

Sexual Assault Prevention Guidelines

2023 edition

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Guidelines

These sexual assault prevention guidelines provide a roadmap for franchisors, franchisees, day spas, and massage clinics to: maximize the safety of both clients and therapists; and minimize the risk of sexual assault. Additionally, if you are a massage therapist looking for a job in a massage clinic or spa, or a client looking for the safest spa to go to for a massage, these guidelines will give you the knowledge to help you decide which type of business to work with.

Standards of care in the massage therapy profession, and health care in general, develop and evolve over time. Comprehensive and strong models are then followed by the most ethical and professionally led massage clinics and spas, both large and small. While adhering to standards of practice may not fully eliminate the risk of sexual misconduct, it puts in place safeguards that do greatly reduce the likelihood of sexual assault or inappropriate behavior. It gives the business the tools to weed out therapists with poor boundaries and predatory tendencies. These safeguards include: a rigorous screening and hiring process; thorough orientation and training of new therapists about the culture and values of your business; ongoing supervision of therapists to spot problems before they escalate; and inviting honest feedback from clients through regular email surveys.

To be effective, most of the policies and actions described in these guidelines must be put in place and done authentically—with honesty and sincerity. They should not just be incorporated as lip service to prevent lawsuits, but consciously implemented to protect the clients you serve as well as the therapists you have hired. Often, I've seen policies and procedures that look good on paper, but aren't followed up on by clinics, owners, managers, franchisees, or franchisors. Guidelines and rules are meaningless if they are not enforced.

Once these measures are put into place, the way to avoid harm to your business and its reputation is to document how you've met or exceeded the industry standards. Although it might seem like a lot of work, it is worth investing the time to clearly put in writing all of your policies, procedures, hiring processes, and training. Also, always document your verbal and practical interviews with clear notes, and safely store them in each practitioner's personnel file until a minimum of three years after their employment ends. This will not only protect your business but also your therapists and clientele in the long run. Just one lawsuit can tie you up in court for years. The resulting stress and expense can be incredibly draining physically, emotionally, and financially.

The following is a detailed list of what you can do to adhere to the safest standards of practice in massage therapy. Many of the suggested processes link to additional information or templates for your use. Whether you are a day spa, massage clinic, small or large, franchisee or franchisor, these templates will make it easier for you to do your job and provide the safest, most professional environment.

1 Verbal Interview

A skilled interviewer should ask every massage therapist applicant the same set of interview questions, including some challenging ones, as well as run through 6 or 7 roleplays. Role playing often gives you more information and insight beyond just asking questions. All answers and notes should also be documented and kept in the therapist's file, if hired, until a minimum of three years after their employment ends.

A thorough interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes. Effective interviewing is not easy, but rather a skill that can be learned and will greatly benefit your business. Take detailed notes on the verbal interview so that it is clear why you hired the interviewee or not. Questions should address the applicants understanding of boundaries and communication skills in addition to the standard questions about customer service, modalities they are skilled at, and the number of hours they can work. (See **Verbal Interview** for suggested questions and role plays.)

2 Practical Interview

An experienced, senior massage therapist should conduct the practical interview with each applicant. This means a hands-on demonstration of the prospective therapist's work, with criteria specific to skill, knowledge, and also your business needs and expectations. The interviewer needs to be very knowledgeable about the massage therapy profession, not just whoever is available at the time. They should personally receive a massage as the prospective therapist would give to your clientele. It is imperative that they are well-versed in technique and appropriate client interaction. Ideal interviewer candidates include a previous instructor at a massage therapy school or the lead therapist on staff. As with the verbal interview, notes should be kept in the applicant's permanent file until a minimum of three years after their employment ends.

If the interview is done by the business owner or manager, they should have years of experience within the environment and/or been the recipient of countless massages, giving them good sensing and perceptual skills. Owners and managers should watch a skilled therapist do the practical interviews over at least a period of a year before doing it themselves. If an owner or manager is not familiar with the terms and criteria listed in the attached Practical Interview and are not able to recognize the nuances of the hands-on techniques, they are not the appropriate person to be doing the practical interview. (See **Practical Interview.**)

3 Background Checks

Most states include a criminal background check as part of the licensing process. However, they do not usually include a sex offender check, so it's always safer to do your own background check, especially if it has been 6 months or more since they were licensed. Be sure to include a National Criminal Background check, an Unlimited County Background search, and a search of the National Sex Offender Registry. Crimcheck and other companies provide this service for spas and massage practices, as well as verifying an applicant's massage license, for a reasonable price.

- a. **Licensing:** Check with the appropriate city or state agency to verify that the therapist is licensed; this information is generally available online and takes only a few moments to verify. Licensing Boards often keep records of complaints about therapists so call the board to check if this information is available. If you do hire the therapist, keep a copy of their license as well as their liability insurance document for their file until a minimum of three years after employment ends. Also, be sure to check your state licensing board's requirements, as some require individual licenses to be visibly displayed on the premises.

4 The Internet

In addition to your background and reference check, it should be standard practice to check prospective therapists' activities online and on social media platforms. Training is available on how to scour for this information. You can often find out a lot with a quick search of Google, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and possibly other heavily trafficked, specific-interest platforms such as Parler, Reddit, and Twitch.

A search like this would have saved one business a lot of grief in one case I worked on as an expert witness. This particular business did not include this investigative step during the hiring process of a prospective employee. Had they done so; they would have discovered with a Google search, an arrest for rape just three years earlier on this man's record. Because of this oversight, the man was hired, and as a result, the business was sued after he sexually abused several women. (See **Internet Search**.)

5 Check References

Always request and check at least three references for the applicant. The best ones are from previous employers or clients, not from friends or family. If there is not a long employment history, ask the applicant to supply contact information for the school they attended and at least two of their teachers. Directly ask the employer if they would hire the applicant again. If a previous employer is not forthcoming, analyzing the tone of their voice may give answers. Sometimes you have to be persistent to get someone on the phone who will talk to you. It's worth the extra effort. Document your calls and the responses you get in the employee's file.

- a. Additionally, review the school from where the student graduated and the number of training hours they completed to earn their diploma. The absolute minimum should be 500 hours, but 650 to 1000 hours are better. (Most state licensing boards require a minimum number of hours.) You need to verify they did not attend any number of shoddy schools that do minimal training and basically sell diplomas. Additionally, find out if the school curriculum included at least 90 hours of ethics, communication, and business courses, combined. Many of today's corporate schools have eliminated these important courses, which means you will likely have to do some extra training of this new therapist. Also, ask if the therapist has taken continuing education courses and what they were; this shows an interest in developing and increasing their skills.

6 Code of Ethics

Adopt a Code of Ethics that includes explicit statements that no sexual contact of any kind can occur between the practitioner and the client and include it within your new hire training manuals. Each therapist should read and sign a copy to be kept in their employment file. Also display the code so that it is visible to both therapists and clients. This establishes safety and acts as a deterrent, as well as being a signal to employees and customers that your business values and upholds ethical behavior. For reference, some massage organizations that include a clear statement about sexual contact in their code of ethics are: Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP), College of Massage Therapists of Ontario (CMTO), The National Certification Board of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB), and The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA).

