Chapter 2
The Therapeutic Relationship

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Introduction

• Massage therapy field has two major skill areas
  – Hard skills: knowledge of anatomy, physiology, pathology, tactile precision, and massage acumen
  – Soft skills: therapeutic relationship management, communication, problem solving, professionalism, boundaries, integrity, and sexual risk management

Therapeutic Relationship

• Special purpose and goal: to serve the needs and best interests of our clients
• Framework includes:
  – Communication
  – Trust
  – Client-centered care
  – Compassion
  – Safety
  – Respect
  – Responsibility
  – Structured time
  – Power differential

Communication Skills

• Intentions
• Self-disclosure
• Speaking to clients
  – Open-ended questions
  – Closed-ended questions
• Listening to clients
  – Paraphrasing
  – Clarifying
  – Exploring

Methods of Communication

• Verbal
  – Words
• Nonverbal
  – Tones
  – Gestures
  – Posture
  – Facial expressions

Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>Impose solution on other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit</td>
<td>Lower aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flee</td>
<td>Choose to leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeze</td>
<td>Choose to wait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solve</td>
<td>Develop win-win strategy</td>
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Problem Solving
• Identifying and accepting problem
• Talking
• Taking responsibility
• Listening
• Gathering information
• Thinking
• Generating options
• Resolving

Qualities of a Professional Massage Therapist
• Knowledge of techniques and principles,
• Understanding of legal and ethical issues
• Working knowledge of and tolerance for human nature
• The three Cs:
  – Courtesy
  – Compassion
  – Common sense

Professional Image
• Projecting a professional image includes:
  – Acting within professional boundaries
  – Addressing client concerns
  – Wearing a uniform or clothing that separates the therapist from the client
  – Providing business cards and brochures
• Evaluate professional image annually

Legal Versus Ethical Issues
• Legal issues
  – Laws
  – Rules
  – Regulations
• Ethical issues
  – Standards of competence
  – Professional values and ideals

Self-Disclosure and Confidentiality
• Both are important aspects of the therapeutic relationship
• Self-disclosure
  – Honest and open sharing of emotions, ideas, and insights
• Confidentiality
  – Safekeeping of client self-disclosure
  – Nondisclosure of privileged information

Client Confidentiality Limits
• Obligation to the law
  – Subpoenaed client records
  – Insurance company requirements
  – Can legally breach if threat to self or others, abuse is suspected, or in medical emergency
• Obligation to others
  – Other health care providers
  – Translators due to language barriers
  – Relatives with power of attorney
Scope of Practice

- Scope of practice: a profession’s working parameters
- Scope of practice allowances
  - Touch
  - Encourage healthy lifestyles,
  - Teach preventive measures
  - Suggest general dietary modifications
  - Offer recommendations for self-care massage
  - Perform general assessment of client’s condition and formulate a plan of care
  - Use hydrotherapy and aromatherapy

Professional Standards

- Scope of practice restrictions
  - Provide specific nutrition information
  - Perform medical interventions
  - Diagnose or prescribe medications
  - Any other service requiring a license to practice: psychotherapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, physical therapy, or any other branch of medicine without the proper license

Certification, Licensure, and Registration

- Certification: voluntary process whereby applicants must meet specific requirements to receive a certificate
- Licensure: mandatory credentialing process that grants the right to practice certain skills and endeavors
- Reciprocity: process by which a professional license obtained in one state is valid in other states

Code of Ethics

- Set of guiding moral principles that governs actions
  - Most health care professions have a code of ethics
  - Codes may include governing principles for therapeutic relationships, professional behavior, business policies, and decision-making guidance

NCBTMB Code of Ethics

- Confidentiality
- Continuing education
- Discrimination
- Honesty
- Informed consent
- Laws and legislation
- Professional boundaries
- Quality of care
- Scope of practice
- Sexual contact

NCBTMB Standards of Practice

- Professionalism
- Legal and ethical requirements
- Confidentiality
- Business practices
- Roles and boundaries
- Prevention of sexual misconduct
Boundaries
• Set of parameters indicating border or limit
• Mark or delineate the differences between client and therapist
• Define our personal and professional space
• Clarify each person’s role, responsibilities, expectations, and limitations
• Established and maintained through communication

Healthy Boundaries
• Awareness and clarity
• Appropriateness
• Congruency
• Protective
• Flexibility and adaptability

Intimate Versus Therapeutic Relationships

Boundary Management
• A therapist should know when to guard and when to extend or expand or temporarily overlap boundaries
• It is very important that a therapist maintain his or her own integrity at all times

Crossing Boundaries: Common Mistakes
• Representing yourself as being qualified in a specific modality without proper training and experience
• Playing the part of a psychotherapist
• Asking a client to be a friend
• Commenting on client’s appearance
• Working on a client who clearly presents contraindications

Client Neglect
• Unintentional emotional or physical harm
  – Caused by insensitivity or lack of knowledge
  – Prevented by developing a professional attitude, maintaining healthy boundaries, and continuing to learn
Client Abuse
• Harm caused by a deliberate action
  – Abuse can be verbal or nonverbal.
  – Can be classified as physical, sexual, emotional, or financial

Conflicts of Interest
• Arise when a difference exists between the therapist’s personal interests and his or her professional obligations
  – Selling products

