

Ethics Refresher Home Study Course

3 CE Hours
Text and Online Study Guide

Presented by the:
Center for Massage Therapy Continuing Education

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It is the responsibility of the practitioner to determine the appropriateness of the principles presented in terms within the scope of practice. This information is in no way meant to diagnose or treat medical conditions. This ethics course is based upon the ethical standards set forth by state laws, the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork and the American Massage Therapy Association.

Instructions for the Ethics Refresher Home Study Course

Thank you for investing in the Ethics Refresher home study course, a 3 CE hour refresher course designed to further your knowledge in the principles and practices of professional ethics. The following will give instructions on what you will need to do to complete this course. This is a 3 CE hour course, so that means it should take you approximately 3 hours to read through the text and complete the exam and course evaluation.

The following are steps to follow in completing this course:

- 1. Read the instructions and review the text and exam.**
- 2. Access the online examination in your account at www.massagetherapyceu.com.**
- 3. Complete your examination and print your certificate. The exam is open book and there is no time limit for completion.**

You must pass the exam with a 70% or better to pass this home study course. You are allowed to access and take the exam up to 3 times if needed. There is no time limit when taking the exam. Feel free to review the text while taking the exam. There are no trick questions on the exam. All of the answers are clearly found in the text. The exam is also included at the end of the text for review before taking the exam.

It is advised to answer the exam questions in the study guide before testing online. That way, when you are testing you do not have to go back and forth through the online exam.

Good luck as you complete this course. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us at 866-784-5940, 712-490-8245 or info@massagetherapyceu.com. Most state boards require that you keep your “proof of completion” certificates for at least four years in case of audit. Thank you for taking our Ethics Refresher home study course.

Ethics Refresher Text

Introduction

The periodic review of ethics is necessary in the massage therapy field in order to maintain the standards of practice and code of ethics set forth by your state agency and other certifying agencies such as the National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) and the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA). Many states have adopted the NCBTMB's code of ethics and standards of practice. However, some individual states may have variations of these according to their own law of practice. It is important to review your state's laws and rules on ethical practices as a licensed and/or certified massage therapist.

This course will outline common topics of ethics in the massage therapy profession. It will also explain professionalism, boundaries, sexual conduct, transference and countertransference, informed consent, draping and record keeping. If at any time, through the course of your work you need assistance, please contact the Center for Massage Therapy Continuing Education at 866-784-5940 or via email at info@massagetherapyceu.com and someone will promptly assist you. We are here to serve you and answer any questions you may have. This course is revised often and every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content. Should you have any concerns please contact us at the above listed sources.

Ethics

The term **ethics** can be defined as:

“A system or set of moral rules, principles or ideas that govern an individual's behavior”

The concept of ethics is not always black and white. For many people ethics and their ethical beliefs depend somewhat on the situation. Ethical beliefs also vary from person to person. It is safe to say that ethics is not an absolute principle. Ethics involves standards of behavior, not simply issues of right and wrong or what is legal or illegal. For example, you may believe that it is wrong to lie. Does that mean that you would never lie to anyone no matter what the situation? Although the concept of ethics in massage and bodywork is a little clearer, from time to time therapists can be unsure of what is right and wrong and expected of them in the profession.

In massage therapy, the concept of ethics presides over every relationship we have including relationships with clients, associates, other health care professionals and the general public. The ethical guidelines set forth in the massage therapy profession are values and ideals for making proper decisions in the best interest of all parties involved. The basis for many of these guidelines has been formulated by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB). Many state boards have adopted these ethical guidelines and many of them have written their own. The governing boards in massage therapy write their code of ethics and standards of practice according to what they believe to be essential to the integrity of the profession. Every professional organization's code of ethics has key issues that are equally important and relevant. It is not always necessary to memorize each professional organization's standards of practice, but it is imperative to conduct your self in a way that is professional, courteous and responsible at all times. The NCBTMB and the AMTA's code of ethics and standards of practice are printed at the end of this text.

Scope of Practice

Scope of Practice is a term used by licensing and certifying boards for various professions that defines the procedures, actions and processes that are permitted for the licensed individual. The scope of practice is limited to what the law allows for specific education, experience and demonstrated competency. In massage therapy, most states have laws, licensing bodies, and regulations that describe requirements for education and training and define scope of practice.

The NCBTMB defines scope of practice as:

“The minimum standards necessary for safe and effective practice and the parameters of practice determined by the certificant’s professional training and education, and, when applicable, regulatory bodies.”

The scope of practice defines what is legally acceptable as a licensed or certified massage therapist as well as what is not legally acceptable. Massage professionals need to be aware of the limits of their skills and the legally accepted scope of practice for the profession. Working with other health professionals, if needed, always provides the best possible outcome for the client.

Boundaries

In the massage and bodywork profession, one of the most important aspects of practice is boundaries. Because massage therapy is such a personal profession, establishing proper boundaries in every aspect of practice is a must.

In general, personal **boundaries** are defined as:

“Guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify for himself/herself what are reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave around him or her and how he or she will respond when someone steps outside those limits”

In massage therapy, a **boundary** can be defined as:

“Limits between acceptable and unacceptable behavior which govern the relationship between the therapist and the client which may be physical, emotional or implied”

In massage therapy there are many types of boundaries. They include:

- Legal boundaries
- Professional boundaries
- Emotional boundaries
- Physical boundaries
- Sexual boundaries
- Client relationship boundaries
- Social boundaries
- Financial boundaries

Legal and Professional Boundaries

Legal and professional boundaries involve limits, guidelines and expectations of professional behavior. Governing bodies, such as local agencies, state boards, the NCBTMB and the AMTA have definite expectations and limitations of what is acceptable in the practice of massage therapy.

