

Intake, Informed Consent, Treatment Notes

Having a client fill out an intake form, conducting an interview, and having the client sign a consent form prior to receiving a massage are not just business practices. In regulated states, it's the law, as is keeping treatment notes on each session. It's also the only ethical way to conduct business, whether it's the law in your state or not.

I frequently hear complaints about employers who do not give therapists time to conduct proper intakes and fill out post-session notes, or worse, don't require them at all. In the final analysis, the therapist is obligated by law to do so, no matter what the business owner or manager says (so if you work in such a place, be sure to prominently place this column where the owner/manager will see it). Some states are requiring establishments to be licensed as well as the individual therapists, and the owner can be held responsible for such violations. If you're working alone, you're not excused, either. One such therapist said to me, "Why should I keep notes? I do the same thing for everybody." a) I feel sorry for her clients, and b) it's still the law.

Massaging a client without an intake is taking a chance that they have contraindications and that you could cause harm. You need to know their health history, active or recent illnesses and ongoing treatments, chronic conditions, recent surgeries, whether there are any areas to avoid, and so forth.

Informed consent is not as cut-and-dried as "I consent to receive a massage." For example, a client specifically requests light massage. You find a few knotty places and start digging. Or you throw in energy work and add an essential oil you personally like because you think "*she needs this.*" As one client related, while she was prone the therapist suddenly started using an electric massager on her back without saying anything about it. She considered it very unpleasant and was upset that he hadn't previously discussed it. The client booked a light massage and signed a consent form. She didn't bargain for the thumbs digging into the rhomboids, she's sensitive to strong smells, and she didn't ask for energy work or a surprise electric massage.

Conduct an intake. Get informed consent. Honor what the client asked for. Take notes. It's that simple. ABMP has free business forms available on the website.