



NEW AGE SPA
INSTITUTE

Ethics and Boundaries for Massage Therapy

New Age Spa Institute

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Ethics and Boundaries for Massage Therapy

Most professions have ethical guidelines about how a person in that profession should or should not behave. Professional massage organizations and state and local governments that regulate massage often set down ethics for proper massage therapy. The purpose of massage ethics is to protect both clients and massage therapist from situations that can compromise the therapeutic relationship.

Course Goals

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Define the meaning and importance of ethics
2. Explain why ethics are important to professionalism
3. Recognize the principles of massage therapy Code of Ethics
4. Differentiate between personal, professional and legal boundaries.
5. Define a client centered relationship
6. Explain the importance of a safe environment
7. Define informed consent, right of refusal, and scope of practice
8. Define the principles of patient confidentiality
9. Explain how boundary violations and compromises occur
10. Describe measures that help you avoid situations where sexual boundaries are violated
11. Explain the effects of a power differential in the therapeutic relationship
12. Explain the effects of transference, countertransference, and dual relationships in the therapeutic setting
13. Recognize the key elements of NCBTMB's Standards of Practice

What are Massage Therapy Ethics?

Ethics for massage therapy protect the therapeutic relationship. Without ethics there can be no true professionalism. A healthy therapeutic relationship requires an understanding and respect for personal and professional boundaries. Professional boundaries are the foundation of an ethical practice.

Professional massage therapists feel better about themselves and their profession when they work in an ethical manner. Professionals recognize that their credibility rests not only on technical competence, but also on public trust. A satisfied client is your best means of advertising, because that person's good recommendation helps you to maintain public confidence and build a sound business following.

Ethics is the study of the standards and philosophy of human conduct and is defined as a system or code of morals of an individual person, a group, or a profession. The word “ethics” is derived from the Greek word *ethos* (character). In philosophy, ethics defines what is good for the individual and for society and establishes the nature of duties that people owe themselves and one another. To practice good ethics is to be concerned about the public welfare, the welfare of individual clients, your reputation, and the reputation of the profession you represent.

Ethics are moral guidelines that are established by experienced professionals to reduce the incidence and risk of harm or injury in the professional relationship because of an abuse of a position of power. Although the terms “ethics” and “morals” are often used interchangeably, they are not identical. Morals usually refer to practices; ethics refers to the rationale that may or may not support such practices. Morals refer to actions, ethics to the reasoning behind such actions. Ethics is an examined and carefully considered structure that includes both practice and theory.

Ethical principles are general guidelines rather than specific rules. A commitment to quality massage therapy, avoiding discrimination, striving for excellence, maintaining confidentiality, having a professional image and doing no harm are examples of ethical principles in massage therapy. Honoring personal boundaries and maintaining professional boundaries ensure that the therapeutic relationship benefits the client and avoids ethical problems.

Ethical Codes are specific about what a massage therapist should or should not do. A code of ethics states the ethical responsibilities of the massage and bodywork professional. Standards of practice further establish the expectations of professional conduct in regard to the law, confidentiality, business practices, roles and boundaries, and prevention of misconduct.

The code of ethics for massage therapists cover three areas of professional concern including conduct in relation to performing a massage, business dealings and interactions with clients in both a professional setting, as well as within the public arena. Unlike personal ethics, which are flexible and open to debate, professional ethical codes are formally defined, mandatory standards of conduct established by and for members of professional associations to ensure quality and integrity in the profession.

All state licensing authorities, professional associations or certifying and establish their own standards of conduct and ethical guidelines for their members. Massage therapists need to refer directly to the organizations and academic or training institutions with which they are affiliated, as well as state, local, and national associations, to review the ethical guidelines that apply.

Legal boundaries deal with the law and the rules and regulations that are set up by each state, city or county. Violations of these guidelines could result in probation,

limitation of practice, and suspension or revocation of licensure. Clinicians should be aware; moreover, that inappropriate sexual or physical contact can result in patients suing clinicians for battery and malpractice, and in several states sexual exploitation of a patient is considered a felony.

The Therapeutic Relationship

In Massage Therapy, the therapist/client relationship is client centered. All activities are designed to benefit and enhance the client's well-being and maintain or promote their individual welfare. Massage Therapists need to know how to communicate effectively, build trust and set boundaries with their clients. Inherent in the therapeutic relationship is an implicit contract between the therapist and the client.

