

# **POLICY**

## **TENNESSEE MASSAGE LICENSURE BOARD**

---

### **RECOMMENDED ETHICS CURRICULUM IN TENNESSEE MASSAGE SCHOOLS**

---

The Tennessee Massage Licensure Board (Board) hereby adopts the following recommended curriculum for ethics instruction in Tennessee massage schools. The following standards and guidelines are recommendations only and not yet part of Tennessee's required curriculum for Board-approved massage schools in Tennessee.

#### **Standard A: ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- There is need to behave and conduct practice in an ethical manner.
- Discrimination based on race, creed, color, or other protected characteristics is inappropriate.
- Any disregard or dismissal of a client's unique, approach or beliefs regarding their body, modesty, safety level, or communication style is unethical.
- The use of any mind-altering drugs, alcohol or intoxicants prior to or during a treatment session is inappropriate for both the client and massage therapists.
- The dispensing advice about pharmaceuticals or interfering with a client's decision to use pharmaceuticals based on recommendations by the client's medical professionals is beyond a massage therapist's scope of practice and therefore unethical.
- Therapeutic massage implies integrity, safety and professionalism to the client at all levels: emotionally, mentally, and physically. A massage therapist should only work from within their scope of practice and, when in doubt, refer the client to another professional so as not to inadvertently cause harm to a client.
- A massage therapist working outside his or her scope of practice is violating ethical boundaries with possible legal consequences.

#### **Standard B: PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Ethical boundaries must be used to create and maintain professional therapeutic relationships with clients.
- A massage therapist's respect for clients' boundaries builds trust in the therapeutic relationship.

- Massage therapists need to maintain appropriate boundaries when communicating with clients, especially regarding the practitioner's or the client's personal life and experiences.

**Standard C: CODE OF ETHICS VIOLATIONS**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- A massage therapist's ethical obligations include but are not limited to confidentiality, professional boundaries, and non-discrimination.

**Standard D: THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- It is inappropriate to perform any kind of massage/bodywork without the consent of the client.
- There are inherent health risks when giving a treatment.
- Massage therapists must understand the variables essential to a physically, emotionally, and energetically safe treatment area.
- Massage therapists do not diagnose any condition
- Massage therapists facilitate the client's ability to heal rather than to be a fix-it approach.
- Massage therapists need to respect the modesty and comfort level of each client to maintain safety and build trust in the therapeutic relationship.
- Massage therapists must demonstrate compassion for all clients and their conditions.
- Massage therapists must understand and respect each client's autonomy and power over their own body.
- Massage therapists need to respect the client's ability to make choices that empower the client in the healing process.
- Massage therapists must understand how massage/bodywork affects clients mentally, physically and emotionally.
- Massage therapists must understand that the therapeutic relationship allows no room for manipulative behavior.
- Massage therapists must understand transference, counter-transference, and the power differential in the therapeutic relationship.
- Massage therapists must understand the need to be accountable to professional colleagues or administrative and legal authorities.

**Standard E: DUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Massage therapists understand that entering into a dual relationship with a client (ie: socializing or dating) may be unlawful, cause harm to the therapeutic relationship and process or to the client or practitioner.
- Massage therapists need to create professional boundaries, communicate those to clients, and seek support when those boundaries are being tested.

- Massage therapists need to establish clear professional boundaries when taking on a client with whom the practitioner has an existing or previous relationship.

#### **Standard F: SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Massage therapists need to create and maintain appropriate and professional physical, emotional and sexual boundaries with all clients.
- It is not appropriate to use the profession to seduce or otherwise mislead a client regardless of compensation agreements.
- Massage therapists must recognize and respond appropriately and professionally to sexual innuendoes and harassment from clients while adhering to policies established for client and practitioner safety.
- Massage therapists must recognize that clients have rights when entering into a therapeutic relationship and that safety from sexual predators is communicated by the existence of a written policy protecting the clients from sexual advances by the practitioner.
- The professional image of a massage therapist is crucial. Working in provocative attire or in a provocative location, or advertising in a provocative manner are equally inappropriate.
- Performing any sexual act with a client at any time is inappropriate and may result in disciplinary actions up to and including revocation of the practitioner's license.

#### **Standard G: MASSAGE/BODYWORK-RELATED LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Massage therapists must understand state laws and regulations for establishing a therapeutic massage practice.
- Massage therapists must understand the reasons to adopt and apply a set of ethical guidelines and professional scope of practice guidelines.
- Massage therapists must understand basic tax requirements for maintaining a sole proprietorship, a partnership, and various types of corporations.

#### **Standard H: SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Massage therapists must understand and adhere to and effectively communicate the principles of working within a scope of practice.
- Massage therapists must understand that diagnosing and prescribing are outside the scope of practice for a massage practitioner.
- Massage therapists must understand the importance and safety aspects of clinical reasoning to work effectively with clients and their limitations.
- Massage therapists must understand and apply clinical reasoning in all aspects of client interaction.

- Massage therapists must understand and recognize when, why and how to refer clients to a more experienced massage practitioner, Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) practitioner, or medical provider.

**Standard I: PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Massage therapists must understand informed consent and the timing of it in the therapeutic process.
- Massage therapists must understand the importance of accurately representing training, credentials, and the profession in all marketing and professional communication.
- Massage therapists must demonstrate working knowledge of professional communication skills to effectively network with other healthcare and adjunct professionals.
- Massage therapists must respect the perspectives and opinions of other professionals and professions.
- Massage therapists must understand how to communicate support and respect for a client's healing process.

**Standard J: CONFIDENTIALITY**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner that:**

- Massage therapists must understand the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the implications of these regulations in their practice.
- Massage therapists must maintain client confidentiality in all aspects of the practitioner's life be it social, business, community or family network.

**Standard K: PRINCIPLES**

**The educational program should provide within the ethics curriculum, material which informs the learner of:**

- A variety of approaches to ethics, e.g., utilitarian, rights, justice, common good, virtue.
- The basic principles of ethical problem solving.
- Ethical decisions require reflection, discussion with peers and willingness to consider options.
- The qualities of an ethical approach such as consistency and integrity.
- The need to review and maintain ethical standards as a practice evolves in order to assure compliance.

**Adopted by the Tennessee Massage Licensure Board on  
May 4, 2016.**