

Avoiding Boundary Burnout

2020 was one of the most stressful years ever for the massage therapy profession due to COVID-19. Many therapists had to deal with shutdowns, new and intense safety protocols to follow, losing clients who don't feel it's safe to get massage, clients who got angry because they couldn't get massage, and who in many cases, tried to get the therapist to ignore the shutdowns and do it anyway. Whew! May 2021 be better!

Maintaining our own boundaries is just as important as honoring the client's boundaries. But when we have our minds on our own problems, whether that's financial, sickness or death of a family member, or some other life-changing issue, it's easy to get so mentally and/or emotionally overwhelmed, that we may find ourselves letting our boundaries slide. We may not even be *aware* that we're letting them slide, until one day you suddenly notice that you've recently had numerous no-shows, or lots of last-minute cancelations. You may not have noticed until it started hurting you financially. Or you've found yourself dumping your problems a client during a session, or ignoring a client making a pass—*things you wouldn't normally do*.

Avoiding this kind of boundary burnout is key. You don't want to just do a job—you *want to actually enjoy your work while making a living*. And once you start to let things slide, it can become a habit. It's a good idea to engage in some healthy introspection, even if you haven't noticed anything amiss. Take a look at your schedule. Are you working the way you want to, or are you being too accommodating, coming in on your day off, or taking appointments at times you really don't want to, because a client says that's the only time they're available? Take a look at your financial situation. In the wake of the pandemic, most therapists who have been able to work have had to spend substantial money on PPE and expand their time between appointments to accommodate sanitation procedures. It may seem like a bad time to raise your prices, but if expenses have gone up, do it and don't feel bad about it. Take a good look at your client list. Are there clients you've allowed to take advantage of you, or tried to guilt you into doing something you didn't want to? Sometimes it's best to let people go. If you realize you've been guilty of sharing your personal problems with clients, resolve to keep their sessions on a professional level in the future—and do it. Good boundaries make good therapeutic relationships.

About the Author (use on all columns)

Laura Allen has been a licensed massage therapist since 1999 and an Approved Provider of Continuing Education since 2000. She is the author of *Nina McIntosh's The Educated Heart*, now in its 5th edition. Allen lives in the mountains of Western North Carolina with her husband, James Clayton, and their two rescue dogs.