In this implicit contract the client can expect:

- Informed consent prior to any treatment.
- To know that his medical record and his condition will be kept in confidence.
- Privacy.
- Right to refuse treatment.
- Always treated with dignity and respect.
- Reasonable and competent care.
- Clear description of the policies and practices of the massage practice.
- Be able to examine and receive an explanation of their bill.
- That the massage therapist is working within their scope of practice
- Confidentiality

Massage therapists treat individuals ethically not only by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm, but also by making efforts to secure their well-being. Therapists bear the burden of accountability, because they are in a position of authority or power in relation to the client. The client trusts that the practitioner will act in the client's best interests, and it is the practitioner's duty to do so. This concept is central to professional practice and the therapeutic relationship.

The client comes for an appointment at a prearranged location, receives an agreed-on treatment, for a specified length of time and an agreed-on fee. The client expects to receive treatment to address certain conditions or otherwise enhance the state of wellness in accordance with the knowledge of the therapist and dependent on the therapist's skills and education. It is the responsibility of the therapist to provide an environment that is secure and safe. Clients put trust in the therapist to always act in the client's best interests.

A safe environment is a central goal in developing a therapeutic relationship. The therapist creates a place where any client is safe enough to be vulnerable, to be open, to release, to relax; a place of trust or a safe haven in which to unwind. The client assumes

there is safety from physical, emotional, or sexual impropriety. If the therapist respects these client rights, ethics are respected and both the client and the practitioner are protected.

With Informed Consent message clients need to be able to make a decision as to whether they want you to work on them and what they want you to do. This is informed consent. They must be given enough information, such as: what are the goals and purpose of the session, what are the possible consequences of the treatment, what risks are involved, what are the possible benefits of a treatment, how much time will the treatment take, how much money will the treatment cost and how will it be paid for. With this information, a client will be able to determine if they want the treatment for themselves or do they refuse the treatment.

Patients have a fundamental right to direct what happens to their bodies, grounded in the principles of autonomy and respect for persons. In turn, health care professionals have an ethical obligation to involve patients in a process of shared decision making and to seek patients' informed consent for treatments and procedures. Good informed consent practices, thus, are an essential component of ethics quality in health care.

The goal of the informed consent process is to ensure that patients have an opportunity to be informed participants in decisions about their health care. To achieve that goal practitioners must inform the patient (or authorized surrogate) about treatment options and alternatives, including the risks and benefits of each, providing the information that a "reasonable person" in similar circumstances would want to know in making the treatment decision. A key element of the process is that the practitioner must explain why he or she believes recommended treatments or procedures will be more beneficial than alternatives in the context of the patient's diagnosis.

Massage clients have the right to refuse the service for any reason at any time. If they determine that the session should be stopped right in the middle, their needs must be respected. Be aware that a session interrupted before completed may also cause a problem in the financial agreement. Does the client owe for the whole time? This same right also applies for the practitioner. You can end a session at any time, for any reason. The bottom line is to work on only people who are nurturing to you and do not drain your energy. If your mother just died of lung cancer it may not be advisable to work on someone who smokes.

Scope of practice refers to massage therapists' area of competence, usually obtained through formal study, training, and/or professional experience, and one for which they've received certification or other proof of qualification. Unlike other standardized training programs or fields of study, schools of professional massage therapy and state requirements vary significantly in the number of necessary hours of study and curriculum. Some schools provide substantial training in specialized procedures, such as lymphatic- drainage techniques or hydrotherapy, while others may only touch upon these subjects, if they are discussed at all.

Massage therapists who choose to provide services they are not appropriately trained or competent in is a dangerous personal decision that undermines the profession and may carry weighty legal implications. Personal level of discretion and ethical standards will largely determine the manner in which massage therapists advertise their services, describe their education and professional experience, and list credentials. Therapists must decide if they can rightfully claim substantive experience in a discipline for which they've attended a three-hour workshop or watched a series of instructional videos, or when they can properly call themselves an expert in one modality or another.

Misrepresenting one's educational achievements, credentials, or abilities is a serious breach of responsibility that endangers client safety and reflects poorly on the massage profession as a whole. If a subject is outside massage therapists' area of expertise, they should not hesitate to say so. The therapist should then direct the client to the appropriate informational resources or professional services. Massage therapists should make sure any information or suggestions they pass along are supported by the professional community and recent research findings, and are appropriate and safe for the client.