7 Zero Tolerance

Have a brief yet explicit “Zero Tolerance” statement regarding sexual abuse or harassment of clients in the workplace. Having a series of clear, unambiguous statements about which actions and behaviors are totally unacceptable makes your values and policies resoundingly clear. Each hired therapist should read and sign the statement, in front of the manager, which will be added to their employment file. (See **Sexual Misconduct Statement**.)

- a. **All-Staff Zero Tolerance Meetings:** Whenever an accusation or complaint of sexual assault, verbal impropriety, or inappropriate physical contact is reported to a spa or massage clinic, a general meeting of the entire staff and therapists should be called as soon as possible. To protect the privacy of all concerned, the names of clients or therapists involved in the incident are never mentioned in these meetings.

These mandatory emergency general meetings let all employees know that the organization truly enforces their policies of zero tolerance for sexual assault or sexual impropriety by either clients or therapists. They reinforce all written policies available to the staff and therapists that may be overlooked or ignored over time. They also create a greater sense of safety for everyone. An atmosphere of openness and honesty must be encouraged from the organization’s management and leaders to have an effective sexual assault prevention policy.

If the inappropriate incident was initiated by the client, he or she should have been permanently banned already. If the accused was a therapist, he or she should already be suspended from working at the organization pending an investigation and should not be present at this meeting. The alleged incident should be described by management in detail to all attendees. Employees are asked to come forward at that time, privately afterward, or anonymously with any information that they may have about this or any other incident they know of where a therapist or client has been inappropriate. They should also be encouraged to reach out to management or file an anonymous report at any time they become aware of any such behaviors—not just in response to a meeting. Otherwise, employees often never say anything and the inappropriate incidents go uninvestigated or completely unreported. (See **Sample Meeting Agenda Outline**.)

8 Surveys

Set up simple surveys to be automatically sent to every new client after they receive a session from one of your therapists. Send the survey again every two to three months. A victim of sexual abuse often needs time and physical distance from the event to process it and decide to report an incident. The client is often in shock and not thinking clearly. These surveys are an effective method for spotting inappropriate behavior and boundary crossings before they escalate into sexual misconduct. Small boundary crossings and violations are often the precursors to gross sexual assault. The surveys should have an option for the client to remain anonymous.

If an issue presents itself in the survey or there is a question about possible misconduct, there should be immediate follow up with the therapist. For example, if they had loose, sloppy draping or asked inappropriate personal questions, follow-up training may be all that is needed. However, if a pattern of poor boundaries is spotted, or if the client was inappropriately exposed, even momentarily, due to poor draping, the therapist should be put on probation and carefully monitored. If warranted, your business can begin an investigation of this therapist to gain further information. (See **Survey**.)

9 Training

Take the time to orient and train every new hire both during onboarding and then approximately every 2 or 3 months. Since 2001 large corporations purchased many of the best massage schools in the United States and proceeded to cut most of the ethics, communication, and business skills courses to save money. Many of these new owners often let go of the most experienced teachers because they were paid at a higher rate. These were the only instructors that were capable of teaching the subjects above. The corporate schools began to hire new graduates who had virtually no training in how to teach. Being a massage therapist is a different profession than teaching. Don't assume that your new therapist learned everything they needed to know within their schooling, since many curricula have been slashed on these vital topics. The previous standard of the most professional schools was to train new teachers for 6 months to a year and then closely supervise them. This is no longer necessarily the case.

Also, many skills need to be put into action through experience on the job including ethics, boundaries, sexual assault prevention, reporting therapist or client inappropriate behavior, dealing with difficult clients, attraction to clients, and dealing with sexual arousal. Spas and massage clinics need to put more into training their therapists because of a deterioration in the quality of many massage schools. It is an investment to take the time to train each hire so that they adhere to your standards, provide work that is consistent to the services you offer, and to make sure they are part of a cohesive team. Video training on ethics, sexual issues, and communication must be supplemented by robust discussions led by a skilled person, knowledgeable about these issues.

Within the onboarding orientation, there should be training about boundaries, communication, sexuality, and ethics with explicit conversations and role plays around a number of scenarios, including:

- Recognizing and respecting boundaries
- Power dynamics of the Client/Therapist relationship
- What to do if you are attracted to a client
- How to politely avoid dual relationships
- How to respond if a client asks you to engage in an activity outside the workplace, whether online or in real life
- The zero-tolerance policy for sexual comments, jokes, or actions
- Responding to off-color jokes or sexual innuendo
- Dealing with overly personal client questions
- Effective draping
- Dealing with clients who don't want a drape
- Never working under the drape
- Never working on the inner upper thigh more than three to four inches from the groin
- Always allowing the client to undress and dress in private (which would include how to make all clients comfortable with how much clothing they wish to remove)

Additional areas to note are:

- How to handle clients who cross boundaries or behave inappropriately toward the therapist
- Qualifications for working with cancer survivors
- Qualifications for working with clients who are pregnant
- How to write and file a report to the employer about an inappropriate client behavior or interaction
- How to report inappropriate behavior of another therapist

Inappropriate behavior of another therapist may come to the attention of a therapist from a client or in an interaction with a coworker. It is important to have a reporting and complaint process for clients, and also for therapists so that either feel safe to speak up if inappropriate behavior occurs.

At the end of the initial orientation and training sessions, have the therapist sign-off on a document that they have completed the orientation and have them take a challenging test to check their comprehension and understanding of the material. Do not assume they understood what you have taught.

- a. Training Manual:** Create a clearly written training manual stating the organization's philosophy, values, policies, and procedures that apply to the practitioner. Not only does the manual outline reflect the training given to new hires but will also serve as a reference tool during their time of employment. It is standard to include your stated policies regarding absences, lateness, dress code, cleanliness, room setup, and so forth. Expand the manual to also state, explicitly, policies about the following: communicating with management; resolving conflict; giving and receiving feedback; cultivating a client-centered focus; sexual misconduct and harassment; areas of the body you never touch; prohibiting dual relationships with clients; and, never having sexual contact, making sexual comments or sexual innuendos. The training manual should also include role plays on how to handle clients who are verbally or physically inappropriate with the therapist. By being direct and clear on all of these subjects you set the tone for your new hires and existing employees.

10 Supervision

There are times when a massage therapist has an uncomfortable or disturbing experience when giving a client a massage. The client may have made an off-color joke or was inappropriate in a more subtle way. Practitioners need a shame-free, trustworthy relationship with a supervisor to review and evaluate such challenging or difficult experiences. Supervision can occur in groups or in one-on-one sessions. There are two types of supervision, technical and relationship or clinical supervision. A technical supervisor can help guide therapists to develop their hands-on techniques. A relationship or clinical supervisor helps practitioners learn how to define their own boundaries, set boundaries for challenging clients, and deal with the intense feelings or sexual attraction that may develop. Offering clinical and technical supervision for your therapists by a qualified practitioner is an asset to your business and a deterrent to underlying personal and professional conflicts. (See **Supervision**.)

