

Guidelines for Safe Touch in a Therapeutic Context

1. Have a contract that includes issues of touch.
2. Educate your clients on *their rights* regarding boundaries and touch.
3. Encourage and empower clients to notice and speak up about touch boundaries, preferences (regarding body parts, types of touch, etc.), and related feelings.
4. Check each time verbally until trust has built to such a point that checking can become nonverbal.
5. With new issues: go back to the contract and check for permission.
6. Establish verbal and nonverbal signals to *stop* touch.
7. Timing needs to be within the client's control (e.g., how long will the touching last; how long before client is ready to be touched).
8. Touch needs to be consistent with the environmental setting in which you are planning to use it.
9. Develop your own and your clients' awareness that there are *different norms* regarding touch (e.g., cultural). Check out your (and their) assumptions.
10. Learn to read your clients' body signals that indicate touch preferences/discomfort.
11. As therapists, we must be ever mindful that we could have conscious, or unconscious, agendas (eg. sexual). We are committed to being vigilant about such motives and not acting upon them.
12. Learn about and listen to your own body signals. Don't push past your own boundaries to accommodate a client's need. Clients could be hurt by your not attending to your own signals and limits. Educate your clients on *your rights*

regarding boundaries and touch. Be able to speak to any conflict of needs between client and therapist.

13. Apologize for, and acknowledge, all touch mistakes.
14. Respect the client in all stages: not wanting touch; shifting to wanting touch; and away from wanting touch.
15. Learn to bracket your own emotions. (Bracketing is a process whereby we put our own feelings on hold so that we may attend to a client's needs-with the understanding that we will set aside time in the future, in a space that is safe for us, to have these feelings and look at these issues.)
16. Develop a working knowledge of *doubling*, *transference*, and *projection*. Learn how to identify when you, or your client, are unconsciously seeing the ghost of another, or a projection of part of self. Learn how to deal with these ghosts for yourself and for your clients. Learn to recognize when you are unconsciously feeling the same emotions as your client.
17. Educate the client regarding natural body sounds and functions and emotions arising from touch. (passing gas, crying, shaking, belching)
18. Educate the client regarding quality of touch vs. quantity of touch.