Establishing healthy legal boundaries in your practice involves:

- Obeying all applicable local, state and federal laws regarding the practice of massage
- Refraining from contributing to or behaving in any manner that may violate any applicable law
- Reporting to the proper authorities any alleged violations by other massage therapists or bodyworkers

Establishing healthy professional boundaries involves:

- Practicing within your scope of practice at all times
- Treating each client and colleague with dignity and respect
- Using professional language at all times with clients and colleagues
- Dressing in a manner that is neat, clean and modest when practicing massage therapy
- Providing an environment which is not only neat, clean and sanitary but also meets any minimum requirements by law
- Establishing an office policy (which will be discussed further in the text) which outlines important aspects of your practice such as services, office hours, charges and expectations
- Keeping your personal lives, opinions and needs out of your massage and bodywork sessions

Emotional Boundaries

Emotional boundaries are those which govern the expectations between the therapist and client related to emotional issues or problems. Many clients seek massage therapists with not only physical pain, but also emotional issues and problems. Massage therapists must remain focused on treating the client's body rather than trying to address emotional issues the client may present. Maintaining appropriate emotional boundaries can be very difficult at times because there is an emotional component of massage and bodywork. A client or therapist may also unconsciously transfer emotional issues onto each other (called transference or counter transference discussed later in the text) which contributes the difficulty of keeping clear emotional boundaries.

It is natural to want to nurture clients when they experience an emotional response to the bodywork being performed. Keep in mind that crossing a line and trying to address these issues is considered counseling and is dangerous for both the therapist and the client. Instead, listen and respect the client's feelings, but do not offer any emotional advice. If necessary, refer the client to the appropriate healthcare professional.

Physical Boundaries

Physical boundaries involve physical expectations and limitations between the therapist and the client such as draping and touching. Many states and regulating agencies clearly outline these boundaries. If no regulations are in effect, clients will generally expect that massage therapists will act in a manner which will make them feel safe and comfortable.

Common physical boundaries include:

- Never touch the genitalia or breast tissue of any client, male or female. In some instances where massage may be beneficial on the underlying musculature of the breast region, obtain the clients full consent before treating these areas.

- Always use proper draping. For men, the genitalia should be covered at all times. For women, the genitalia and breasts should be covered at all times. A good general rule of thumb is to always cover any body part not being worked on.
- Before treating the gluteal region, inner thigh or region which may be uncomfortable for a client, explain what you would like to do and ask for permission.
- If in doubt or you feel your client may be uncomfortable, always explain what you are doing and obtain permission before treating an area.

Paying close attention to clients in verbal and nonverbal communication will give therapists important cues to whether they are comfortable or not. Adjust the massage routine if needed. This will ensure that both the therapist and the client have a rewarding bodywork session.

Sexual Boundaries

Sexual boundaries are limits which prevent sexual contact between the client and the therapist or sexualizing of bodywork. In all states with regulation as well as the NCBTMB, firm sexual boundaries are outlined. Massage should never be sexual in nature. Establishing proper sexual boundaries in an office policy (which will be discussed further in the text), brochure or consent form will help establish healthy sexual boundaries with clients from the beginning. It will also help protect therapists from sexual situations during a bodywork session.

Sexual boundaries involve more than just sexual behavior. A therapist or a client who experiences sexual thoughts or emotions during a bodywork session is crossing a boundary line. Although they are purely thoughts, problems are inevitable.

Sexually inappropriate behaviors include:

- Engaging in any conduct that is sexual or may be interpreted as sexual
- Any behavior, gestures, or expressions that are seductive in nature or sexually demeaning to the client or by the client toward the therapist
- Draping practices which reflect a lack of respect for the client's or the therapist's privacy
- Sexual or inappropriate comments by the client or the therapist such as comments on sexual orientation or sexual performance
- Therapist-client sex, whether initiated by the client or the massage therapist
- Sexually inappropriate thoughts or emotions by the therapist or the client during a bodywork session

Following are the NCBTMB's rules regarding sexual boundaries and behavior:

- Refrain from participating in a sexual relationship or sexual conduct with the client, whether consensual or otherwise, from the beginning of the client/therapist relationship and for a minimum of six months after the termination of the client/therapist relationship unless a pre-existing relationship exists between a certificant or applicant for certification and client prior to the certificant or applicant for certification applying to be certified by NCBTMB
- In the event that the client initiates sexual behavior, clarify the purpose of the therapeutic session, and, if such conduct does not cease, terminate or refuse the session
- Recognize that sexual activity with clients, students, employees, supervisors, or trainees is prohibited even if consensual

If a sexually uncomfortable situation arises it is the therapist's responsibility to stop this behavior and/or prevent it from happening. The following are a few suggestions for dealing with sexual situations:

- If you feel as though a client is behaving sexually inappropriate during a bodywork session, inform them that sexual behavior is not tolerated. If the behavior persists, end the session immediately.
- State in a consent or intake form that: "Massage therapy is a professional health service and a nonsexual environment. Sexual impropriety is not tolerated."
- If employed in a large business where a client is acting sexually inappropriately, document it and inform a supervisor immediately.
- If an incident is a solicitation for prostitution, report it to the police.