11 Client Educational Brochure

Provide every client a printed or digital brochure that lets them know what to expect in the massage therapy session, what is expected of them, and how to recognize and respond to signs of inappropriate conduct. This documentation creates well-informed clients and serves as a safety valve and deterrent to those with unclear professional boundaries.

Clients don't always know what to expect or what is acceptable behavior in the massage therapy treatment room. This is especially true for clients new to massage. However, regular clients can also come across situations to which they do not know how to appropriately react. For therapists who may be unclear about boundaries, when a publication of this sort is given to every client, it may also serve as a deterrent knowing their clients are well informed. If you put this client brochure on your website instead of handing a paper brochure to the client, it's important to make sure they have read it. Not everybody reads what is on the website. If the brochure is only on your website, ask each client if they have read it. If not, hand them a printed copy or have them read it on a tablet you have at the office. (For further details see **Client Brochure**.)

12 Complaint Process

There should be a clear and rigorous process for complaints, either about a client's or therapist's behavior. This can help protect your clients, your practitioners, and your business. Having a transparent policy cultivates trust and establishes confidence that they are dealing with a company with high ethical standards. Often, clients who are dissatisfied with some aspect of their treatment don't directly express their concerns; they just stop coming. Encourage every complaint, regardless of how small it may seem, and follow up on it.

If the client is inappropriate, the organization must support the therapist in terminating the session and banning that client from all of their facilities. Conversely, an inappropriate therapist should be immediately suspended and investigated by the police, an independent company, or internally. Surveys should be sent out immediately to all that therapist's clients over the past 6 months. Immediately arrange an interview with the reporting client at a location of their choosing. If the allegations are found to be true and if the client gives their permission the therapist should be reported to the police. The therapist should be terminated. Ethically and morally, the therapist should be reported to the massage therapy board, which would prevent them from simply relocating to another state or location to abuse again.

Note, there is a spectrum of types of sex offenders. One primary example is a sexual predator who is seen as continuously trying to obtain sexual contact with another person in an abusive manner. Analogous to how a predator hunts down its prey, the sexual predator is thought to seek out or "hunt" for his or her sexual objects. Sexual predators usually commit multiple sexual assaults throughout their life.

Another type of sex offender is the person with very poorly developed interpersonal, physical, and/or sexual boundaries. This individual can mistakenly think or feel that the person they are drawn to is interested in sexual contact with them. They act on those sexual impulses without explicit agreement from the other person, often with dire consequences. For this type of sex offender, a sexual assault may be a one-time event. And of course, there are other categories of sex offenders that fall on either sides of these two. None of these individuals should be in the massage therapy profession.

In most cases that end up in court, there is often a pattern of small complaints before an instance of gross abuse. Therefore, having a safe, clear avenue for complaints to be voiced, can prove itself invaluable, as it can bypass a more grievous situation later. Having a robust complaint process will help discourage therapists with predatory tendencies who will be searching for an establishment with less rigorous checks and balances. There are companies that will manage the complete complaint process for your organization. One such company is [Redirect](#). Redirect, a company founded by a board-certified forensic psychologist, conducts investigations in the aftermath of reports of sexual misconduct. By

integrating forensic psychology with professional investigation, Redirect uses a trauma-informed, fact-finding process that is driven by the hiring organization's code of conduct policy. Redirect helps reduce the risk of future incidents by providing valuable insights and support, leadership coaching, staff training, and policy consultation. (For a sample of a defined complaint process you can do on your own, see **Complaint Process**.)

13 Mystery Shopper

Mystery shoppers should regularly be used as part of the quality control process to verify that therapists are following the policies and procedures of the organization. For example:

- Using secure draping
- Starting and ending on time
- Washing hands in the presence of the client before the session
- Asking the client where they would like the focus of the work that day
- Inquiring about the lighting and temperature in the room
- Asking about the depth of pressure during the session
- Asking if they would like music
- Verifying that the therapist follows the clients request for the focus of the session

Using a mystery shopper is also an important component for keeping clients safe. Because it is difficult to weed out 100% of therapists with poor boundaries or predatory tendencies during the interview process, it should be part of an ongoing vetting process for therapists.

In addition to using a mystery shopper as part of vetting, it is also indicated when certain boundaries are crossed. These are examples of behaviors that may trigger a mystery shopper visit and perhaps lead to intervention and retraining.

- Using loose draping that does not feel secure
- Accidentally exposing the female breast for less than 1 second while re-draping, followed by an immediate acknowledgement and an apology
- Engaging in personal conversations, like asking clients inappropriate personal questions.
- Talking about themselves and their problems to clients.

Using a mystery shopper is NOT indicated when inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature is suspected or reported. If there has been even one complaint of a sexual nature against a therapist an investigation should occur. Behaviors like the following should trigger an immediate suspension followed by an investigation, not a mystery shopper visit.

- Undraping/exposing the client's genital region
- Undraping/exposing the female breast
- Looking under or over the drape at the client's body as they turn over
- Massaging the buttock without permission

- Working under the drape
- Touching any part of the breast skin-to-skin or through the sheet
- Making any physical contact with a client's underwear at the groin line of the inner upper thigh while supine or prone.
- Making physical contact with any part of a client's genitalia.
- Touching the upper inner thigh any higher than 4 inches from the groin
- Pressing the pelvis against any part of the client's body, etc.
- Making sexual advances, jokes, comments or innuendos toward a client.
- Being romantically or sexually involved with a client.
- Making comments, neither positive nor negative, about a client's body.

Massage therapists should be informed about the existence and goals of the mystery shopper program and exactly what they will be looking for. This will act as a deterrent for inappropriate behavior and a higher degree of compliance with the policies and procedures.

Predator therapists often test a client's verbal and/or physical boundaries during a massage therapy session to gauge whether a client is susceptible to their advances. Others, with poorly developed boundaries, may gradually move from the professional to the personal, drifting into inappropriate touch or conversation. Too often, these inappropriate actions are not reported because either the client feels too ashamed or embarrassed to bring the issue to light or they have not been properly educated by the spa or clinic to recognize such improprieties. (For a more information see **Mystery Shopper**.)

14 Call Button

Installing a "call button" within easy reach in each treatment room, gives both the therapist and client access to the front desk staff immediately in cases of an emergency or a situation that requires an urgent response. A small button should be placed under the edge of each massage table, just where the client's hand rests. At the start of each session, the therapist indicates the location and use of this "call button". Within your training and training manual, provide instructions with sample phrases for the therapist to use, such as: "This call button is here to keep both of us safe, if either of us wants or needs help." This creates an immediate sense of safety for the client and the therapist. The call button also works as a deterrent for any therapist to engage in inappropriate activity or any client that has a tendency to violate the boundaries of a therapist.