Confidentiality in the therapist/client relationship is the foundation of safety, protection, trust, and respect. A massage client's information, both written and verbal belongs to the client. It helps to provide an environment for the client to relax, open, release, transform, and heal. The obligation to ensure patient privacy is rooted in the ethical principle of respect for persons.

Massage Therapists convey that respect in a few ways with regard to privacy. They respect patient's informational privacy by limiting access to patient information to those authorized health care providers who need it to perform their duties. The obligation to ensure patient privacy is also justified by the obligation of harm prevention. Sometimes maintaining patient privacy is a way of keeping the patient safe, for example, by minimizing the risk of identity theft.

Confidentiality is mandated by HIPAA laws, specifically the Privacy Rule. The Privacy Rule protects all individually identifiable health information held or transmitted by a covered entity or its business associate, in any form or media, whether electronic, paper, or oral.

This includes:

- the individual's past, present or future physical or mental health or condition,
- the provision of health care to the individual, or
- the past, present, or future payment for the provision of health care to the individual, and that identifies the individual or for which there is a reasonable basis to believe it can be used to identify the individual.
- Individually identifiable health information includes many common identifiers (e.g., name, address, birth date, Social Security Number).

All health care providers must make reasonable efforts to use, disclose, and request only the minimum amount of protected health information needed to accomplish the intended purpose of the use, disclosure, or request. They must also develop and implement policies and procedures to reasonably limit uses and disclosures to the minimum necessary. When the minimum necessary standard applies to a use or disclosure, a covered entity may not use, disclose, or request the entire medical record for a particular purpose, unless it can specifically justify the whole record as the amount reasonably needed for the purpose.

Therapeutic Boundaries

A boundary defines the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Establishing boundaries should begin with the therapist's first client interaction on the phone or in the office. Creating professional boundaries can be achieved in many ways such as;

- dressing appropriately
- greeting the client by name
- taking time to discuss medical history and session goals
- offering clear directions in a professional tone
- leaving the room as the client undresses
- starting and ending massage services on time

There are hundreds of small ways to establish "boundaries" through professional behavior and boundaries can be developed both verbally and non-verbally.

Boundaries define personal comfort zones, the space in which individuals operate with a sense of safety and control. Boundaries define the professional relationship as fundamentally respectful and protective of the patient and as dedicated to the patient's well-being. Professional boundaries are outlined in policy and procedure statements that are presented to the client at the beginning of the therapeutic relationship. These boundaries create a secure and a safe environment from which to work with client.

An important aspect of a professional practice is to recognize, respect, and honor the client's personal boundaries. It is important to explore boundaries and constantly readjust limits to accommodate each individual. When boundaries are violated, respect may be lost in the relationship.

There is three main types of boundaries we deal with include: professional boundaries, and personal boundaries and legal boundaries,

Professional boundaries are determined by many things, such as your type of practice, your business rules and practices.

Personal boundaries are everything that determines your safety zone. They may be

influenced by past experiences, beliefs and values.

Legal boundaries are those that of course deal with the law and the rules and regulations that are set up by each state, city or county. Your scope of practice is defined legally. Your scope of practice is the limits or boundaries that apply to your practice. This may include areas you can work on and what you can or cannot do. This will determine if you can do things like make diagnosis's, do physical adjustments, work in the mouth or other body cavity and sell vitamins and other related items. The laws vary so much that it is impossible to discuss here. Make sure you contact your local authorities to determine what your legal boundaries are and that you work within the law.

Boundaries are often difficult to determine. What may be good for one person may not be right for another. Boundaries are defined by our experiences, beliefs and expectations. Some determining factors in the formation of personal boundaries include family, school, or religious upbringing. Cultural and ethnic influences also shape attitudes about relationships, privacy, and touch.

Everyone with whom we interact has different boundaries, and so we must be sensitive and able to respond with understanding. In some situations, we must hold strong boundaries, and at other appropriate times we must be flexible to merge or expand our experience. It is important to be aware of a client's concept of the boundaries in a variety of categories and how we can address related issues.

A boundary violation occurs when a health care professional's behavior goes beyond appropriate professional limits. Many small boundary errors occur with very little impact, depending on the level of trust in the relationship. When a boundary is severely invaded or violated, this might constitute a situation of neglect or even abuse. When a boundary has been crossed, we may say someone has "crossed the line" or "gone too far." Sometimes a client crosses a boundary in a very innocent way.

