

Sensitive Subjects

We all have buttons people can push, don't we? People get upset about politics, tragedies going on in the world (or our own corner of it), or get riled up about the latest protest or social injustice on the six o'clock news. There's nothing wrong with having a strong personal opinion about something, but strong opinions, or at least conversation about them, don't belong in the massage room.

There's an old rule of etiquette about not discussing politics, sex, or religion in social settings. "Social setting" is a relative term; you might be used to griping about politics when you're out for a pizza with your best friend, but you might avoid that if you were attending parent's night at the elementary school or having dinner with your spouse's boss. And you certainly ought to avoid it during a massage session, which is not a social setting. The client is supposed to be relaxed, and you're supposed to be client-centered.

The world would be a boring place if everyone was alike. We all have our opinions, our individual belief systems, and our subjective biases. Nobody wants to think of themselves as having a closed mind, or not respecting other peoples' rights to their opinions, and still, it's human nature to want to argue for our side. Discussing sensitive subjects with clients, especially those we don't know, can put the client-therapist relationship on rocky ground, and could cost you clients. If you hate the current government administration, but your client thinks it's great, that conversation probably isn't going to go well. Announcing that you're an atheist to a client who invites you to attend their fundamentalist church may be upsetting to them, or vice versa, if you're the fundamentalist and the client is the atheist. Even current events can be sensitive for discussion, like football players failing to stand for the national anthem or a racially-charged riot or shooting. During a massage session is not the time to focus on the negative or try to convince someone to come around to your point of view.

Giving too many details of your own personal life can also be a detriment to a healthy therapeutic relationship. Your client doesn't need to know that you stop at the neighborhood bar every day on your way home, that your boyfriend dumped you, or that you're worried about how you're going to make the rent. While those may not be "sensitive subjects," discussing such things takes the focus off the client. The massage environment is intimate, but that doesn't mean that intimate conversation about *you* should be taking place. Keep the focus on the client, where it belongs, and avoid the urge to talk about yourself and your opinions.