Information about the call button and its purpose should be on the company's website as well as having prominent signs in the treatment rooms. Call buttons can generally be installed for a few hundred dollars per room. Research has shown that the incidence of inappropriate touch is dramatically less when call buttons are installed, and complaints generally go down significantly.

15 Field Visit

If the clinic or spa is a franchise operation, the franchisor should do a field visit to each franchisee at least every 3 months to verify that they are adhering to all operation's manual guidelines, including this checklist. After a franchise spa has been vetted, trained, and opened, the most important task of the franchisor is continued education and enforcement of its accountability standards. If the franchisor has mandated everything in this checklist as well as others, they must be sure that these standards are followed. In most cases, the franchise owner is not a massage therapist and knows little about the profession. The franchisor is their teacher, industry guide, and parent. Without the franchisor's guidance they will often falter. Every field visit is an opportunity to help the new owner get it right with regards to the franchise goals as well as the health and welfare of each employee and client.

A primary component of each field visit is to check the employee files. This lets the franchisor know if the spa is on the right path. As a part of the visit they check for interview notes, reference checks, a copy of a therapist's license, surveys, any complaints or incident reports, and how they were dealt with.

Verbal Interview

Verbal Interview Questions and Role Plays

Why did you choose massage therapy as your profession?

What do you like about it?

Do you get massage regularly yourself?

What do you do to maintain your own health?

If you could have changed one thing about your massage school education, what would it be?

Why do you want to work in a spa setting?

Have you been trained in any spa treatment protocols? Which ones?

Have you had training in working with pregnancy? If yes, how many hours of training did you receive?

Have you had training in working with clients who have or have had cancer? If yes, how many hours of training did you receive?

How many clients do you typically see in a day?

Is that the number you'd like to be seeing?

How long do you work on each person?

How many hour-long sessions can you do before you need a break?

Have you had or do you have a private practice? How many private clients do/did you see each week?

Why did you leave your last job?

Were you ever fired? If so, why?

Tell me about a time when you had difficulty with an employer and how you handled it.

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Why did you leave your last job?

Were you ever fired? If so, why?

Tell me about a time when you had difficulty with an employer and how you handled it.

Was there ever a time when a client accused you of being inappropriate during a massage

What was the outcome?

If you got upset with me or any other staff member, how would you handle it? For example,

if you felt you had been spoken to disrespectfully?

Give me an example of an area in your life that you would like to improve.

Do you make friends with your clients? What are the pros and cons of doing this?

Have you every had a situation when a client was inappropriate before, during or after a massage? If yes, how did you handle it?

Have you ever felt attracted to a client? If so, how did you handle those feelings?

Tell me about a time you had difficulty with a client and how you handled it.

How would you handle a client who arrived 20 minutes late for a 50-minute massage?

What do you think should happen to a therapist who engages in sexual acts with a client?

What if it's consensual?

And what if it's not consensual?

Scenarios to Role-Play with the Prospective Employee

Because massage therapists are sometimes faced with challenging ethical issues, role-playing serves as a way to explore how a potential employee may react in complex ethical situations.

Role-play each of these scenarios with the applicant. Interviewers may also want to add additional questions related to circumstances specific to their particular spa. During role-play situations keep the conversation going and argue a bit to see how the applicant responds.

After each scenario we will give you an example of what a poor response would be and what a professional response might be.

Scenario #1

Interviewer sets up the situation by saying: "A very nice client that you have been working with for a few months asks you a question. I'm the client and say to you, 'Would you like to go out to lunch sometime?'"

Continue the conversation to see how the applicant responds when you push back. (For example, if the applicant responds to Scenario #1 by asking why the guest is extending the invitation, the interviewer can role-play by saying, "Just to get to know you better," and see how the applicant responds.)

Example: Scenario #1 (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to go out to lunch sometime?

APPLICANT: How come you'd like to go to lunch together?

INTERVIEWER: I'd just like to get to know you better.

APPLICANT: I don't usually do that with a client but you've been seeing me for quite a while and I think that might be nice. When should you like to get together?

Example: Scenario #1 (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to go out to lunch sometime?

APPLICANT: Thanks for the invitation. Our policy is that therapists keep the relationship with all client strictly professional so no, I can't have lunch with you.

Or

APPLICANT: Our experience in the profession is that when you mix personal and professional relationships and something goes wrong it often destroy the professional relationship as well so as policy we don't socialize with clients.

Scenario #2

Say: "I'm the client and say: 'I would prefer not to be draped with the sheet because it feels claustrophobic.'"

Continue the conversation and argue a bit and see how the applicant responds.

Example: Draping Role Play (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: I'd prefer not to be draped with the sheet and blanket because it feels heavy and claustrophobic.

APPLICANT: How about if I just used the sheet and no blanket?

INTERVIEWER: That would be a little better but it would still make me claustrophobic.

APPLICANT: I'm sorry you feel that way. How about if I used a towel instead so it only covered half of your body?

INTERVIEWER: That would still not feel as good. You're comfortable with bodies, aren't you?

APPLICANT: I am comfortable with people's bodies but the rules say you have to be covered.

INTERVIEWER: I'm the client and I'm telling you that I'm not comfortable with the sheet on me.

APPLICANT: OK, I'll just cover your pelvic region with a towel.

Example: Draping Role Play (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: I'd prefer not to be draped with the sheet and blanket because it feels heavy and claustrophobic.

APPLICANT: I can just drape you with a sheet and a towel. Does that work for you?

INTERVIEWER: No, not really.

APPLICANT: We have a professional draping policy here that I cannot deviate from. If you are not comfortable with that I can talk to the manager about possibly refunding your money. Would you like me to do that?

Scenario #3

Say: "I'm going to be the client: 'I was pretty nervous to come back today because of something that happened last time I was here. I've seen you before and trust you so I want to tell you about it. The last time I was here the therapist uncovered my breasts and he massaged them. I was really upset and froze.'"

Continue the conversation to see how the applicant responds.

Example: Uncovered Breasts Role Play (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: I was pretty nervous to come back today because of something that happened last time I was here. I've seen you before and trust you so I want to tell you about it. The last time I was here the therapist uncovered my breasts and he massaged them. I was really upset and froze.

APPLICANT: Really? I can't believe someone would do that?

INTERVIEWER: I wouldn't make something like that up.

APPLICANT: Well, since you didn't say anything, he probably thought it was OK.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it wasn't.

APPLICANT: Just don't make any more appointments with him.

Example: Uncovered Breasts Role Play (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: I was pretty nervous to come back today because of something that happened last time I was here. I've seen you before and trust you so I want to tell you about it. The last time I was here the therapist uncovered my breasts and he massaged them. I was really upset and froze.