Even in the case of minor boundary infractions, there can be a sense of discomfort or confusion. When we move outside of our own boundaries or push beyond another's, we find ourselves in dangerous territory that can easily lead to disappointment, questionable behavior, emotional turmoil, or abuse.

The following are warning signs of boundary compromises:

1. Failing to establish a professional environment.
2. Accepting unwanted touch or gifts.
3. Neglecting your personal value system.
4. Feeling overwhelmed by a client.
5. Believing that you can do more than you are educated to do.
6. Allowing your client to zap all your energy.
7. Falling in love with your client.

8. Failure to recognize that your boundaries have been crossed.
9. Touching a client without obtaining informed consent.
10. Allowing others to make decisions for you.
11. Letting others define who you are or what your goals are.
12. Believing that your client can anticipate your needs.
13. Allowing your feelings and emotions to get in the way of your massage.
14. Feeling a sense of dread toward massaging a client.
15. Expecting someone to “rescue” you from your troubles.
16. Fear of saying no because you dread the consequences.
17. Your “gut response” tells you something is wrong.

Maintaining boundaries is an ongoing process for all therapists. On any given day, a therapist or client could intentionally or unintentionally cross a boundary. In many situations, educating the client on your scope of practice and your office policies will be sufficient and the therapeutic session can continue. If a client chooses to push your boundaries, then the therapist must either end the session or relationship, refer the client to someone else, or decide the client is no longer a suitable client candidate.

Ethics is just looking more closely at relationships and learning to become more conscious and make better choices. Clients will want to become friends or ask you out on a date. They will want discounts and special favors like giving them more of your time when they are late for an appointment. They will bring you favors to win your trust. They will come to you in pain and grief and many deep old wounds. Ethics is the study of the relational dynamics that take place between the massage therapist and client.

Boundaries are violated when one person “crosses a line” by doing or saying something to another person without the other person’s consent. The person who holds the most power in a relationship is ultimately responsible when boundary violations take place. Our boundaries define us in relation to others. Many relational problems are a result of “secret” boundaries. By stepping into the light and communicating our boundaries visibly and openly, others can benefit from them and our challenge areas can be corrected.

As a professional massage therapist providing services to the public, it is important that you understand your legal rights, obligations and risks while practicing good ethics. The headlines are rampant with incidents of betrayal and unprofessional conduct by persons of authority, power and trust. As a precaution, professionals in all fields must take care to ensure that their clients will never misinterpret their motives or services as being sexually oriented. This is especially true in the case of massage professionals.

To avoid misunderstandings, always educate each client regarding the massage techniques to be used. Include body part, type of strokes, pressure, possibility of pain, in your explanation. Describe thoroughly the duration of the treatment and the reason for the type of massage to be used. Urge them to be open in communication with you concerning the massage before, during and after each session. Keep all communication and actions professional.

Understanding and applying the following measures will help you avoid situations where sexual boundaries might be violated:

1. Keep clients professionally draped
2. Avoid actions that could be misconstrued as flirtatious.
3. Be careful about sharing personal information.
4. Be cautious how and where you touch someone.
5. Be aware of where your body is in relation to your clients' body.
6. Pay attention for signs that a client is focusing on you sexually or emotionally.
7. Decide if this is a situation needs to be confronted immediately and if so, do it right away in a calm and professional manner.
8. If a client disrespects you by crossing boundaries that have already be established by you, you must be able to follow through and end your session.

If you, as a therapist, have crossed a boundary, it is important to look within and think about the services you are meant to provide. Has the relationship been more focused on your needs and not the clients' needs? If necessary, work with a mentor or other professional and refocus your sessions on the clients.

A number one priority is to be clear on your own sexual issues. Don't take them into the therapy room. Firm boundaries of appropriate behavior must be maintained, even if a client is being provocative. Flirting and/ or sexual contact of any kind is highly unethical and prohibited by the ethics and bylaws of the massage profession. Inappropriate terminology when speaking about body parts is never to be used by the practitioner or tolerated from a client, not is any type of sexual innuendo. If a sexual relationship between a therapist and a client is desired, the professional relationship must be terminated.

All massage therapists must strive to maintain high standards of conduct thus ensuring a safe and comfortable environment and preserving the image and ethics of the massage profession.

Massage therapists are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment cases.

