. Professionals must be willing to adjust their personal behavior for the professional good.

The role of the health care professional and the relationships they share with patients have changed over in the last 50 years. In decades past, physicians treated patients in a parental role, such as we

saw in old TV shows and movies such as Ben Casey and Marcus Welby MD. Sometimes details and conditions of illnesses were kept from the patient and medical decisions required little or no patient input. Today the patient has as much right to their choice of healthcare and treatment option as do those providing the care.

With this in mind we need to take the broad concepts of ethics which were discussed earlier and directly relate them to the development of standards of practice.

### **Standards of practice:**

- Provide specific guidelines and rules to form a professional structure
- Direct quality care
- Provide a means of measuring the quality of care
- Are more concrete than ethical principles

Standards of practice could include some of the following:

1. In compliance with the principles of the code of ethics, massage professionals will perform the following:
2. Respect all clients, colleagues and health professional through nondiscrimination regardless of age, gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, body type, political affiliation, state of health, personal habits and life-coping skills.
3. Perform only those services for which they are qualified and honestly represent their education, certification, professional affiliation, and other qualifications.
4. Respect all ethical health care practitioners and work with them to promote health and healing.
5. Refrain from working with any individual who has a specific disease process without supervision by a licensed medical professional
6. Provide a safe, comfortable and clean environment.
7. Follow city, county and state legal requirements.
8. Keep accurate records and review the records with the client.

You should develop a personal code of ethics and standard of practice statement based on those previously mentioned and including any others that you think should apply to your practice.

### **Informed Consent**

In order to further protect the client, informed consent is required. This is a protection process that requires that clients understand what will occur, that they participate voluntarily and that they be competent to give consent. This helps to support ethical behavior and reflects the ethical principle of client participation and self-determination in a client-centered approach.

As part of informed consent, the following questions should be answered at the outset of the professional relationship:

- What are the goals of the therapeutic program?
- What services will be provided?
- What behavior is expected of the client?
- What are the risks and benefits of the process?
- What are the practitioner's qualifications?
- What are the financial considerations?
- How long is the therapy expected to last?
- What are the limitations of confidentiality?
- In what areas does the professional have mandatory reporting requirements?

Informed consent is obtained through the intake procedure. This is accomplished by standard intake forms requiring written information provided by the client and also the written information provided to the client in the form of handouts describing indications, benefits and contraindications for massage. Gaining informed consent requires good communication skills. And these skills apply not only to the verbal give and take between client and practitioner but also to the written communications given to the client both prior to and after client/practitioner interaction.

### **Communication Skills for the Massage Therapist/Healthcare Worker**

Clients frequently complain that practitioners fail to listen to their complaints thoroughly and sympathetically. Negative and/or positive opinions regarding the therapist are usually formed in the first few minutes of client/therapist contact. Effective communication is often difficult for both the professional and the client. But direct communication is essential to avoid ethical dilemmas. Direct, honest communications that focuses on the situation rather than the person delivered in a gentle, respectful way, allows for resolution of any problems.

Good communication skills are required to retrieve information, maintain charting and client records and provide information effectively so a client can give informed consent.

Effective communication skills are vital to establishing rapport and putting the client at ease. The client must be able to trust the practitioner if optimal results are to be achieved. There are two basic parts to communication: listening and responding. However each person has a preferred method that is the most comfortable for them. As a professional we need to be aware of these differences and use them during the entire client session.

We need to also be aware that the strongest message is delivered through the kinesthetic model, or as it is more commonly referred to, body language. As we move our bodies when we talk, others visually receive the message we are sending. It is important that a consistency exist between what is heard and seen. When there is a lack of congruence, the body language will have the strongest effect.

The tone of voice is also more important than the actual words spoken. In fact, the words are the least effective part of the communication pattern.

Words that mean one thing to you as the therapist may have a very different meaning to the client. We need to make sure that each of the people communicating is working from the same

definition of the word used. For example: when a therapist asks a client to disrobe, the meaning may be to remove external clothing but keep under garments on, will the client interprets the word disrobe as to take off all clothing. During the informed consent process, the therapist needs to be very specific as to what they are saying means.