APPLICANT: That sounds like a very upsetting experience. I'm glad you feel safe enough to tell me. I would like you to speak to the manager right after our session. Would you be willing to do that?

Scenario #4

Say: "I'm one of your fellow therapist and I say to you: 'One of my clients asked me to go to a party. What do you think I should do?'"

Continue the conversation to see how the applicant responds.

Example: Scenario #4 Party Invitation Role Play (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: One of my clients asked me to go to a party. What do you think I should do?"

APPLICANT: Do you like this client?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, really nice person.

APPLICANT: Do you want to go?

INTERVIEWER: I think so but I'm not sure if I should?

APPLICANT: Life's too short, I'd go.

Example: Scenario #4 Party Invitation Role Play (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: One of my clients asked me to go to a party. What do you think I should do?"

APPLICANT: What do you think you should do?

INTERVIEWER: I don't know, I'm conflicted about it. What do you think?

APPLICANT: I think you have to say no.

INTERVIEWER: What should I say?

APPLICANT: I like to keep my relationships with clients professional. The clinic has a policy of no socializing with clients.

Scenario #5 Hurting Me Role Play

Say: "I am your client and I say, 'Another therapist at the facility hurt me physically during my treatment and was then rude to me for saying something about it.'"

Continue the conversation to see how the applicant responds.

Example: Scenario #5 (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: Another therapist at the facility hurt me physically during my treatment and was then rude to me for saying something about it.

APPLICANT: Have you seen this therapist before?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, a few times.

APPLICANT: Were those sessions similar?

INTERVIEWER: No, they were all ok.

APPLICANT: Maybe give the therapist another chance or just don't see them again.

INTERVIEWER: Should I report it to the management?

APPLICANT: Only if you want to.

Example: Scenario #5 (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: Another therapist at the facility hurt me physically during my treatment and was then rude to me for saying something about it.

APPLICANT: That sounds awful. Did you tell the management?

INTERVIEWER: No, I didn't want to make them lose their job.

APPLICANT: We pride ourselves at treating our clients well. I'd like to ask you to talk to the manager. The therapist will get a warning and likely some training. I wouldn't want that to happen to any other client. Can you do that or would you like me to report it for you?

Scenario #6

Say: "I'm your male client lying supine on the table and I get an erection. How do you respond?"

Continue the conversation to see how the applicant responds.

Example: Scenario 6 Erection Role Play (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: I'm the client and I get an erection during treatment. How do you respond?

APPLICANT: THAT'S not ok. This session is over. Get dressed and leave.

INTERVIEWER says: Do you have another option?

APPLICANT: I would work on his leg with a lot of pressure so that it hurt and that would make it go away.

Scenario 6 Erection Role Play (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: I'm the client and I get an erection during treatment. How do you respond?

APPLICANT: I notice you are sexually aroused. Tell me what you're experiencing.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sorry. This has never happened before.

APPLICANT: When clients relax there is sometimes this physiological reaction. It's ok. I want to clarify that this is a therapeutic massage and nothing of a sexual nature ever happens here.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have another option.

APPLICANT: It is never my intent to create sexual arousal during a session, but if it happens and I'm clear that your intent isn't sexual either, then I am comfortable in continuing the session if you are.

Scenario #7

Say: "I am your client and I say, 'I'd like you to work on my breasts during my treatment.'"

Continue the conversation to see how the applicant responds.

Example: Scenario #7 (Poor Response)

INTERVIEWER: Would you massage my breasts?

APPLICANT: We don't usually do that.

INTERVIEWER: Charlie always does that for me. It can't be that difficult.

APPLICANT: Ok, just this one time.

Example: Scenario #7 (Professional Response)

INTERVIEWER: Would you massage my breasts?

APPLICANT: It's company policy that we don't massage the breasts or the abdomen.

INTERVIEWER: Charlie always does that for me. I won't tell your boss.

APPLICANT: I won't perform any services that are outside of our company policy. If you want to continue your massage within the scope of my practice then we can do that. Would you like me to continue your service?

Ask the applicant what he would do next?

Does he say he would report the client to the management?

Does he say he would report Charlie to the management?

If not, you have clear information not to hire this practitioner.

Practical Interview

Practical Hands-On Interview Checklist

The best person to give the practical hands-on interview is an experienced massage therapist who has been a massage technique teacher. If you do not know what some of these things mean or are not experienced in identifying them, you should not be the one giving the practical hands-on interview/evaluation.

Say to the therapist, "Treat me as you would any client."

In the process of the practical role play ...

Therapist Intake Questioning

Did the therapist ask you about the following? (Yes/No)

- Client's goals for the massage
- Where to focus on client's body
- Type of pressure client prefers (mild, moderate or deep)
- Did the therapist check the level of pressure client several times during the session?
- What not to do
- Where in their body client feels tense
- Lighting in the room
- Temperature in the room
- Client's choice of music (or none)
- Anything else therapist needs to know about client

Draping (Rating: 1–5, 1: Poor 2: Fair 3: Good 4: Very Good 5: Excellent)

___ Secure draping (prone), especially at the upper inner thigh

___ Secure draping (supine), especially at the upper inner thigh

___ Secure draping (supine), especially at the chest (women)

___ Draping performed gently

___ Draping performed with attention to sight boundaries

___ Privacy while turning over

Hand contact (Yes/No)

Is the hand contact:

___ Full

___ Relaxed

___ Partial hand contact

___ Tense

Hand temperature (Yes/No)

Is the hand:

___ Warm/hot

___ Cool/cold

___ Does the hand temperature change during the session? How?

Pressure (Yes/No)

___ Did the therapist ask about pressure during the session

Technique (Yes/No)

___ Did each technique have a clear beginning and end?

Was the hand contact: (Yes/No)

___ Too light?

___ Too hard?

___ Just right?

Speed (Yes/No)

The pace was often:

___ Too fast

___ Too slow

___ Varied

___ Just right

Transitions (Select One)

Transitions between strokes and body parts were:

___ Smooth

___ Disjointed

Physical Boundaries (Yes/No)

Was there:

- ___ Was there an inappropriate body contact other than with the therapists hands/forearms?
- ___ Did the therapist pelvis come in contact with your body at any time?
- ___ Brushing of the therapist's clothing against the client's body?
- ___ Brushing of the therapist's hair against the client's body?
- ___ Sweat from the therapist's dripping onto the client's?
- ___ Contact with the side breast tissue when prone and/or when working on the back?
- ___ Appropriate distance when working the upper inner thigh (3-4 inches from genitals)

Verbal Boundaries (Yes/No)

- ___ Were there any inappropriate verbal boundary crossings?
- ___ Excessive personal self-disclosure
- ___ Sexual comments of any nature
- ___ Inappropriate comments about the body

If yes to any of the above, please elaborate.

Time Boundaries (Yes/No)

- ___ Did the therapist finish in the time allotted?
- ___ Did the therapist cut the time short?
- ___ Did the therapist lose their sense of time and go overtime?