Therapists must be constantly on guard to prevent any suspicion of sexual misconduct. Massage therapists can be accused of sexual harassment even though their intent is purely professional.

A strict code of ethics must be respected to prevent any subtle appearance of wrongdoing. For instance, hugging a client after a massage may enhance the client's perception of the sexual nature of the massage. Experienced therapists are aware that inappropriate bodily contact can open up problems for the therapist as well as the client.

It is important for the massage therapist to consider each encounter with clients separately and use introspection to see if any boundaries may be crossed. It is important also to establish a mentor relationship with other therapists and to discuss any situations that do not feel right. Usually if something does not feel right, the professional needs to

trust his/her intuition. It helps to discuss these issues with other therapists and learn how they handled similar situations.

Remember, our first duty is to do no harm.

Creating personal and professional boundaries isn't always easy work. Doing so effectively requires that you take the time to really understand your goals and priorities, as well what you will and will not accept from clients and others. When you take the time to clarify your professional boundaries your practice will thrive.

Therapist and Client Relationship Dynamics

In every relationship, professional or personal, dynamics are formed to either sustain or breakdown the relationship. Dynamics can be healthy or counterproductive and possibly harmful, depending on the client and/or the therapists' responses.

The therapists' relationship and interactions with clients is a partnership that promotes healthy behaviors. It leads to sound, informed, health-care decisions; and ensures the client's voice is heard. The client's best interests should always be the therapist's primary goal, and the guide for all actions and decisions.

When a client seeks the services of a professional, an authority figure, someone to whom the client can defer judgment, that client enters a relationship in which it is comfortable. There is sometimes an unconscious predisposition for the client to project onto the practitioner qualities of someone from a former relationship. The client might also seek more out of the therapeutic relationship than is appropriate.

When a client tries to personalize the therapeutic relationship, it is known as transference. Transference can appear in any relationship in which there is a power differential. Transference involves misperceptions that the client might have toward the massage therapist. Those unconscious misperceptions can be positive or negative. The therapist should be aware of the signs of transference and take necessary measures to reduce its occurrence.

Some signs of transference include the following:

1. The client attempts to become more personally involved with the practitioner.
2. The client asks personal questions not related to the reason for the visit.
3. The client might vie for extra time during or at the end of the session.
4. The client might invite the practitioner to social activities, or try to get closer physically, socially, or emotionally.
5. The client brings or offers gifts or favors.
6. The client proposes friendships or sexual involvement.
7. The client might become more demanding of the practitioner's time and attention or even become angry, disappointed, or rejected if the practitioner does not

respond.

8. The client might want to adore, befriend, and please the practitioner or berate and mistrust the practitioner.

These signs of transference are not necessarily about the therapist but are related to the power differential and the attempts of the client to personalize the therapeutic relationship. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to maintain clear professional boundaries when transference occurs.

When the practitioner tends to personalize the therapeutic relationship, it is known as countertransference. Countertransference involves misperceptions of the practitioner toward the client. It is usually unconscious and always a problem for the therapeutic process.

Signs of countertransference include the following:

1. Strong emotional feelings toward the client, either positive or negative.
2. Thinking excessively about a client between sessions.
3. Dressing in a special manner when a certain client is coming.
4. Making special provisions or spending extra time with a client.
5. Fantasizing or having sexual feelings toward a client.
6. Yawning excessively during an appointment.
7. Dreading an upcoming appointment with a client.
8. Negative reactions to a client, such as:
9. Feeling guilty, frustrated, or angry if a client does not respond to treatment.
10. Feeling anger or disappointment if a client is late or cancels.
11. Experiencing fatigue, disappointment, depression, or even infatuation after a session.

Strong feelings toward a client can signal countertransference including: love, sexual attraction, a need to rescue as well as avoidance, aggravation, frustration and anger.

Many times a client's transference, when unrecognized, will generate countertransference on the part of the unaware therapist. This is nearly always a path to distress and possible disaster for the therapist.

Transference and countertransference are natural, unconscious phenomena that occur in therapeutic relationships in which there is a power differential. If not recognized and effectively defused, the result has a negative impact on the relationship, possibly emotionally harming the client and potentially devastating the professional's practice.

Healthy professional boundaries are the best defense against transference and countertransference. When boundaries are challenged or when a professional is tempted to move beyond those boundaries, it is a warning sign to assess motivations and how one

is operating as a professional massage therapist.

