



College of Massage Therapists of Ontario

Code of Ethics

Glossary of Terms

December 2019

The purpose of this glossary of terms is to assist Massage Therapists in understanding and applying the Code of Ethics.

This glossary explains some terms used in the Code of Ethics. In some instances, this glossary provides basic definitions, while in other instances, more detailed information regarding key concepts is offered to support Massage Therapists in applying the Code of Ethics in their clinical practice.

Abuse

A Massage Therapist is in a position of power in the client-Massage Therapist relationship. Abuse is a violation of that power. When a Massage Therapist abuses the power they hold, they violate the trust and respect of the client. Abuse occurs when a Massage Therapist utilizes the therapeutic relationship to meet their own personal interests or needs. A Massage Therapist who abuses a client acts outside of professional boundaries.

Abuse may be financial, physical, sexual, verbal and/or emotional exploitation of the client.

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse exploits the power differential between the Massage Therapist and client and is often a monetary or equivalent gain for the Massage Therapist. Examples of financial abuse may include accepting gifts of significant value, borrowing money, becoming a trustee of a client's account, accessing a client's bank account or seeking financial benefits or other services.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is an act which may reasonably be seen to cause pain or harm to another. Slapping, hitting, pushing, shoving, pinching or any use of force during a treatment are examples of behaviours which can be viewed as physical abuse.

Sexual Abuse

The *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (the RHPA) defines sexual abuse as follows: "sexual abuse" of a client by a registrant means, (a) sexual intercourse or other forms of physical sexual relations between the registrant and the client, (b) touching, of a sexual nature, of the client by the registrant, or (c) behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature by the registrant towards the client. "Sexual nature" does not include touching, behaviour or remarks of a clinical nature appropriate to the service provided. Please see the College's [Standard for Maintaining Professional Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse](#) for more information.

Sexual abuse does not only include unwanted touching of a client by a Massage Therapist. Any romantic or sexual relationship with a client, including a spouse, is always considered sexual abuse under the RHPA. In the eyes of the law, a client is unable to “consent” to a sexual relationship with a practitioner from whom they are receiving treatment, such as Massage Therapy.

The RHPA stipulates that **at least one year** must have passed since the last professional relationship with a client before any sexual relationship between the Massage Therapist and the client could occur. Failing to wait this one year will mean that sexual contact between the Massage Therapist and client, even if “consensual”, constitutes sexual abuse of a patient within the meaning in the RHPA. A clear termination of the treating relationship, including a discharge note created at the time of discharge, will be required in order to show when the treating relationship ended¹.

Verbal or Emotional Abuse

Verbal or emotional abuse is language (including that used in online communication) that demeans, humiliates or insults the client. Verbal abuse can cause emotional abuse since the language may harm the client emotionally, culturally or spiritually. Given that Massage Therapists work with clients of many cultures and beliefs, it is important to recognize that personal remarks about a client’s appearance, behaviour, language, beliefs, religious practices, etc. may be distressing. Behaviours such as sarcasm, teasing, swearing or threatening are examples of behaviours that may be considered verbal or emotional abuse.

Accountability

Accountability is to be answerable for the practice of Massage Therapy and to act in a manner consistent with a Massage Therapist’s professional responsibility, as outlined in the [Code of Ethics](#), [Standards of Practice](#), legislation and other relevant documents.

Conflict of Interest

A Massage Therapist is in a conflict of interest if their personal or financial interest conflicts or appears to conflict with the exercise of their professional judgment or duty to act in the best interest of the client. A conflict of interest can be potential, real or perceived. If circumstances exist where a reasonable person would conclude that the Massage Therapist’s professional judgment may be compromised, then a conflict of interest exists.

¹ As discussed in CMTO’s [Standard for Maintaining Professional Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse](#)

Some examples of conflicts of interest² include:

- accepting a referral fee, or any other benefit, for the referral of a client to another person or business; or
- advising a client to purchase a particular healthcare product if the Massage Therapist or a relative has a financial interest in that product (or the vendor of that product), unless the Massage Therapist informs the client in advance about the nature of the financial interest (in which case the registrant should also provide the client with information on at least one other source for the product).

Consent

A client must provide voluntary and fully informed consent to all aspects of treatment and must be capable of providing such consent.

Informed consent includes the client understanding all the following:

1. nature of the treatment;
2. expected benefits of the treatment;
3. material risks of the treatment;
4. material side effects of the treatment;
5. alternative courses of action; and
6. likely consequence(s) of not having the treatment.

Consent for treating sensitive areas, as defined in the [Standard for Maintaining Professional Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse](#), must be obtained in writing.

Dignity

Dignity is the quality of being worthy of respect and esteem as human beings.

Dual Relationship

A dual relationship is when a Massage Therapist has some other type of relationship with a client in addition to the professional therapeutic relationship. The multiple relationships can become blurred or merged, making it difficult to maintain clear boundaries and distorting or compromising the therapeutic relationship.

Examples of dual relationships include, but are not limited to:

- personal friendships with clients;

² Please see CMTO's [Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) for additional information

- bartering for goods or services with clients;
- treating family members; or
- romantic or sexual relationships with clients (which is sexual abuse under the RHPA).

Fair and Equitable Access to Care

Massage Therapists must treat clients in an unbiased manner and provide every client with equal access to their care regardless of who clients are and their personal situations/circumstances.

Honesty

Honesty is being sincere and truthful, and refraining from any kind of deceit in the practice of Massage Therapy.

Integrity

Integrity is the quality of being sincere, honest and trustworthy in making choices and decisions consistent with a Massage Therapist's professional values.

Professional Judgement

Professional judgement is the ability to competently interpret and apply ethical and legal requirements within the unique circumstances of clinical practice, education, research, administration and regulatory requirements.

Professional Misconduct

Professional misconduct is conduct that does not meet the minimum expectations of integrity, client-centered care and professionalism, as well as other legal and ethical standards.

Professional Responsibility

Professional responsibility includes the duties that Massage Therapists exercise to their clients as regulated healthcare professionals in line with their professional role and commitment.

Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA)

In Ontario, regulated health professions are governed under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (RHPA) and individual health profession Acts (*Massage Therapy Act, 1991*).

Scope of Practice

The Scope of Practice of a profession describes the activities in which the profession is trained and fully regulated.

The *Massage Therapy Act, 1991*, defines the Scope of Practice for Massage Therapy as “the assessment of the soft tissue and joints of the body and the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction and pain of the soft tissues and joints by manipulation to develop, maintain, rehabilitate or augment physical function, or relieve pain.”

Therapeutic Relationship

A therapeutic relationship is a purposeful client-therapist relationship designed to promote, support and advance the health and best interest of the client. It is grounded in trust, respect and the appropriate use of knowledge and power.

Therapeutic Touch

Therapeutic touch is physical contact between a Massage Therapist and client for clinical indications within the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy, and with the intention to facilitate their health and well-being.

Transference and Counter-Transference

Transference

Transference refers to redirection, to the Massage Therapist, of a client’s feelings for another person who is significant to them. Transference can obstruct the goal of the therapeutic relationship.

Counter-Transference

Counter-transference refers to redirection of a Massage Therapist’s feelings towards the client, or when the Massage Therapist uses a client to meet personal psychological needs. Counter-transference can change the focus or content of the therapeutic relationship, as the Massage Therapist’s needs and/or unresolved issues become part of the therapeutic experience and impede the Massage Therapist’s ability to be fully present for the client.

Transparency

Transparency is the quality of being open and honest.