Body Mechanics (Select One)

Balanced use of body weight and hand pressure

Most pressure by use of the hands only

Safety (Yes/No)

Did you feel safe with this therapist?

Can you identify anything specific that made you feel unsafe or uncomfortable?

Quality of Touch (Select One)

High

Moderate

Low

Sense of ease and professionalism being with this therapist: (Select One)

High

Medium

Low

How was the ending of the session? (Select One)

Smooth

Abrupt

Should we hire or not hire? And why?

Internet Search

Searching for Applicants on the Internet and Social Media

Research Potential Employees with Search Engines: Google, Bing, DuckDuckGo

Almost every adult has some footprint online whether small or large, public or private. Simply searching first and last name can give you enormous amounts of results, but potentially none relevant to what you are looking for. By knowing some search tools and using a few extra characters in your search you can significantly filter the hits you receive. Try the following on their own and in combination to see what gives you the best SERP (search engine results page). Also, try Bing.com and DuckDuckGo.com in addition to Google for the most thorough view at someone's online presence.

Possible results will vary from very specific to completely unrelated to the person in mind. You'll need to spend some time scanning the SERP for links that are a match. Change and use multiple identifiers (e.g.: massage, sexual assault) to hone your results. Keep an eye out for news clippings, police logs, court documents, reviews, and other public posts. General searches on these sites will likely produce links to their social media profiles as well – see below.

First & Last Name in Quotes

- "John Smith"
- Results will be limited to those containing both words

Include identifiers

- Massage
- Rape
- Battery
- "Sexual Assault"
- If there are 2 or more words, put the phrase in quotes

Use the + sign

- +rape +"John Smith"
- +"sexual assault" +"John Smith"
- Adding a plus symbol before a word or phrase indicates to the search engine that it is required in your search results

Use the - sign

- +"John Smith" -carpenter
- Adding a minus symbol before a word or phrase indicates to the search engine that it is to be excluded from your search results

Research Potential Employees with Social Media: Facebook*, LinkedIn*, Twitter*

Lesser known but popular sites: Reddit, Instagram*, Parler*

(*an account is necessary to perform the search)

Most people have a single if not several social media accounts, where they share their thoughts with family, friends, colleagues, and strangers alike. Even if they haven't signed up to any of the large platforms, someone may be talking about them and tagging them online. Sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn often give snapshots of a person's background including education and profession. Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit searches will show you a person's interests, and examples of who and what they follow online.

While searching social media sites may turn up a random article or public post about the person, the majority of results will give you an overview of their activities and priorities. You'll need to interpret what you find – both what they post and what they chose to repost. For example, if they continually post about the exciting continuing education classes they just had, this person may be a good hire. If they constantly complain about work and their boss, that may impact what kind of questions you want to ask them during an interview.

- First create/login to your personal or business account to view all public pages
- Include location with name to limit results (e.g.: Denver, CO; NYC; California)
- Try searching with their email address instead of their name as it is more unique
- Try name variants (e.g.: Jim, James, Jay; Chris, Kris, Christine)

Sexual Misconduct Statement

In my work as a massage therapist, I understand that I should:

- Never be romantically/sexually involved with a client.
- Never make sexual advances, jokes, comments or innuendos toward a client.
- Never respond to sexual advances, jokes, comments or innuendos from a client.
- Never make positive or negative comments about a client's body.
- Never work on the inner upper thigh closer than 3 to 4 inches from the groin.
- Never press my pelvis against any part of a client's body.
- Never kiss a client.
- Never touch or even brush against a client's genital region.
- Never touch any part of the female breast.
- Never have any type of sexual contact with a client.

I understand that any of these actions or behaviors are unethical and illegal.

I understand that if I sexually assault or ever do anything sexual with a client I would likely be arrested, be reported to the massage board, be terminated from my job, loss of my massage license, go to prison, and become a registered sex offender for the rest of my life.

Therapist Signature: _____ Date: _____

Ethics Code

[Print your adopted code of ethics here]

I agree to abide by this code of ethics.

Therapist Signature: _____ Date: _____

Sample Zero Tolerance Meeting Agenda Outline

1. Define the goal of the meeting:
 - Keeping clients and therapists safe
 - Ensuring the integrity of the profession
 - Upholding the values of the organization
 - Protecting the reputation of the spa or clinic
2. Emphasize why Sexual Assault Prevention is so important:
 - Describe in detail how damaging a sexual assault or boundary violation can be to a client's life.
 - Distribute to all employees articles that detail the ramifications of sexual assault.
 - Refamiliarize all employees with the company's policies and how possible consequences are termination of employment, loss of license, arrest, being added to the sex offender registry, and imprisonment.
3. Discuss how to handle client information about a sexual assault:
 - Recognize that victims will most likely be in shock, suffering from an acute form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their memory of the details of the incident may not be as clear until a few days later when they are somewhat recovered.
 - For a summary list of potential physical and psychological effects of sexual abuse and assault, I recommend you read [this short article](#). This article would also be an excellent tool to print and hand out at the all-staff Zero Tolerance meeting.
 - Who specifically should be contacted to make a complaint: Management, Supervisor, Police.
 - What online systems are in place at the organization for reporting an assault?
 - How can someone report anonymously about an assault?
4. When you describe the incident, do it in detail. Don't be subtle. Speak the whole truth.
5. It's often useful to have the therapists and staff meet in pairs for approximately five minutes so that they feel freer to speak and encourage each other to come forward with information.
6. Open the discussion to the full staff and therapists:
 - Ask for reactions to the incident
 - It's often useful to start the conversation with a discussion about times when clients may have been inappropriate with the therapists' or staff.
 - This often opens the door to allow therapists in particular to speak more honestly about uncomfortable experiences they have had and ones they have heard about from their clients.
7. Wrap-up the meeting by having each person speak for a moment about the usefulness of the meeting. Be sure to state that people can pass if they wish to. Invite those who are too shy to speak in public to come to a designated person in management after the meeting to speak privately.

Survey

You use a link to the survey.

Spa Inc

*Required Question(s)

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete our survey!

***1. What services have you received at (name) spa?**

Massage Therapy

Esthetic Services

Hot Stone Services

[check boxes]

***2. If you received a massage, is there anything you particularly liked or disliked about how your massage therapist worked? (If you did not receive a massage at, simply type N/A in the box below).**

[text comment box]

***3. Are there things your massage therapist could do to improve the massage experience?**

[text comment box]

***4. Has anything happened in any massage session at (name) spa that made you feel uncomfortable? If yes, then please explain.**

Yes

No

[multiple choice buttons]

Comment:

[text comment box]

***5. Did the massage therapist do or say anything inappropriate as far as you are concerned? If yes, please explain.**

Yes

No

[multiple choice buttons]

Comment:

[text comment box]

***6. Would you recommend your massage therapist to a friend? Please explain why or why not.**

Yes

No

[multiple choice buttons]

Comment:

[text comment box]

***7. How would you rate your experience with the front desk staff at (name) spa?**

Excellent

Good

OK

Poor

[multiple choice buttons]

Comment:

[text comment box]

***8. How likely are you to return to (name) spa?**

Least Likely < -- > Most Likely

[rating scale]

Comment:

[text comment box]

9. Thank you so much for your valuable feedback!

If you would like us to follow up with you, feel free to leave your name and email address. If you would like to remain anonymous, just skip this question.