In a relationship in which there is a power differential, it is ultimately the responsibility of the person in the more powerful role to provide a safe, secure environment. The therapist is therefore responsible for recognizing and ensuring that transference and countertransference issues are not acted out in a way that is harmful to the client or the therapeutic relationship. In some circumstances, this requires ending the therapeutic relationship and referring the client to different practitioner.

A dual relationship is any situation that combines the therapeutic relationship with a secondary relationship that extends beyond the massage therapist/client relationship. Dual relationships span a broad spectrum. An attraction, one for the other or mutual, results in a social or romantic relationship outside or beyond the therapeutic relationship.

If the feelings or attractions come from the client, the massage therapist must clearly restate the professional boundaries and take responsibility to uphold them. If the feelings are on the part of the therapist, then you should seek out supervision to clarify the origin of the feelings and strengthen your boundaries, or refer the client to another practitioner.

In the therapeutic relationship the power differential always makes it is the therapist's responsibility to always act ethically. The therapist can pose questions such as: how will the client-centered therapeutic relationship be affected? Will the dual relationship improve or enhance the client's well-being? Choices must be made that maintain and enhance the well-being of the client. The professional is ultimately responsible for maintaining boundaries even when the client initiates the activities. It is the practitioner's responsibility to inform the client of the possible positive and negative implications of pursuing the relationship.

If there is a strong mutual attraction, both parties should openly discuss the ramifications and complexities before proceeding. It is important to carefully examine the motives of entering the nontherapeutic relationship. Mutual and equal consent is essential. Without good communication, feelings are hurt, which leads to all aspects of the relationship suffering.

Before becoming involved or pursuing any social relationship, the therapist/client relationship should end. The therapist should seek supervision with peers or a supervisor to explore the source of the feelings. If the feelings persist and the client seeks the therapist outside of the therapeutic setting, the practitioner should use extreme caution before establishing any social relationship. It is usually a good idea to wait a period of time after the professional relationship is discontinued before continuing a personal or romantic relationship. Dual relationships are a normal part of human interaction but are nearly always detrimental to the therapeutic relationship.

NCBTMB Approved Provider Standards of Practice

Background

The purpose of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB) is to foster high standards of ethical and professional practice in the delivery of services and continuing education through a recognized credible Approved Provider program that assures the competency of educators of therapeutic massage and bodywork continuing education.

These Approved Provider Standards of Practice ensure that Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status are aware of, and committed to, upholding high standards of practice for the profession.

Also, the Approved Provider Standards of Practice are meant to assist members of the profession, including consumers, other health care professionals, and state and municipal regulatory agencies or boards with understanding the duties and responsibilities of NCBTMB Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status.

The NCBTMB developed and adopted the Approved Provider Standards of Practice to provide Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status with a clear statement of the expectations of professional conduct and level of practice afforded the profession in, among other things, the following areas: Professionalism, Legal and Ethical Requirements, Confidentiality, Business Practices, Roles and Boundaries, and Prevention of Sexual Misconduct. These Approved Provider Standards of Practice were approved and ratified by the NCBTMB Board of Directors, representatives of the Approved Provider population and key stakeholders of the NCBTMB.

Preamble

These Approved Provider Standards of Practice for the profession of therapeutic massage and bodywork are the guiding principles by which Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status conduct their day-to-day responsibilities within their scope of practice. These principles help to assure that all professional behaviors are conducted in the most ethical, compassionate, and responsible manner. Through these Approved Provider Standards of Practice, NCBTMB seeks to establish and uphold high standards, traditions, and principles of the practices that constitute the profession of therapeutic massage and bodywork and continuing education.

The Standards are enforceable guidelines for professional conduct, and therefore, are stated in observable and measurable terms intended as minimum levels of practice to which Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status are held accountable. Upon submission of the application to become an Approved Provider, each applicant for Approved Provider status must agree to uphold and abide by the NCBTMB Approved Provider Code of Ethics, Approved Provider Standards of Practice and applicable policies.

Approved Providers or applicants for Approved Provider status failure to comply with the Approved Provider Code of Ethics and the Approved Provider Standards of Practice as provided herein constitutes professional misconduct and may result in sanctions, or other

appropriate disciplinary actions, including the suspension or revocation of Approved Provider status.

NCBTMB certificants, Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status are obligated to report unethical behavior and violations of the Approved Provider Code of Ethics and/or the Approved Provider Standards of Practice they reasonably and in good faith believe have been performed by other NCBTMB Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status to NCBTMB.