Client Relationship and Social Boundaries

Client relationship and social boundaries refer to boundaries between a therapist and a client that prevent the relationship from becoming social, rather than professional. Massage therapists see many clients, and keeping a professional relationship during and out of the massage session is an important aspect of your practice. Establish healthy boundaries regarding therapist-client relationships in an office policy and plan ahead for reacting to an uncomfortable boundary violation. Examples of crossing a relationship or social boundary include:

- A therapist who continually talks about their personal life during a massage session
- A client who sees you at a social event and discusses your therapeutic session
- A client or therapist who is eager to become close friends
- A client who invites you to a social/personal event

The above examples may be harmful to a massage practice and to the therapeutic therapist-client relationship.

What if you already have a social or professional relationship with a client who comes to see you for bodywork services? In this case, a dual relationship comes into play. A dual relationship occurs when a therapist has a relationship with a client other than the contractual therapeutic one. Typically, the therapist and the client have both a social and professional relationship. Most therapists will, at some point in their career, experience a dual relationship. Dual relationships are common with professionals and as long as there are healthy boundaries in place, they are acceptable. Without boundaries, there is a greater potential for problems to occur which can harm the relationship and ultimately, a massage practice.

The following are steps for creating a healthy professional dual relationship:

1. Identify each type of relationship, whether it's professional, social or personal
2. Identify the importance of each type of relationship
3. Identify clear boundaries which will keep both relationships healthy
4. Determine any potential risks or problems that may arise as a result of the dual relationship
5. Determine how you can remain open and objective to both relationships

If a dual relationship begins to become difficult, communicate with the other person involved before the situation elevates. Many times, with effective communication, the area of concern can

be easily worked out with clarification of proper boundaries. The following may be warning signs that a dual relationship has become problematic:

- You feel taken advantage of or that the relationship has become one-sided
- You question whether you can provide adequate care
- You begin to dislike the relationship and the other person
- You begin to have feelings of mistrust or negativity toward the other person

Although it is not possible to be prepared for all possible client situations, having a good set of professional boundaries is important. The clearer a therapist is about mixing social and professional situations, the better equipped they will be to handle situations as they arise.

Financial Boundaries

Financial boundaries are rules in place to protect and govern our financial practices. Financial practices can make or break a massage practice. Massage therapy is not only a health profession, it is also a business. Sound financial policies must be integrated into a practice in order to become a successful massage therapist. Many therapists are uneasy about the financial side of their work and do not have a business background.

Financial aspects of a massage practice to consider are:

- Appropriate fees for your services
- Appropriate fees for any products you sell
- Will you offer discounts for any reason
- Fees for clients which make an appointment and do not show up
- Proper bookkeeping procedures

Money can be a sensitive subject for both clients and therapists. There may also be people who will try and take advantage of the services massage therapists offer. It is imperative that the therapist is clear about their services and charges in advance to avoid uncomfortable situations.

The following are guidelines for setting appropriate financial boundaries with clients:

- Research what other practitioners are charging in your area and determine your fees
- Create an office policy which outlines your services and what you will charge for each service offered
- Post your fees in your office where the general public can easily see them
- If you will offer monthly specials, plan and post them well in advance
- If you are going to offer discounts for students or other therapists, be clear in advance of what the amounts will be
- State your prices to potential clients on the phone before the initial appointment

If you are starting a practice, put together a business plan which includes your start up costs, initial rent and supplies, phone set up and marketing expenses. Along with initial expenses include the month to month expenses. Determine how much money is needed each month to meet the needs of the business. Use a program such as Intuit's QuickBooks to keep track of all expenses and payments. If you have trouble with money and numbers, get help from someone who understands the massage business.

Office Policy

An **office policy** is a:

“Document which outlines the general rules of the office and its procedures”

Office policies are most common for massage therapists who own their own business. However, if employed in any type of spa or healthcare setting, the business should also have a general office policy available to all employees.

An office policy should clearly state, at minimum, the following:

- Hours of operation
- Phone handling policy
- Appointment scheduling policy
- Fees
- Payment and gratuity policy
- Cancellation policy
- Late arrival policy
- Gift certificate policy
- Minor and children policy
- Referral policy
- Insurance policy
- Attire and clothing policy
- Sexual behavior policy
- Draping policy
- Cell phone and distraction policy
- Illness policy
- Vacation policy
- Job description

With an office policy in place, clear boundaries for the therapist-client relationship are set from the beginning. An office policy clarifies any gray area of a massage practice. It also answers many questions that clients as well as employees may have.

Transference

In the massage and bodywork field, **transference** can be defined as:

“The transfer or projection of feelings, thoughts or behaviors about another person, such as a parent, from a client onto a massage therapist”

Transference is a common occurrence and may happen in any relationship. It is generally an unconscious practice so it is not talked about frequently. Transference is a very complex process which comes from the psychology profession. Psychologists suggest that transference grows from past relationships with others, such as parents, teachers, lovers or siblings. Our past relationships set the stage for how we react in current relationships. For example, a client you are treating that has been physically abused as a child may have a fear of being injured by others with power over them. For a client lying on a massage table, the therapist certainly may appear to have power over them.

The unique power dynamic in massage therapy and during therapeutic massage sessions sets the stage for transference. Most clients see a massage therapist for services that they cannot perform on their own. This puts the therapist in a position of power, which can lead to situations where clients believe that therapists know more about themselves and their condition than the clients do themselves. They may develop a crush, never question your judgment or confide in you with their personal secrets.

Another reason transference may happen so easily in massage therapy is the fact that bodywork can trigger a variety of emotions from clients such as happiness, joy, sadness, fear or anger. Many times these emotions are the result of emotions the client felt in the past toward other people. Recognizing that sometimes a client's reaction may be the result of transference will help you remain professional and handle a variety of situations in a professional manner, preserving a healthy therapist-client relationship.

