

Dual Relationships

A *dual relationship* is one in which the therapist and client have another relationship that's separate from the therapeutic relationship...but is it *really* separate?

In spite of good intentions, it's sometimes difficult to keep personal relationships out of the massage room, if the client is also your friend or family member. During my years of practicing massage, I have made it a policy to avoid dual relationships. Case in point: if I gave my mother a massage, she'd be on the table telling me all the latest family gossip and perhaps getting agitated over some family matter that she truly had no control over, such as someone getting divorced or a family tragedy. If *you* were giving her a massage, she wouldn't be subjecting you to the family trauma and drama...she'd relax and focus on the massage, which is exactly what she should be doing.

When you're massaging a friend, it's tempting to discuss all your problems, just like you might do if you were out for a drink or a meal together—except it isn't a drink or a meal. It's supposed to be a time when your skill as a bodyworker and your compassionate and professional attention is focused on them. It's not a social occasion, so avoid treating it like one. Save the details of your personal life for a social visit and honor the sanctity of the massage room.

It can also be easy to fall into the trap of treating friends and family as less important than other clients, such as thinking it's okay to start the session late or reschedule, because "it's just John, he'll understand that I had to get to that 50% off shoe sale today!" If you are going to have friends and family as clients, they deserve the same consideration and professional behavior as any other client.

A dual relationship with people you have a business relationship with can also be a potentially troublesome situation. What if your accountant fails to give you a heads up that you're making too much money this year, and you should be paying more in quarterly estimated taxes? If you find out at tax time that you have a huge tax bill, aren't you going to feel resentful about that? Can you resist the urge to complain about that while they're on the table?

A doctor, lawyer, or other professional does not want to spend their massage session hearing about your stomach woes or giving you free legal advice—that they happen to be paying for the privilege of doing if they're paying you for the massage. Remember, it's their time, not your time.