These Approved Provider Standards of Practice reflect NCBTMB's clear commitment that Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status provide an optimal level of service and strive for excellence in their businesses. This includes remaining in good standing with NCBTMB, committing to continued personal and professional growth through continuing education, and understanding and accepting that personal and professional actions reflect on the integrity of the therapeutic massage and bodywork profession and NCBTMB. Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status are responsible for showing and maintaining professional compliance with the Approved Provider Standards of Practice.

NCBTMB requires Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status to conduct themselves in a highly professional and dignified manner. NCBTMB will not consider and/or adjudicate complaints against Approved Providers and applicants for Approved Provider status that are based solely on consumer related issues or are based on competitive marketplace issues.

As the therapeutic massage and bodywork profession evolves, so, too, will the Approved Provider Standards of Practice. The Approved Provider Standards of Practice are, therefore, a live and dynamic document and subject to revision in keeping with the changing demands and expectations of the therapeutic massage and bodywork profession.

Standards of Practice Standard I: Professionalism

The Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status must provide optimal levels of professional therapeutic massage and bodywork continuing education and demonstrate expert knowledge in specific modalities taught by seeking continuous education of each subject taught. Massage therapy and bodywork modalities must always be within the massage therapist's/bodyworker's scope of practice and taught ethically and non-judgmentally to other professionals in the field. In his/her professional role the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status shall:

- a. adhere to the NCBTMB Approved Provider Code of Ethics, Approved Provider Standards of Practice, policies and procedures
- b. comply with the peer review process conducted by the NCBTMB Approved Provider Committee regarding any alleged violations of the NCBTMB Approved Provider Standards of Practice
- c. comply with the peer review process conducted by the NCBTMB Ethics &

Standards Committee regarding any alleged violations of the NCBTMB Approved Provider Code of Ethics

- d. treat each student with respect, dignity and worth
- e. use professional verbal, nonverbal and written communications
- f. provide an environment that is safe and comfortable for the student and which, at a minimum, meets all legal requirements for health and safety
- g. use standard precautions to insure professional hygienic practices and maintain a level of personal hygiene appropriate for continuing education providers in the therapeutic setting
- h. wear clothing that is clean, modest, and professional
- i. obtain voluntary and informed consent from students prior to initiating the lab/clinical portions of the class
- j. if applicable, conduct an accurate needs assessment, develop a curriculum, and update the curriculum as needed
- k. require that students use appropriate draping techniques to protect other students' physical and emotional privacy while in the classroom, lab/clinical setting
- l. be knowledgeable of the subject being taught and teach within the massage therapist's scope of practice
- m. respect the traditions and practices of other Approved Providers
- n. not falsely impugn the reputation of any other Approved Provider
- o. use the initials NCBTMB only to designate his/her status as an Approved Provider
- p. remain in good standing with NCBTMB
- q. understand that the NCBTMB Approved Provider certificate may be displayed prominently in the Approved Provider's business
- r. use the NCBTMB Approved Provider logo and approval number on business cards, brochures, advertisements, and stationery only in a manner that is within established NCBTMB guidelines
- s. not duplicate the NCBTMB Approved Provider certificate for purposes other than verification of the Approved Provider's status
- t. immediately return the certificate to NCBTMB if Approved Provider status is revoked
- u. inform NCBTMB of any changes or additions to information included in his/her application for NCBTMB Approved Provider status or renewal of status

Standard II: Legal and Ethical Requirements

The Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status must comply with all the legal requirements in applicable jurisdictions regulating the profession of therapeutic massage and bodywork. In his/her professional role the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status 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 Approved Providers, certificants or applicants for Approved Provider status
- 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 Approved Providers, certificants or applicants for Approved Provider status
- g. report to NCBTMB any pending litigation and resulting resolution related to the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider's status professional practice and the professional practice of other Approved Providers, certificants or applicants for Approved Provider status
- 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 Approved Provider, and the resulting resolution of such complaint

Standard III: Confidentiality

The Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status shall respect the confidentiality of student information and safeguard all records. In his/her professional role the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status shall:

- a. protect the confidentiality of the student's identity in conversations, all advertisements, and any and all other matters unless disclosure of identifiable information is requested by the student in writing, is medically necessary, is required by law or for purposes of public protection
- b. solicit only information that is relevant to the professional student/Approved Provider relationship
- c. share pertinent information about the student with third parties when required by law or for purposes of public protection
- d. maintain the student files for a minimum period of four years
- e. store and dispose of student files in a secure manner