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Supervision

The Role of Professional and Peer-to-Peer Supervision in Massage Therapy

Supervision assists practitioners in maintaining ethical practices and reducing burnout.¹ Without solid communication tools, practitioners have to figure out by trial and error how to best manage the complex interpersonal dilemmas of taking care of clients.² Unfortunately, relationships can be irrevocably damaged with a strategy based on guessing. Discussing these issues in a supervision setting helps diffuse residual emotions and create balance.³

Different Types and Formats of Supervision

There are two types of supervision: technical supervision and relationship supervision. Technical supervision in massage and bodywork means working with an experienced therapist who is an expert in the type of work you do. This kind of supervisor can help you with how you approach a problem or develop new skills and techniques for working with a particular issue. They can also offer a supervision consultation on how to work with a person who has a type of pain they have not seen before or someone who is not responding to treatment as they would expect. In relationship supervision, often referred to as clinical supervision, the supervisor works with the therapist on how to deal with ethical and communication issues. For example, if a practitioner may have a client who talks incessantly during the session, asks a lot of personal questions, or the therapist feels attracted to the client. All of these issues should be discussed, not brushed aside as if they were inconsequential.

There are many formats for supervision. It can be done on a one-on-one basis or in a group. It is often useful to have supervision in a small group of 8 or 10 practitioners who work together or do the same kind of work. This broadens the base of learning and creates an additional support system for each member. If the practitioner is in a larger supervision group, she/he can learn from many other practitioner's experiences.

In a group setting, clinical or relationship supervision has four primary functions:

- 1) Addressing the relationship issues that arise between clients and practitioners
- 2) Acting as a support group for the participants
- 3) Serving as a forum for didactic instruction on important psychological concepts (such as projection, transference, countertransference, etc.)
- 4) Training the participants in supervisory skills so that they feel confident continuing this type of coaching by themselves in the future without the supervisor.

In a group setting, the supervisor will often invite other members to help navigate a colleague towards the core issue underlying the problem they have brought to the group.

Rather than offering advice and telling the practitioner what to do, a good supervisor helps the practitioner explore what's happening internally, define where the appropriate boundary

is for the practitioner and the client, and determine what action might correct the situation. Practitioners often increase their tolerance and understanding and learn how to manage feelings in themselves and their clients through clinical supervision.

Essential Elements of Helpful Supervision

1. Useful supervision includes an interpersonal climate of reasonable safety including an atmosphere of warmth, respect, honesty, and support that allows a trust-based relationship to develop. A collaborative approach with a sense of mutual empowerment and openness to new learning for all participants is valued. Definition and clarity about the supervisory contract including time, issues of confidentiality, and learning goals are essential to establish a sense of safety and clear boundaries.
2. Supervision works best when the educational contract is as specific as possible, and all parties communicate directly and clearly. Successful supervisory experiences include feeling that “mistakes” are a ubiquitous and important part of the learning process and that the sense of comfort and self-disclosure deepens across time.
3. Supervisory approaches that foster the personal and professional development of the individual practitioner are preferable. Supervisors who encourage practitioners to creatively answer their own questions facilitate the development of a competent professional.

How to Find a Supervisor

A technical supervisor could have been one of your teachers at school or a therapist with many years of experience in the same modality that you practice. They have to have had some teaching experience and be a good communicator. Just asking around in that modality’s community can often help you find the person who is the right fit for you. Try them out once to see how it goes.

Finding a clinical supervisor is often a more complex task, particularly in areas where there are few therapists familiar with somatic practices. Psychotherapy disciplines have the longest tradition of providing clinical supervision and thus psychotherapists are fruitful sources. Psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and counselors are likely to be experienced supervisors.

Interviewing Potential Supervisors

You are purchasing a professional service that may range from \$50 per hour to several hundred dollars per hour and should investigate and choose wisely. Often, group supervision is more cost effective and a richer learning experience. A more feasible and cost-effective approach in the long run would likely be to have a group of lead therapists who work within the organization

(selected by a list of criteria) trained in how to do supervision. This could be done online and include individuals from around the country.

After an initial screening telephone call to assess if the supervisor has time, is affordable, and sounds like a potential match, arrange an interview. During the face-to-face or online interview with the prospective supervisor, you have an opportunity to experience how it feels to sit and speak with this person and gain an impression of how he or she thinks and works.

Prepare questions you would like answered in advance of this meeting, such as the following:

1. What has been your experience as a supervisor? How long? For what disciplines?
2. Have you ever worked with or supervised massage and bodywork practitioners?
3. Have you personally received massage and bodywork?
4. How do you describe your work as a supervisor?
5. What is your fee for supervision? For how much time?
6. Are the discussions with you confidential? What are the limits, if any, of confidentiality?
7. Can you give me the names of a few individuals you've supervised who would be willing to speak about their experiences?

These guidelines are designed to help you secure the best kind of supervisory assistance for your particular situation. If for any reason, even if it's difficult to articulate, you feel uncomfortable in the initial meeting with the prospective supervisor, trust your intuition and look elsewhere.

Peer Supervision

After six months or a year of clinical supervision, a brief, start-up consultation with a clinical supervisor is helpful to define and establish the contract and frame for successful peer group supervision. When successful, peer group supervision far exceeds other forms of supervision and continuing education for individualized learning, intimacy, support, and a sense of belonging that anchors their professional work. Many peer groups opt to have a clinical supervisor moderate their meetings on a regular schedule, such as quarterly or twice a year. This supervisor might also be appropriate to meet with individually when additional support is requested.

1. Nancy Bridges, "Psychodynamic perspective on therapeutic boundaries: Creative clinical possibilities," *Psychotherapy Practice and Research* Volume 8, Number 4 (1999): 1-9.
2. Nancy Bridges, "The role of supervision in managing intense affect and constructing boundaries in therapeutic relationships," *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, Volume 24, Number 4 (2000): 218-225.
3. Nancy Bridges, "Meaning and management of attraction: Neglected areas of psychotherapy training and practice," *Psychotherapy* Volume 31, Number 3 (1994): 424-433.