The following are possible signs of transference from clients:

- The client's attitude may suddenly change during the session
- The client may begin to laugh or cry
- The client may begin to tense up or pull away
- The client's tone of voice may change
- A client may try to touch you or hug you
- The client may try to socialize with you
- The client may begin to share very personal information with you

Sample situations of transference include:

- A client who begins to call the therapist frequently and buy them gifts
- A client who is very nervous and skeptical of your qualifications
- A client who continually asks you out on a date
- A client who expresses affection to the point of making the therapist uncomfortable
- A client who reveals personal information and would like to discuss it with you
- A client who asks you for an extremely discounted rate
- A client who demands extra time during a session

Transference may be positive or negative, and if a therapist is experiencing transference from a client, it may be difficult to determine the best course of action. Do you end the session? Do you try and console the client? Do you simply ignore the behavior? The first step in handling transference is to acknowledge that it is happening and to never take it personally. Although knowing what to do next may be confusing, if dealt with in a professional manner, transference can be easily managed and have minimal interference in a massage practice.

The following are some suggestions for handling transference:

- Keep in communication with the client and ask them how they are doing frequently
- Ask the client if you should lighten pressure or skip the area
- Ask the client if you need to discontinue the session
- Refer the client to another healthcare professional if you feel the emotions may be overwhelming to the client
- Keep the relationship professional at all times

- If you are worried about the client touching or hugging you, wait behind your desk after the session

The following are suggestions on what not to do when dealing with transference:

- Do not attempt to help the client with an emotional issue
- Do not discount or ignore the client's reactions and cues
- Do not tell the client to forget about the emotions or issues they are experiencing

Countertransference

Countertransference is similar to transference. It can be defined as:

“The transfer or projection of feelings, thoughts or behaviors about another person, such as a parent, from a therapist onto a client”

Countertransference involves the projection of feelings from the therapist onto a client. Like transference, countertransference is largely an unconscious practice. Usually therapists are not aware that they are reacting to a client in a certain way. Countertransference usually happens as a result of something the client says or does. For example, if as a child you had an older sibling who always complained about headaches and you thought she was faking, you may react the same way to a client who frequently complains of headaches.

Like clients, massage therapists also come to the bodywork session with a personal history. The closeness of the practice of massage may cause therapists to lose their objectivity at times. The same factors which may be triggers for a client's transference can also be triggers for therapists. It is important to be aware when this happens and be able to react to it in a professional manner. If countertransference continues to happen, therapists begin to shift the focus from the client to their own personal needs. This can be damaging to the therapeutic relationship.

Countertransference can be positive or negative. Knowing that all relationships may involve both countertransference and transference will help you to identify when something is not quite right. The following are possible warning signs that either positive or negative countertransference may be happening in your practice:

- You really look forward to a particular session
- You do not want the session to finish
- You become personally involved with a client
- You feel overjoyed or thrilled during a session
- You reduce your fees for a particular client
- You begin to experience neck pain after working on clients with neck problems
- You begin to resent working on a certain client
- You are easily agitated by a client
- You offer emotional and personal advice to clients
- You begin to feel emotionally drained after a massage session
- You want the massage session to be over quickly
- You begin to have trouble focusing on the client's therapeutic needs

Once countertransference has been identified, how can you deal with it successfully so that it does not damage your professionalism or practice? The following are some steps you can take to safely manage countertransference in your practice:

- Get outside help by joining peer supervision group with other therapists in your area
- Take inventory of your relationship with clients
- Be aware when you want to go outside of your usual boundaries for a client
- Think about whether you have had similar emotional issues with someone in your past
- Keep your feelings and emotions separate from the client's treatment plan
- Keep the focus on why the client has come to you

Draping

Draping is:

“The process of keeping the client's body covered during the massage session”

In general, all body parts, except the part the therapist is working, should be covered during a massage session to protect the client's privacy. At minimum, the genitalia and breasts of a woman should be covered at all times.

There are four basic types of draping in the practice of massage and bodywork. They include:

- Clothed
- Diaper draping
- Top cover method
- Full sheet draping

Clothed draping is when the client remains clothed during the massage session. This type of draping is useful for:

- Onsite massage
- Chair massage
- Thai yoga massage
- Shiatsu bodywork

It may also be helpful for children and first time massage recipients to remain clothed if they are nervous or skeptical about receiving a massage. Remaining clothed will help them to feel comfortable while receiving a therapeutic massage. It is better for a person to receive a clothed massage than no massage at all.

Diaper draping involves the use of towels or sheets to cover only the genitals (and breasts for a woman) of clients during a massage session. This type of draping is only suitable when the bodywork room is very warm and the client will not chill. A fair amount of trust between the therapist and the client is required for this type of draping. Diaper draping does not cover the entire body and may leave the client feeling exposed. If this method of draping is chosen ask for feedback frequently and ask the client to adjust the drape if they are uncomfortable in any way.

This type of draping is useful for:

- Performing full stretches
- Modalities which use a lot of movement

The top cover method involves the use of a covered massage table with a large towel or sheet to cover the client's whole body from the neck down. The cover sheet may also be used as a wrap for the client to walk from the changing area to the massage table. This type of draping provides warmth and security while providing privacy at the same time. With the top cover method the therapist only uncovers the area being worked by tucking the sheet under the arms or legs as needed. This type of draping is usually the easiest and most common form of draping used because it provides warmth and security for the client and at the same time is practical for the therapist. This type of draping is useful for all types of massage.