Standard IV: Business Practices

The Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status shall teach with honesty, integrity, and lawfulness in the business of therapeutic massage and bodywork continuing education. In his/her professional role the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status 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 records and required documentation for each student
- d. accurately and truthfully inform the profession of courses 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 Approved Provider Code of Ethics and Approved Provider Standards of Practice
- h. advertise in a manner that is not misleading to the profession and shall not use

- sensational, sexual or provocative language and/or pictures to promote business or in the learning environment
- i. comply with all laws regarding sexual harassment
 - j. not exploit the trust and dependency of others, including students and employees/co-workers
 - k. display/discuss a schedule of fees in advance of the session that is clearly understood by the student or potential student
 - l. make financial arrangements in advance that are clearly understood by and safeguard the best interests of the student
 - m. have clearly defined cancellation and refund policies
 - n. follow acceptable accounting practices
 - o. file all applicable municipal, state and federal taxes
 - p. maintain accurate financial records, contracts and legal obligations, continuing education course records, tax reports, copies of certificates, transcripts and receipts for at least four years

Standard V: Roles and Boundaries

The Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status shall adhere to ethical boundaries and perform the professional roles designed to protect both the student and the Approved Provider, and safeguard the professional relationship between the student and Approved Provider. In his/her professional role the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status shall:

- a. recognize his/her personal limitations and teach course only within these limitations
- b. recognize his/her influential position with students and not exploit the relationship for personal or other gain
- c. recognize and limit the impact of transference and counter-transference between the Approved Provider and students
- d. avoid dual or multidimensional relationships that could impair professional judgment or result in exploitation of students or employees and/or coworkers
- e. not engage in any sexual activity with any student
- f. refrain from teaching 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 Approved Provider)
- g. have the right to refuse and/or terminate a class with a student who is abusive or under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or any illegal substance

Standard VI: Prevention of Sexual Misconduct

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

- a. refrain from participating in a sexual relationship or sexual conduct with the student, whether consensual or otherwise, from the beginning of the student/Approved Provider relationship and for a minimum of six months after the course end date unless a pre-existing relationship exists between the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status and student prior to the Approved Provider or applicant for Approved Provider status applying for Approved Provider status by NCBTMB
- b. in the event that the student initiates sexual behavior, clarify the purpose of the continuing education course, and, if such conduct does not cease, terminate or refuse the student for further courses
- c. recognize that sexual activity with students, employees, supervisors, or trainees is prohibited even if consensual
- d. not touch the genitalia
- e. only teach therapeutic treatments within the massage therapy scope of practice

Glossary of Terms

Acceptable Accounting Procedures: Rules, conventions, standards, and procedures that are widely accepted among financial accountants.

Boundary: A boundary is a limit that separates one person from another. Its function is to protect the integrity of each person.

Competency: Study and development of a particular professional knowledge base and skills associated with and applied in practice within that knowledge base.

Counter-Transference: A practitioner's unresolved feelings and issues which are unconsciously transferred to the student or client.

Dignity: The quality or state of being worthy, honored or esteemed.

Dual Relationships: An alliance in addition to the student/Approved Provider relationship, such as social, familial, business or any other relationship that is outside the therapeutic relationship.

Genitalia, Female: Labia majora, labia minora, clitoris and vaginal orifice.

Genitalia, Male: Testes, penis and scrotum.

Impugn: To assail by words or arguments, oppose or attack as false.

Integrity: Honesty. Firm adherence to a code of values.

Multidimensional Relationships: Overlapping relationships in which the Approved Provider and student share an alliance, in addition to the instructor/student relationship.

Sexual Activity: Any verbal and/or nonverbal behavior for the purpose of soliciting, receiving or giving sexual gratification.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:
1. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition

of an individual's employment; 2. Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individuals; or 3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Scope of Practice: The minimum standards necessary for safe and effective practice and the parameters of practice determined by the Approved Provider's/student's professional training and education, and, when applicable, regulatory bodies.

Therapeutic Breast Massage: Manipulation of the non-muscular soft tissue structure of the breast up to and including the areola and nipple. Transference: The displacement or transfer of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors originally related to a significant person, such as a parent, onto someone else, such as a massage therapist (or doctor, psychotherapist, teacher, spiritual advisor, etc.).