Session Termination
• Standard procedure:
  – Remove hands from client; step back and toward the door; tell client massage is over
  – Inform client you will wait outside until he or she is dressed
  – Avoid answering questions until client is dressed and out of massage room
  – If alone or frightened, call someone or lock yourself in a room until client has left
  – Document events that led to termination

Incident Reports
• Filled out and retained to document things that happened to client or therapist
• Be sure to include
  – Date, time, exact location
  – Who was present
  – Steps taken to alleviate problem
  – Condition of client if physical injury was involved

Incident Reports

Transference
• Occurs when the client transfers or projects feelings, thoughts, and behaviors related to a significant person in his or her early life onto the therapist
• Client begins to personalize the therapeutic relationship
  – Client’s perception changes to caring friend, confidant, person missing in his or her life, or even possible lover
Transference Red Flags

- Frequently asks about personal life
- Calls during times you have made clear are for personal time
- Frequently brings you gifts
- Asks for advice with personal issues
- Frequently asks for more time when session has ended and is openly disappointed when you do not comply
- Asks you for a date

Countertransference

- Therapist brings his or her own unresolved issues or personal needs into the therapeutic relationship
- Therapist counters client’s transference and tries to get his or her own personal needs met through interactions with the client

Countertransference Red Flags

- Having intense feelings toward a client, either positive or negative
- Becoming angry or depressed when a client cancels a scheduled appointment
- Becoming impatient, angry, or depressed when a client is not progressing with treatment
- Being argumentative with a client
- Involvement in a client’s personal life

Dual Relationships

- Occur when more than one relationship with a client exists
- Maintaining healthy professional boundaries may be difficult
- Conflicts of interest may arise
- Boundaries may become blurred
- Potential for client abuse is heightened
- Problematic

Intimacy

- Sensual (experience of the senses) bond to another
- Intimacy includes the elements of:
  - Choice
  - Mutuality
  - Reciprocity
  - Trust
  - Delight
Intimacy Versus Therapeutic Relationship

- **Similarities**
  - Choice and mutuality exist
  - Trust is built
  - Delight is experienced

- **Difference**
  - Reciprocity is not part of the therapeutic relationship

Friends Who Become Clients

- Professional boundaries must be established
- Both parties must understand their positions and responsibilities
- During the massage, the conversation and focus should be on the client

Dating Clients

- Most codes of ethics (including NCBTMB’s) require 6 month time between client-therapist relationship and personal relationship
- Dating an ex-client could:
  - Damage therapist’s relationship with other clients
  - Damage reputations
  - Raise red flag within therapist’s profession

Sexual Misconduct

- Any sexual contact between a therapist and a client
- Any sexualizing of the therapeutic relationship
- Potential is in every profession, not just massage

Sexual Misconduct Examples

- Engaging in flirtatious behavior
- Seductive gestures or expressions
- Looking at a client seductively
- Sexual comments about a client’s body or clothing
- Telling sexual jokes
- Failure to ensure privacy through proper draping

Sexual Misconduct Examples

- Entering the room before client is properly draped or dressed
- Conversations about sexual problems, sexual performance, preferences, or fantasies initiated or involving either the therapist or client
- Asking a client for a date
- Unnecessary examination or treatments
Sexual Misconduct Examples

- Inappropriate touching of the client’s breasts or pelvic area
- Therapist’s breast or pelvic area touching a client
- Filming the client without his or her permission
- Masturbation by practitioner or client
- Intercourse
- Rape

Sexual Risk Management

- Avoid terms of endearment
- Use anatomical references and clinical terminology
- Avoid inappropriate words when advertising
- Be aware of a new client’s goals for treatment, demeanor, tone of voice, and willingness to give name and phone number

Sexual Risk Management

- Do not work in a secluded office with unknown clients
- Do not schedule new clients when no one else will be in the office
- Realize problems associated with a home office
- Out-calls deserve special consideration
- Avoid sending sexual signals

Sexual Risk Management

- Obtain separate voluntary consent when work on or near the female breast is merited
- Be aware of body contact during the massage
- Avoid working on areas that might stimulate an erection
- Be blunt and straightforward when dealing with situations involving sexual behavior

Consequences of Behavior

- Loss of income and reputation
- Loss of marriage and friendships
- Loss of relationship with peers and colleagues
- Loss of license and membership in professional organizations
- Loss of insurance coverage
- Lawsuits, criminal charges, fines, attorney’s fees, court costs, and time in jail

Sexual Misconduct of a Colleague

- Contact the therapist and let him or her know what is being said
- Present information received and direct observations that relate to the misconduct
- Provide information regarding the professional and legal consequences of unethical behavior
Sexual Misconduct of a Colleague

• Suggest that the therapist remove him or herself from the role as therapist and refer the client to another therapist
• If therapist refuses to change behavior and act in the best interest of the client
  – Report the situation to the therapist's employer
  – File a complaint with the state board that regulates licensure and professional affiliations of which the therapist is a member

Summary

• The therapeutic relationship requires awareness and skill in managing the therapeutic process, maintaining communication, and using a professional code of ethics and standards of practice.
• Healthy relationships always involve healthy boundaries. Boundaries help us avoid neglect, abuse, conflicts of interest, dual relationships, and sexual misconduct.