Client Brochure

Client Educational Brochure Recommendations

Any organization whose basis of care includes hands-on contact needs to provide an educational informational brochure that would accomplish several goals. It should describe to the clients that the highest standards are applied in their requirements for hiring practitioners, including state licensing, criminal background check and employment reference checks. The brochure would also include an overview of what to expect during a massage therapy session. It would delineate their rights as a consumer and tell them how to protect themselves if their rights are violated. This brochure should also be prepared to better inform your clientele about sexual misconduct in the health and wellness field. You would want to specify what your spa's specific boundaries of work are. For instance, work may be done up to 1 inch below the clavicle, but there is never work done on the breast, genitals, upper inner thigh, (within 3 to 4 inches of the groin is not permitted). If a client expresses consent, will you permit abdominal massage or Gluteal work or not? If so, will you require the work to be performed over the drape or on the skin? If your establishment is striving to manifest excellence in the quality of care, and uphold the latest understandings of massage therapy, make sure to highlight that your therapists are regularly participating in ongoing training and/or continuing education courses if that is the case. If your facility has a call button attached to every table state that as well and its purpose.

In this brochure the client is defined as anyone who receives services for any therapy or health care. Sexual misconduct is defined as including sexual touching of the client by the practitioner and/or any activity or verbal behavior that is sexual in nature. Sexual contact includes a wide range of behaviors besides intercourse. It includes any behaviors that aim to arouse sexual feelings. They range from suggestive verbal remarks to erotic hugging and kissing in addition to direct sexual contact. The behavior doesn't have to be coercive to be inappropriate.

RECOMMENDED CONTENT:

Client Responsibilities

1. The spa will try its best to accommodate you if you are late for your service, but your service time may need to be adjusted based on therapist availability.
2. Clients must demonstrate ethical behavior. Therapists have the right to immediately terminate your session if any inappropriate comments or behaviors are enacted.

Client Bill of Rights

You have a right:

1. To tell your therapist what you want and don't want in your session.
2. To undress to your level of comfort, whether you would like to leave your underwear on, remove all of your clothing, or would like to just take your shirt off. The therapist must leave the room for you to undress.
3. To tell the therapists to increase or decrease the amount of pressure applied.
4. To have the temperature of the room, lighting level, and volume of music adjusted to your liking.
5. To stop treatment at any time and not be pressured to continue.
6. To a professional relationship with your therapist. Report to management if you feel they have broken any boundaries, which would include things like asking to see you outside of this work relationship, complimenting or criticizing your body, having a conversation that is sexual in nature, asking questions that are too personal, or having an opinion about your lifestyle or relationships.
7. To know that there is no discrimination among clients or colleagues.
8. That within the constraints of the law, there is a confidential nature to the professional relationship between client and therapist.
9. To safe treatment, free from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
10. To know that your practitioner is also physically clean.
11. To know your private areas will be properly draped at all times during your session.
12. To treatment only on agreed areas, and never including work on the inner upper thigh, female breasts, or genitals.
13. To question any action that you experience as invasive or sexual.
14. To terminate treatment if you feel threatened.
15. To discuss your massage therapy with friends outside of the therapy relationship.
16. To professional consultation with other practitioners to discuss your situation.
17. To never have any advances of sexual activity or conduct.
18. To report unethical and illegal behavior.
19. To expect a swift response to your report of inappropriate behavior.
20. Knowing you will have assistance in contacting the appropriate authorities, or if the client is not comfortable doing so, authorities will be contacted in the client's behalf.
21. To know that the practitioner in question will be suspended during a pending investigation of inappropriate behavior.

Complaint Process

Every ethics complaint, regardless of how small it may seem, should be followed up on. A sexual misconduct complaint may be received in person, over the phone, or in writing through a survey or email.

In cases of misconduct towards the therapist, the clinic or spa should fully support the therapist and train them if needed, in handling such situations and giving them the authority to end a session whenever they deem appropriate.

It is imperative that ALL spas and clinics be responsive to ALL sexual misconduct complaints, no matter how trivial they seem. Small complaints are commonly made before there is an instance of gross abuse. In most cases that have ended up in court, several small complaints were made before someone finally pursued a larger complaint. Investigating the small signals right away can help avoid larger complaints and/or a lawsuit.

If owners and managers are not specifically trained to investigate sexual misconduct complaints, an outside investigator should be hired. [Redirect](#) is one company that performs this entire investigation for spas and clinics by professionals skilled in this type of investigation. They issue you a detailed report so that you can make an intelligent decision.

In the absence of an outside investigator, these follow-up complaint response guidelines are recommended:

- When someone in reception receives a complaint directly from a client, they should be instructed to take very detailed and specific notes. Then they should have the client read them, and if the client confirms the accuracy, have them date and sign/initial the document.
- With the consent of the client, report the incident to the police who should be given a copy of the complaint documentation and will then investigate.
- If the client calls the police or asks you to do so, cooperate fully.
- If the client does not want to involve the police, conduct an investigation yourself or with an outside investigation service.
- Have the owner or manager speak to the therapist who has been accused. After a complaint, it is recommended that any therapist accused of sexual misconduct or assault be suspended during the investigation pending the outcome.

- The owner or manager should speak to the client as soon as possible after the incident has been reported. This is best done in person at a place of the client's choosing, like a nearby coffee shop or restaurant. Clients who were molested will most likely not want to return to the spa or clinic. This approach has been known to result in fewer lawsuits, as well as fewer misunderstandings.
- Immediately after an incident, send a standard follow-up survey to both male and female clients seen by the accused therapist during the previous six months. (For a template see **Survey**.)
- Inform the owner or corporate office immediately. If this is a franchise, the franchisor should also receive a notification of any sexual misconduct complaint at their franchise. The franchisor should have a clear method in place to make sure that all of the above steps are followed by the franchise.

If a client reports sexual misconduct by one therapist to a different therapist (not the one being accused), that therapist should know the organization's stated policy and report this incident to the management. It is recommended that a reporting protocol be written for this situation and available to all employees.

Mystery Shopper

Mystery Shopper as a Preventative Measure

Careful selection and vetting of a mystery shopper are crucial.

The mystery shopper should have these qualities and qualifications:

- A massage therapy teacher with at least five years of experience, or
- A massage therapist who has also been a communications teacher at a massage school, or
- A teacher who has taught communication, ethics including boundaries at a massage school.
- A psychologist, social worker, counselor, or psychotherapist who has at least several years of experience as a massage client.
- An assertive person who can set boundaries and say no easily.
- Emotionally mature person with a good sense of boundaries.

Where to find Mystery Shoppers:

- Massage schools
- Rape crisis centers
- The National Sexual Assault Hotline
- Local AMTA Chapters

How to interview a potential Mystery Shopper:

- Conduct the interview in person or by Zoom/Skype/FaceTime so you can see them
- Review experience
- Discuss understanding of trauma
- Check references
- Explain signs to watch for during the massage

Additional Resources

RAINN.org (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)

www.HealthyPlace.com

Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman, MD

Effect of Sexual Assault on Women Sexual Assault Victims by Samantha Gluck

The Ethics of Touch by Ben E Benjamin PhD and Cherie Sohnen-Moe

What I Learned as an Expert Witness by Ben E Benjamin PhD

Clients Crossing Boundaries by Ben E Benjamin PhD