As professionals we also need to be effective listeners as part of the active communication process. Most clients will come in with an issue that is very obvious if you listen not only to what they are saying but also to their body language. Any client or patient is in your office for a specific reason and that reason may be apparent from the moment they walk in your door. Listening, as part of effective communication also requires observing in the case of massage therapy. Clients with aches and pains will tend to touch the painful areas during the course of their responding to your intake questions. This is part of active listening, where you may restate the problem that you saw by clarifying their situation. Whereas reflective listening allows you to restate what they have just told you to indicate that you understood what they were saying.

Below are some common-sense guidelines to good communication skills.

1. Maintain eye contact. Poor eye contact conveys dishonesty and nervousness. Proper eye contact will help you establish trust and rapport with the client.
2. Maintain a professional appearance. Correct attire for your profession is recommended. Many offices designate a specific "uniform". Good hygiene cannot be overemphasized. Cologne and perfume should not be worn during treatment sessions. Some clients may either be allergic or object to the fragrance. First impressions are lasting.
3. Keep the conversation light when first greeting the client. Be amiable and respectful.
4. Observe the demeanor of the client. Some clients may be friendly and open, while others may act guarded and distant. Recognizing the difference can help you establish effective communication skills for each individual client. What may work for one client may not work for another. Remember that some clients may be coming to see you due to some painful issues.
5. Respect the client's cultural and religious customs. The United States today is more culturally diverse than ever. You can expect to treat clients who have originated from many different foreign lands. Although some customs and beliefs may seem strange to you, they are a vital part of many people's lives from foreign countries.
6. When interviewing the client, be sure to state your question clearly and precisely. Allow the client to answer at his or her own pace. Use reflective and active listening skills. Focus your attention on the client's response. Do not attempt to do other things in the room while the client is talking.
7. When responding, address any concerns the client may have had respectfully and cordially. Remember to document responses in the client's chart.

### **Client Confidentiality as part of the Ethics**

Prior to being evaluated, all clients should be required to fill out information forms. The following is a list of information that should be included on these forms:

1. Client name, address, work and home phone numbers.

2. Person to contact in case of emergency.
3. Insurance information, if applicable.
4. Allergies including food and/or chemical allergies. (May be important in selecting massage oils, creams, or herbal preparations.)
1. Past medical history. (May be important in identifying areas of the body to avoid.)
5. Reason for visit.
6. Informed consent for treatment with information on scope of practice with client signature and date.
7. Consent to release medical information if required by law or court order.

This information should be kept on each client in a formal chart along with progress notes. Information in these charts should never be released to anyone but the client unless legal authorization is obtained. Clients should be required to sign a release form if requesting their medical records. The purpose of maintaining the chart is to satisfy state laws, meet insurance filing requirements, and to defend the practitioner in the face of possible litigation. This is an ethical issue also, since part of your code of ethics should include confidentiality.

The importance of good communication between practitioner and client cannot be underestimated. It is usually within minutes of initial contact that impressions are made. These impressions will most likely affect the outcome of treatment.

## **Professional Boundaries**

It is important to maintain professional boundaries at all times. Many misunderstandings have occurred when the client's dignity and respect have been compromised unintentionally. Proper draping techniques can help avoid such dilemmas for the massage professional. All healthcare professionals need to develop strategies to maintain professional boundaries with clients.

All people have needs and wants. Needs sustain life; when needs are not met people become ill and die. Life needs include air, water, food, shelter and sensory stimulation. Wants lead to a sense of satisfaction. Some examples of wants are a certain make of car, a particular job, chocolate cake or to live in a certain place. We all need shelter but I want a cabin in the woods. We all need food, but I want to smell fresh-baked whole wheat bread in the kitchen of my cabin in the woods. We all need touch, but I want a hug from my daughters as they come in the door of my cabin in the woods.

While massage provides sensory stimulation in the form of touch, it also meets a need for clients. Needs and wants often become confused in the mind of the client, therefore it is very important to maintain boundaries in the professional relationship between client/therapist.

