

## **Emotional Release on the Massage Table: Dos and Don'ts**

Massage therapists sometimes wind up with a client who is chronically emotionally needy. They come to each session and can't wait to share the details of their latest crisis—because they're *always* in a crisis—and they're depending on you to make them feel better. They may cry and ask you for advice. Other times, a client who is usually pleasant, or reserved, and isn't normally the type to share the details of their personal lives, may appear unusually upset. Perhaps they've just received bad news, had a death in the family, going through a breakup, or lost a beloved pet. They may or may not share the details, but they may be emotional during the massage, including crying. Such a release may be as subtle as a few tears rolling down their cheeks; sometimes it may turn into a full-blown sobbing session. What are we to do?

These two scenarios call for individual handling. In the case of the chronically emotionally needy client, the best thing to do is release them as a client. If you feel exhausted and irritated every time they leave, or you find yourself getting irritated the moment you see them on the caller ID because you *know* it's going to be another session full of trauma and drama, let them go. You don't need to feel guilty about the fact that you don't want to work with someone who leaves you feeling like they've sucked all the oxygen out of the room. You're a massage therapist; you're not their psychiatrist or their personal savior. Keeping them as a client is a stressor to *you*, and it's hard to give your next client what *they* need when you're stressed yourself. If you want to feel joy in your work, let them go. Massage therapists have the right of refusal, as does the client.

In the case of the client who experiences an out-of-the-ordinary emotional release on the table, you don't need to do anything except be present and compassionate. Leave your hands on them in a gentle way. Be sympathetic, ask if they need a tissue or a glass of water, and ask if they'd like to continue with the session. Avoid counseling the client; practicing psychology is out of our scope of practice. Just be kind and caring and provide a safe space for them.