

## Choosing Our Words Wisely

We all know the feeling...you put your hands on someone and think “Those are the tightest traps I’ve ever felt,” or “It’s a wonder they can move their neck,” or “What a knot!”

We may think it, *but we should avoid saying it*. We don’t want the client to feel worse than they already do. In the words of one client, “I didn’t appreciate it when a massage therapist told me that I have the tightest shoulders they’ve ever seen. That’s a title I didn’t want to have.” They have taken a positive step by coming for a massage, so praise them for that. Compliment them on their self-care: “I’m sorry you’ve been having this pain, but we’ll see if we can get some relief for you today. It’s great that you’re coming in for a massage!” You want to say encouraging words that will let clients know that they can get better, not give them the idea that they are stuck in an uncomfortable condition. It’s easy for clients to think we’re criticizing them, or putting the responsibility on them for the condition their body is in. Instead of commenting that they have the tightest shoulders you’ve ever seen, and asking how they get in that mess, which sounds like a judgment, state something like “this shoulder needs more flexibility, let’s see if we can do something to help that.” Speak in a sympathetic tone.

Suggest and persuade your clients rather than ordering them to “let that shoulder relax.” Instead, say something like “I wonder how good it would feel if you let that shoulder relax.”

Avoid making promises that you may not be able to keep. While we want to be positive and upbeat about the work we do, we should never promise anyone that we can “fix” them...and especially not in one massage. People sometimes come to us with problems that they’ve had for years, literally. The gentle discussion needs to happen that they didn’t get in this condition in one day, and it most likely won’t go away after one massage, although hopefully they will get *some* relief. Avoid giving people the impression that you’re a miracle worker and they’ll be good as new in an hour. That can come back to haunt you if for any reason they *don’t* improve, which sometimes happens in spite of our best efforts.

Remember at all times that there is a power differential at play in the massage room. The client thinks we’re a knowledgeable authority, and our words—good or bad—carry weight with them. Choosing your words wisely can make a big difference in how much benefit the client gets from their therapeutic sessions with you.