A boundary can be defined as the personal space within an arm's length perimeter when a person is standing. It can also be the personal emotional space designated by morals, values and experience. Some people are not very good at defining personal boundaries or respecting others'. And certain boundaries are defined by more than physical space, but for the purpose of this discuss, a respect for personal boundaries simply begins with staying an arm's length away from another until invited to come closer. This may seem silly with respect to massage but as part of communication

and informed consent, the practitioner must have the client's acceptance before entering their personal space. This will come from the initial assessment phase during which time you are communicating verbally with the client prior to the actual treatment session.

Sometime people who have been emotionally, physically or sexually abused have not had the chance to recognize or define their own personal boundaries. Practitioners should be especially respectful in their approaches and explain professional therapeutic boundaries carefully to the client. Setting limits during a massage session may be a safe way to begin the process of allowing this type of client to learn to define their own personal boundaries.

The client and the practitioner must respect each other's boundaries also. By creating a personal code of ethics you are outlining your professional and personal boundaries to a client. Boundaries should be discussed during the initial informed consent procedures and should be included in writing in the client policy that you give to every client.

Boundaries are difficult to define. We each bring into our professions varying experiences that define what we feel is correct. As professionals we are responsible for also finding the client's comfort zone. Ethically, we need to be able to touch a person in a respectful, nonjudgmental way. Hindrances may included personal prejudices regarding body size, color, gender and attitude. It is our ethical responsibility to refer clients with which we feel uncomfortable to another professional. A client may also have a behavior that drives us crazy (excessive talking or sniffing). If that behavior interferes with our ability to be the best massage professional for the client, then we should learn how to refer.

Clients have the right to refuse our services; this is called the right of refusal. It is a client's right to refuse or stop treatment at anytime. When this request is made during the treatment, the therapist must comply despite prior consent.

As therapists we also have right of refusal. Massage professionals may refuse to massage or otherwise treat any person if a just and reasonable cause exists. Lack of appropriate knowledge or skills is a reason for refusal and referral to another professional. Some refusals may be due to your own personal boundaries. Know them and be open and honest we clients when refusing services and also be able to refer to another professional.

A massage professional has the right to refuse to treat any area of the body of the client and terminate the professional relationship if her/she feels the client is sexualizing the relationship or if the professional feels adversely influenced in any way by the client. This also becomes a legal issue in many states and we address this at greater length in our Florida Law and Statues course.

Anytime there are blurred boundaries we create an environment that is conducive to the development of ethical dilemmas. Professional boundaries must be identified and established with each client. Having clear, professional boundaries help support effective, therapeutic massage sessions for both the client and the practitioner.

## Dual Relationships

Dual relationships may occur when personal and professional boundaries become blurred. A dual or multiple role relationship may occur when an individual engages in two role categories, for example, in addition to the professional relationship of therapist to client, there may be another relationship, such as relative, friend, business partner or co-worker. It may seem like it would be best to avoid such relationships, however it may not always be possible or practical. In small town or close-knit communities it may be more difficult to avoid dual relationships.

There are many opinions regarding the propriety of dual relationships. Some texts feel that even though not all dual relationships are negative they all have that potential. It is important to follow recommended procedures within your profession and maintain such procedures as informed consent, open discussion, supervision and an examination of your own personal motivation in the relationship.

Some of your peers may find it unethical to work on friends, while others consider it appropriate as long as steps are taken to keep it within the context of the therapeutic scope of practice. Steps should always be taken to ensure that there are no detrimental effects to either relationship. It is always better to avoid dual relationships if it appears that the relationship will interfere with the therapeutic relationship. Existence of a dual relationship is not necessarily a violation of boundaries. Such a relationship that does violate boundaries is usually referred to as a "prohibited dual relationship". This means that the dual relationship might impair objectivity or effectiveness, or permit exploitation, or create an actual, apparent or potential conflict of interest.