The full sheet method uses a large flat sheet that covers the table and wraps around the client at the same time. This method provides more security and coverage than diaper draping. However, an additional sheet or towel may be required for the client to get from the changing area to the table. The uncovering process is similar to the top cover method. Only the body part being worked on is exposed and then covered after the area is finished. This type of draping is useful for all types of massage. It may be more difficult to use with modalities which use a lot of movement and full stretches because of the limitation of only one sheet for both the table and the client.

Whatever draping method is chosen, the client's best interests must come first. Respecting the privacy of the client is the primary rule in providing the most relaxing environment. The client will not experience a therapeutic massage treatment if they are feeling vulnerable or exposed.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is a legal and medical term which is used to ensure that a patient or client knows all of the information involved in a particular treatment. In massage therapy, it can be defined as:

“A client's right to all of the pertinent information about a treatment and the giving of consent after being properly advised of the relevant facts, risks and benefits involved”

The elements of informed consent include:

- Informing the client of the nature of the treatment
- Informing the client of any work that will be done close to their genitals or breasts
- Informing the client of possible alternative treatments
- Informing the client of the potential risks (contraindications and precautions) and benefits of the treatment

In order for informed consent to be considered valid, the client must be competent and the consent should be given voluntarily. A general informed consent which you may use in your practice is printed below. If performing advanced bodywork or any alternative treatments, you may need to revise this statement to reflect the nature of the work.

Sample Informed Consent

I understand that the massage I receive is intended to enhance general relaxation, reduce pain caused by muscle tension, decrease muscular tension, increase range of motion and improve circulation. Any other intended purposes for massage therapy are specified below:

If I experience pain or discomfort at any time during the massage session I will inform the therapist promptly so they can alter pressure/strokes to my level of comfort.

The general benefits of massage, contraindications and the treatment procedure have been explained to me. I understand that massage therapy is not a substitute for medical treatment or medications, and that it is recommended that I work with my primary care physician for any medical condition I may have.

I am aware that massage therapists do not diagnose illness or disease, do not prescribe medication, and that spinal or skeletal manipulations are not part of massage therapy. Nothing said by the massage therapist during the massage session will be taken as such.

Because massage should not be performed under certain circumstances, I have informed the therapist of all my known physical and medical conditions as well as medications. I will keep the massage therapist updated on any changes. I understand that there shall be no liability on the therapist's part due to my forgetting to relay any pertinent information.

I understand that any illicit or sexual remarks or advances during the massage session will result in immediate termination of the massage session. I also understand that the massage therapist reserves the right to refuse service to anyone when they deem it necessary.

Client signature: _____ Date: _____

Intake Forms

Client intake forms are very important for the success and maintenance of a massage therapy practice. Intake forms are used to:

- Obtain pertinent information about the client before a treatment plan is formulated
- Obtain a medical history
- Obtain current medical conditions and medications
- Allow therapists to make informed decisions about the type of bodywork that is safe for their clients
- State any expectations of the client before treatment is performed
- Aid in marketing such as mailings, sending birthday or Christmas cards

The following are recommended intake forms for every client:

- Basic personal information
- Medical and family history
- Current medical conditions and medications
- Informed consent
- If health insurance is accepted, a health insurance information form

- If required, notice of privacy practices (based on the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996)

Most of this information can be combined into one or two basic forms and protects both the therapist and the client. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) applies to medical offices or health care providers which conduct the transmission of electronic data. If employed in a medical office, chances are you are required to have this form. If employed in a spa or a business owner and do not accept health insurance, this form is generally not required. However, you are still bound by confidentiality laws to keep all client communication and information confidential.

SOAP Charting

In addition to intake forms, massage therapists should keep daily treatment records. In many states this is a law. The treatment records should state the date of visit, what was done, observations of the therapist and actions taken. **SOAP charting** is often utilized for this purpose.

The acronym SOAP stands for:

- Subjective
- Objective
- Assessment
- Plan

Subjective data is information the client relates to the therapist on a particular visit. For example, if client states that they are sore in the low back from lifting, you would document that information here. Anything the client states should be written and documented in the subjective portion of the notes.

Objective data is the information a therapist gathers based upon the results of assessment or the massage itself. This includes physical and emotional observations. For example, if you notice swelling in a client's ankle, you would document that here. Any observation a therapist makes regarding the client should be written and documented in the objective portion of the notes.

The assessment portion refers to what techniques were utilized or what was done to the client on a particular visit. An example of this would be to write that you performed a one hour Swedish massage with emphasis on the lower back region. Any treatment provided on that particular day needs to be documented in the assessment portion of your notes.

Plan refers to the proposed course of treatment for the client. For example, if you recommended that a client return for another massage in two weeks, you would document that as your treatment plan. Any recommendation made to the client on that particular day should be documented and written in the plan portion of the notes.

The subjective data is gathered and documented before the session begins based upon what the client states. The objective, assessment and plan are all formulated after the session has ended based upon what occurred during the interaction with the client. SOAP charting is a simple and effective way of tracking progress of clients. SOAP charting helps observe treatment outcomes and can show the client how they have progressed through the course of bodywork treatment.

Documentation can be useful in a court of law if necessary. SOAP charting is incorporated in to some state laws and is mentioned by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork in the general business practices section of their standards of practice. It is universally accepted in the medical field. Any client information documented is protected by confidentiality and should never be shared with anyone without signed consent from the client or a court ordered subpoena.

