

Details to Consider in Your Practice

Susan Moody, BCTMB

Those who know me know that I can be very detail-oriented. It is good to be aware that some of your clients might be offended by details you may not normally consider important. Is the skin on your hands rough and scratching your clients? Is there a scent that may be offending some clients? What else can potentially disturb your clients? The purpose of this article is to help you make informed choices whether to continue or discontinue practices that may be keeping some clients from returning.

Rough, Scratchy Skin

Especially in winter, our skin can become very dry, fragile and rough. The potential for hangnails increases, and small tears in our cuticles can allow microbes to infect us. The skin around our fingernails can become hard and crack, causing us to unintentionally scratch our client's skin. Just last week, a client complained that they were scratched several times during their previous massage with another therapist, which they assumed were rough calluses on her hands. Consider filing rough skin, using a sugar or salt scrub, and applying a protective coating of cream/lotion after each hand wash to keep your skin smooth, soft and healthy. Also consider regular manicures which care for your cuticles, especially if you are prone to splitting skin and hangnails.

Offensive Scent

Another complaint I hear from clients is about offensive odors: bad breath, strong body odor, cigarette scent on hands, linen smells, pungent food aroma on clothes (can tell what they had for lunch), or aromatherapy that the client disliked/has allergies to, these are the top examples. More than one client has told me that they would not return to a place that burned incense because the smoke was too biting for them. Be aware that coffee can give some people dragon breath. Curry, fish, fried eggs, garlic, onions, basil and other foods can not only linger on your breath and hands but in your hair, body and clothes. If you eat in your place of business, your massage room might also smell like your food.

It is a fact that we usually become "nose blind" to our own odors, so you may be unaware that your deodorant may have stopped working, your breath still smells like coffee even though you brushed your teeth, your shirt and hair smell like spaghetti even though you are chewing gum and washed your hands and forearms, etc. Consider asking clients if they mind your burning incense or candles and if they are alright with the specific aroma you would like to use. Brushing your teeth after ingesting something with a strong scent, chewing gum, sucking candy, washing your armpits or other potentially-odiferous areas after sweating to remove bacteria, bringing a change of clothes, or ingesting more neutral-smelling food and drink before working on clients can help.

Other Details

A few other details that matter to some clients include choice and volume of music, lighting, conversation, ambient sounds, room and table temperature, and just general things.

- Check in with your client, ask them questions to make sure they are comfortable with the environment, not just the table. I have heard more than once that other therapists have their music too loud, so I ask if the client would like the volume a little louder or quieter. I also ask if the style of music is good for them or if they would like silence, nature sounds, white noise or another type of music or sound. If you can hear outside traffic, people, or other noises outside the room, consider incorporating some type of white noise generator to cover it.
- If you use candles in your room, be aware some people may be triggered by the flickering or the scent of the burning wick (not to mention potentially voiding your insurance).
- A lamp at the client's level might shine in their eyes. I have heard many client complaints that other therapists talk constantly about themselves during the session.

- Other therapists massage and stop, massage and stop, and when the clients look to see what is going on, they find the therapists checking text messages! (a note...do not bring your phone in your room. Purchase a bluetooth or wifi speaker to stream your music).
- Some therapists breathe on their clients to the point the clients feel (and smell) the therapist's breath on their faces. If you know you have gas, consider having at least two or three room sprays or essential oils or something you know won't offend the client to cover the smell, and consider the volume of ambient sound in the room to hopefully cover the sound.

All of us choose to do things that will offend some clients. That is unavoidable. It is good, though, to be aware of as many details as possible that can affect your success so that you can make informed decisions.