It is your responsibility, not the client's, to maintain appropriate boundaries in your professional relationship and severe dual relationships if they cross boundaries. In the case of a complaint being filed, it is your responsibility to demonstrate that the client has not been exploited or coerced, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Recognize and avoid the danger of dual relationships whenever you must relate to a client in more than one context, whether professional, social, educational or commercial. Those dual relationships which may be deemed prohibited may include:

- Accepting as a client anyone with whom you have had a prior sexual relationship
- Forming a sexual relationship with a current client or someone who has been your client
- Treating clients who are related either by blood or legal ties
- Bartering with a client for the exchange of services
- Entering into a business or financial transaction with clients other than massage services

Other situations that can complicate the massage therapy relationship are lending and borrowing money, meeting socially with clients, giving or receiving gifts, inappropriate verbal communication with clients and inappropriate use of language with clients.

Before engaging in a dual relationship, you need to ask yourself if the dual relationship is necessary and could it cause risk to the client. You also need to assess if the dual relationship would cause conflict or a lack of objectivity.

## **Sexual misconduct and the practice of massage**

Boundary issues can also lead to those areas concerning sexual misconduct in the practice of massage. This is one of the most flagrant examples of inappropriate behavior and refers to any sexual activity between the massage therapist and client. It is defined in every state that requires licensing of massage therapist and includes the obvious transgressions of intercourse, masturbation, fellatio, cunnilingus, anal intercourse and oral sex. But it also includes in most states any direct or indirect physical contact between practitioner and client which is intended to sexually arouse one or both individuals.

This issue involves the human sexual response and varies greatly from person to person. Physical arousal can occur unexpectedly because the nerve impulses associated with massage are not confined to just the immediate area receiving the stimulation. This unintended "side-effect" of massage can be as embarrassing to the client as it is to the therapist. Generally it is a momentary surge of sexual energy that may dissipates just as quickly.

Determining the cause of the arousal may be difficult to assess and intervention can be as simple as moving to a another body part or using different massage strokes that encourage a response within the sympathetic nervous system rather than the parasympathetic system which is normally the area of response to such stimulation. You may need to address the incident with the client after the session ends. However, if the client does not show signs of arousal after you have moved or changed your massage strokes this also may not be necessary. If you do address this situation after the session be sure to include these points:

1. Brief incidents of sexual arousal are most often involuntary side effect of specific physiological process activated by the massage.
2. These momentary incidents are not abnormal in the context of massage therapy.
3. Incidents of sustained sexual arousal are inappropriate in the context of massage therapy.
4. Acting on such an impulse is always inappropriate and unacceptable in the context of massage therapy.

If the client indicates sexual interest or continues to show signs of sexual arousal after you have made the necessary adjustments in the massage, you will need to address the situation immediately. This is true also if the client expresses sexual interest regardless of physical arousal. Intervention can take a variety of forms but should at least include the following:

1. A clear declaration that sexual interest or arousal, regardless of cause or intent, is inappropriate in the context of massage therapy.
2. It is unethical for the practitioner to continue treatment if the client is sexually aroused.
3. Incidents of sustained sexual arousal are inappropriate in the context of massage therapy.
4. This type of behavior will not be tolerated in the context of massage therapy and the session will be terminated

Avoid entering into a debate or discussion with the client regarding this point if you need to terminate the session. Simply state that it is unethical in the practice of massage therapy for you to continue. Tell the client to get dressed and leave the room.

## **Ethical Considerations – A Conclusion**

Failure to adhere to ethical guidelines can have legal consequences and may cause you to lose your right to work as a massage therapist in your state. It can also create an unsafe environment for your client who has put their trust in you as a massage professional.

Ethical standards are created to ensure protection for the client and to protect the dignity of the profession of massage therapy. When clients schedule an appointment they have the right to expect that the work they receive will be done professionally and ethically as well as within the scope of practice of the therapist. As a massage therapist you have power over the client with respect to your ability to provide treatment that the client cannot provide for themselves. We are also required to have the knowledge to view this as a relationship of trust and compassion between the therapist and the client.

## **Part Two**

In this section we present a number of ethical situations for you to study. This is not an area on which you will be tested but rather as a section for you to use as you review your own ethical code of standards. In some cases these are actual situations that have been seen by therapists in the field. Others are made-up scenarios to cause you to think about how you would respond in a given situation.

## **Ethical Situations**

Scenario 1 - A friend introduces your client as his new date.