A client is entitled to request to see their information at any time. A release of medical information form is also a good idea to have in the event that another healthcare professional needs to review the information. If a client is referred to another healthcare professional, a release form will be practical. The form should contain a statement that reads something like this:

“I, Client Name, give my permission to Your name or business name, to share my health information with Doctor, healthcare professional or family member, regarding my treatment received at Business name.”

The NCBTMB’s Requirements

As of 2024 the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) requirements for Board Certification renewal are below.

To recertify as a Board Certified Massage Therapist, practitioners must:

- Pass a thorough national background check
- Agree to uphold NCBTMB Standards of Practice & Code of Ethics
- Complete 24 hours of NCBTMB Approved Continuing Education classes:
 - 3 hours of the 24 hours must be in ethics
 - No more than 4 hours of the 24 hours may be in self-care

According to the NCBTMB’s Standards of Practice, this course provides 3 total hours in ethics including:

- 2 CE hours of Standard V: Roles and Boundaries
- 1 CE hour of Standard I: Professionalism

Conclusion

Many major issues for massage therapists concerning ethics, professionalism and law have been discussed. Every massage therapist is ultimately responsible for learning their national, state and local regulations governing the practice of therapeutic massage and ethics. Each year rules and regulations may change. This course is based upon the most current information available. Links to the NCBTMB and many state boards are available on our website at: <http://www.massagetherapyceu.com/approval.php>. Click on your state to find the most up to date information on CE hours or to find a link to the state’s website.

Resources

- Business and Professional Skills for Massage Therapists, by Sandy Fritz
- Ethics for Massage Therapists, by Terrie Yardley-Nohr
- The American Massage Therapy Association www.amtamassage.org
- The Educated Heart, 3rd Edition, by Nina McIntosh
- The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork
www.ncbtmb.org

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NCBTMB's Standards of Practice

Standards of Practice

Standard I: Professionalism

The certificant or applicant for certification must provide optimal levels of professional therapeutic massage and bodywork services and demonstrate excellence in practice by promoting healing and well-being through responsible, compassionate and respectful touch. In his/her professional role the certificant or applicant for certification shall:

- a. adhere to the NCBTMB Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, policies and procedures
- b. comply with the peer review process conducted by the NCBTMB Ethics and Standards Committee regarding any alleged violations of the NCBTMB Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice
- c. treat each client with respect, dignity and worth
- d. use professional verbal, nonverbal and written communications
- e. provide an environment that is safe and comfortable for the client and which, at a minimum, meets all legal requirements for health and safety
- f. use standard precautions to insure professional hygienic practices and maintain a level of personal hygiene appropriate for practitioners in the therapeutic setting
- g. wear clothing that is clean, modest, and professional
- h. obtain voluntary and informed consent from the client prior to initiating the session
- i. if applicable, conduct an accurate needs assessment, develop a plan of care with the client, and update the plan as needed
- j. use appropriate draping to protect the client's physical and emotional privacy
- k. be knowledgeable of his/her scope of practice and practice only within these limitations
- l. refer to other professionals when in the best interest of the client and practitioner
- m. seek other professional advice when needed
- n. respect the traditions and practices of other professionals and foster collegial relationships
- o. not falsely impugn the reputation of any colleague
- p. use the initials NCTMB only to designate his/her professional ability and competency to practice therapeutic massage and bodywork, or the initials NCTM only to designate his/her professional ability and competency to practice therapeutic massage
- q. remain in good standing with NCBTMB
- r. understand that the NCBTMB certificate may be displayed prominently in the certificant's principal place of practice
- s. use the NCBTMB logo and certification number on business cards, brochures, advertisements, and stationery only in a manner that is within established NCBTMB guidelines
- t. not duplicate the NCBTMB certificate for purposes other than verification of the practitioner's credentials
- u. immediately return the certificate to NCBTMB if certification is revoked
- v. inform NCBTMB of any changes or additions to information included in his/her application for NCBTMB certification or recertification

Standard II: Legal and Ethical Requirements

The certificant or applicant for certification must comply with all the legal requirements in applicable jurisdictions regulating the profession of therapeutic massage and bodywork. In his/her professional role the certificant or applicant for certification shall:

- a. obey all applicable local, state, and federal laws
- b. refrain from any behavior that results in illegal, discriminatory, or unethical actions
- c. accept responsibility for his/her own actions
- d. report to the proper authorities any alleged violations of the law by other certificants or applicants for certification
- e. maintain accurate and truthful records
- f. report to NCBTMB any criminal conviction of, or plea of guilty, nolo contendere, or no contest to, a crime in any jurisdiction (other than a minor traffic offense) by him/herself and by other certificants or applicants for certification

- g. report to NCBTMB any pending litigation and resulting resolution related to the certificant or applicant for certification's professional practice and the professional practice of other certificants or applicants for certification
- h. report to NCBTMB any pending complaints in any state or local government or quasi-government board or agency against his/her professional conduct or competence, or that of another certificant, and the resulting resolution of such complaint
- i. respect existing publishing rights and copyright laws, including, but not limited to, those that apply to NCBTMB's copyright-protected examinations

Standard III: Confidentiality

The certificant or applicant for certification shall respect the confidentiality of client information and safeguard all records. In his/her professional role the certificant or applicant for certification shall:

- a. protect the confidentiality of the client's identity in conversations, all advertisements, and any and all other matters unless disclosure of identifiable information is requested by the client in writing, is medically necessary, is required by law or for purposes of public protection
- b. protect the interests of clients who are minors or clients who are unable to give voluntary and informed consent by securing permission from an appropriate third party or guardian
- c. solicit only information that is relevant to the professional client/therapist relationship
- d. share pertinent information about the client with third parties when required by law or for purposes of public protection
- e. maintain the client files for a minimum period of four years
- f. store and dispose of client files in a secure manner

Standard IV: Business Practices

The certificant or applicant for certification shall practice with honesty, integrity, and lawfulness in the business of therapeutic massage and bodywork. In his/her professional role the certificant or applicant for certification shall:

- a. provide a physical setting that is safe and meets all applicable legal requirements for health and safety
- b. maintain adequate and customary liability insurance
- c. maintain adequate progress notes for each client session, if applicable
- d. accurately and truthfully inform the public of services provided
- e. honestly represent all professional qualifications and affiliations
- f. promote his/her business with integrity and avoid potential and actual conflicts of interest
- g. advertise in a manner that is honest, dignified, accurate and representative of services that can be delivered and remains consistent with the NCBTMB Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice
- h. advertise in a manner that is not misleading to the public and shall not use sensational, sexual or provocative language and/or pictures to promote business
- i. comply with all laws regarding sexual harassment
- j. not exploit the trust and dependency of others, including clients and employees/co-workers
- k. display/discuss a schedule of fees in advance of the session that is clearly understood by the client or potential client
- l. make financial arrangements in advance that are clearly understood by and safeguard the best interests of the client or consumer
- m. follow acceptable accounting practices
- n. file all applicable municipal, state and federal taxes
- o. maintain accurate financial records, contracts and legal obligations, appointment records, tax reports and receipts for at least four years

Standard V: Roles and Boundaries

The certificant or applicant for certification shall adhere to ethical boundaries and perform the professional roles designed to protect both the client and the practitioner, and safeguard the therapeutic value of the relationship. In his/her professional role the certificant or applicant for certification shall:

- a. recognize his/her personal limitations and practice only within these limitations

- b. recognize his/her influential position with the client and not exploit the relationship for personal or other gain
- c. recognize and limit the impact of transference and counter-transference between the client and the certificant
- d. avoid dual or multidimensional relationships that could impair professional judgment or result in exploitation of the client or employees and/or coworkers
- e. not engage in any sexual activity with a client
- f. acknowledge and respect the client's freedom of choice in the therapeutic session
- g. respect the client's right to refuse the therapeutic session or any part of the therapeutic session
- h. refrain from practicing under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or any illegal substances (with the exception of a prescribed dosage of prescription medication which does not impair the certificant)
- i. have the right to refuse and/or terminate the service to a client who is abusive or under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or any illegal substance

Standard VI: Prevention of Sexual Misconduct

The certificant or applicant for certification shall refrain from any behavior that sexualizes, or appears to sexualize, the client/therapist relationship. The certificant or applicant for certification recognizes the intimacy of the therapeutic relationship may activate practitioner and/or client needs and/or desires that weaken objectivity and may lead to sexualizing the therapeutic relationship. In his/her professional role the certificant or applicant for certification shall:

- a. refrain from participating in a sexual relationship or sexual conduct with the client, whether consensual or otherwise, from the beginning of the client/therapist relationship and for a minimum of six months after the termination of the client/therapist relationship unless a pre-existing relationship exists between a certificant or applicant for certification and client prior to the certificant or applicant for certification applying to be certified by NCBTMB
- b. in the event that the client initiates sexual behavior, clarify the purpose of the therapeutic session, and, if such conduct does not cease, terminate or refuse the session
- c. recognize that sexual activity with clients, students, employees, supervisors, or trainees is prohibited even if consensual
- d. not touch the genitalia
- e. only perform therapeutic treatments beyond the normal narrowing of the ear canal and normal narrowing of the nasal passages as indicated in the plan of care and only after receiving informed voluntary written consent
- f. only perform therapeutic treatments in the oropharynx as indicated in the plan of care and only after receiving informed voluntary consent
- g. only perform therapeutic treatments into the anal canal as indicated in the plan of care and only after receiving informed voluntary written consent
- h. only provide therapeutic breast massage as indicated in the plan of care and only after receiving informed voluntary written consent from the client

NCBTMB's Code of Ethics

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.

AMTA's Code of Ethics

Principles of Ethics. The Principles of Ethics form the first part of the Code of Ethics. They are aspirational and inspirational model standards of exemplary professional conduct for all members of the association. These Principles should not be regarded as limitations or restrictions, but as goals for which members should constantly strive.

Massage therapists/practitioners shall:

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

Rules of Ethics. The Rules of Ethics are mandatory and direct specific standards of minimally-acceptable professional conduct for all members of the association. The Rules of Ethics are enforceable for all association members, and any members who violate this Code shall be subject to disciplinary action.

Massage therapists/practitioners shall:

1. Conduct all business and professional activities within their scope of practice and all applicable legal and regulatory requirements.
2. Refrain from engaging in any sexual conduct or sexual activities involving their clients in the course of a massage therapy session.
3. Be truthful in advertising and marketing, and refrain from misrepresenting his or her services, charges for services, credentials, training, experience, ability or results.
4. Refrain from using AMTA membership, including the AMTA name, logo or other intellectual property, or the member's position, in any way that is unauthorized, improper or misleading.
5. Refrain from engaging in any activity which would violate confidentiality commitments and/or proprietary rights of AMTA or any other person or organization.

Ethics Refresher Exam

1. The concept of ethics in massage is always black and white.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. What does the scope of practice define?
 - A. What information must be kept confidential
 - B. What is legally acceptable and not acceptable in a profession
 - C. The hours of operation and phone handling policy in an office
 - D. What information the client has the right to know before receiving a massage
3. All of the following are types of boundaries in the massage therapy profession EXCEPT:
 - A. Physical boundaries
 - B. Sexual boundaries
 - C. Office space boundaries
 - D. Financial boundaries
4. Who establishes legal and professional boundaries for the practice of massage?
 - A. Local agencies
 - B. State law
 - C. The NCBTMB
 - D. All of the above
5. What are emotional boundaries?
 - A. Boundaries which govern the expectations between the therapist and client related to emotional issues
 - B. Boundaries which govern limits, guidelines and expectations of professional behavior
 - C. Boundaries which govern physical limitations between the therapist and the client, such as touching
 - D. Boundaries which govern the sexual behavior between a therapist and a client
6. Which of the following is a physical boundary between a therapist and a client?
 - A. Never touch the genitalia of any client
 - B. Always use proper draping
 - C. Before treating an area which may be uncomfortable to the client, explain what you are doing and ask for permission
 - D. All of the above
7. All of the following are violations of sexual boundaries in massage EXCEPT:
 - A. Engaging in any conduct that is sexual with a client
 - B. Making sexually inappropriate comments to a client
 - C. Visiting a sick client in the hospital
 - D. Having sexual thoughts about a client during the massage session

8. What can you do if you feel that you have been sexually violated during a massage session?
 - A. Inform the client that sexual behavior is not tolerated
 - B. End the massage session
 - C. Report the behavior to the police
 - D. All of the above

9. Which of the following is an example of a dual relationship?
 - A. A close friend of yours comes to your office for a therapeutic massage
 - B. A client whom you have never met before comes to your office for a massage
 - C. A friend refers a client to you that you have never met
 - D. A client invites you to their child's birthday party, but you decline

10. All of the below can be warning signs that a dual relationship has become problematic EXCEPT:
 - A. You begin to feel taken advantage of
 - B. You ask the other person a professional question
 - C. You begin to dislike the relationship
 - D. You begin to mistrust the other person

11. Which of the following is a correct way to determine your fees if you are starting a new practice?
 - A. Research what other practitioners are charging and set your prices well under theirs
 - B. Set your fees based on what you think you deserve to earn with out any research
 - C. Research what other practitioners are charging and set your fees accordingly
 - D. Research what other practitioners are charging and set your fees well higher than theirs

12. What is an office policy?
 - A. A financial plan put into effect when you open your office
 - B. A document which outlines the general rules of the office and its procedures
 - C. The projection of feelings from the client onto the practitioner
 - D. A monthly special you plan to offer in your practice

13. Which of the following should be included in an office policy?
 - A. Fees
 - B. Cancellation policy
 - C. Sexual behavior policy
 - D. All of the above

14. Transference is the transfer or projection of feelings, thoughts or behaviors about another person, such as a parent, from the therapist onto a client.
 - A. True
 - B. False

15. Which of the following may be a warning sign of transference?
- A. A client begins to laugh or cry during a session
 - B. A client's tone of voice changes
 - C. A client may try to hug or touch you
 - D. All of the above
16. All of the following are examples of transference EXCEPT:
- A. A client who begins to call you frequently or buys you gifts
 - B. A client who comes to you for a massage and thanks you when they leave
 - C. A client who asks you for an extremely discounted rate
 - D. A client who demands extra time during a session
17. What should you avoid doing when dealing with transference?
- A. Helping the client with an emotional issue
 - B. Ignoring the client's actions and reactions
 - C. Telling the client to forget about the emotions that they are experiencing
 - D. All of the above
18. Countertransference involves the projection of feelings from the therapist onto the client.
- A. True
 - B. False
19. All of the following are possible signs of countertransference in your practice EXCEPT:
- A. A client who frequently calls you or buys you gifts
 - B. You reduce your fees for a particular client
 - C. You offer emotional and personal advice to a client
 - D. You are easily agitated by a client
20. What is draping?
- A. The transfer of feelings from a client onto a therapist
 - B. The process of informing a client of the benefits and contraindications to massage
 - C. The process of keeping the client's body covered during the massage session
 - D. The process of documenting what happened during a massage session
21. What is diaper draping?
- A. The use of a large flat sheet to cover the massage table and the client at the same time
 - B. The use of towels or sheets to cover only the genitals and breasts during the massage session
 - C. The client remains fully clothed during a massage session
 - D. The use of a covered massage table with a large towel or sheet to cover the client

22. The top cover method of draping is useful for all of the following types of massage EXCEPT:
- A. Chair massage
 - B. Swedish massage
 - C. Deep tissue massage
 - D. Pregnancy massage
23. Which of the following elements is included in the concept of informed consent?
- A. Informing the client of the nature of the treatment
 - B. Informing the client of any contraindications
 - C. Informing the client of the benefits of the treatment
 - D. All of the above
24. It is acceptable to state in your informed consent form that any illicit or sexual behavior is not tolerated.
- A. True
 - B. False
25. Which of the following information should be obtained in an initial intake form?
- A. Personal information
 - B. Family medical history
 - C. Informed consent
 - D. All of the above
26. What does the P stand for in SOAP charting?
- A. Partial
 - B. Plan
 - C. Preparation
 - D. Pertinent
27. Which of the following is generally documented before the massage session begins and is based on what the client states?
- A. Subjective data
 - B. Objective data
 - C. Assessment of the client
 - D. Plan of care

This concludes the Ethics Refresher exam.