Scenario 2 - You bump into a client while you both are drinking alcohol at a party.

Scenario 3 - A friend of your sister is an accountant. You have been looking for someone to help you with the bookkeeping of your massage business. You discover that she is willing to trade massages for her services.

Scenario 4 - A male client becomes sexually aroused when you work on his quadriceps. He continues to be aroused even when you ask him to move into the prone position and then asks you to "help" with the situation.

Scenario 5 - You had a fight with your spouse before coming in to work. You show up late and visibly upset. You confide in the client and allow them to comfort you.

Scenario 6 - As a massage therapist you sit on the board of a non-profit group that provides after school and summer activity programs for under-privileged youth. A regular client of yours is a local businessman. When he comes for his routine visit you ask him for a contribution since it is during the group's annual fundraising drive.

Scenario 7 - You have had

## References:

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## Ethics Test

1. Professional ethics is:

- a. Broad concepts that direct standards within a profession
- b. A social, professional and personal perspective
- c. A system of moral principles of conduct or values.
- d. All of the above.

2. A Code of Ethics is:

- a. A set of written guidelines that tell you what to do in a particular case
- b. A way to thinking
- c. A way to develop a set of priorities
- d. All of the above

3. Which act of conduct would be considered unethical?

- a. Providing informed consent for treatment.
- b. Discussing a client's condition with a friend.
- c. Practicing within one's limitations and scope of practice.
- d. Respecting the client's right to confidentiality.

4. Those practitioners who practice under the Code of Ethics of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork are required to safeguard the confidentiality of all client information, unless disclosure is required by law, court order, or is absolutely necessary for the protection of the public.

- a. True.
- b. False.

5. Good communication skills are required to retrieve information, maintain charting and client records and provide information so a client can give informed consent

- a. True
- b. False

6. Informed consent is:

- a. Required in order to further protect the client

- b. A way to provide rules of behavior for the client
- c. A way to explain what services will be provided
- d. All of the above

7. Client confidentiality is a part of ethics.

- a. True
- b. False

8. Proper draping techniques are an example of professional boundaries within the profession of massage therapy.

- a. True
- b. False

9. Effective listening is part of the active communication process.

- a. True
- b. False

10. Informed consent is obtained

- a) Require written information provided by the client
- b) Require verbal information obtained from the client by the therapist
- c) From written information provided to the client by the therapist
- d) All of the above

11. A boundary can be defined as

- a) Personal space within an arm's length perimeter when a person is standing
- b) Personal emotional space designated by morals, values and experience
- c) A non-physical area that can only be entered by invitation
- d) All of the above

12. Clients need to respect a practitioner's boundaries also.

- a. True
- b. False

13. Right of refusal applies to both therapists and clients.

- a. True
- b. False

14. Sexual arousal may be the involuntary side effect of specific physiological process activated by the massage.

- a. True
- b. False

15. The best way to provide good communication is to avoid direct eye contact.

- a. True
- b. False

## Answer Sheet

### Ethics for Massage Therapists

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

License # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Directions:

1. Print your name, address and license information in the spaces provided above.
2. Record your answers by question on the form below
3. Send this sheet and the course evaluation sheet to:

The Body Mechanics  
Paula J. Kaprocki, LMT  
660 Andersontown RD  
Dover, PA 17315

Or email your answers to  
[tbm.massage@gmail.com](mailto:tbm.massage@gmail.com)

- |                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. (a) (b) (c) (d) | 9. (a) (b)          |
| 2. (a) (b) (c) (d) | 10. (a) (b) (c) (d) |
| 3. (a) (b) (c) (d) | 11. (a) (b) (c) (d) |
| 4. (a) (b)         | 12. (a) (b)         |
| 5. (a) (b)         | 13. (a) (b)         |
| 6. (a) (b) (c) (d) | 14. (a) (b)         |
| 7. (a) (b)         | 15. (a) (b)         |
| 8. (a) (b)         |                     |

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Please list any course improvements you would make to any of the above-mentioned criteria

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Would you recommend this course or The Body Mechanics/Body Balancing to others? \_\_\_\_\_

Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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