

Supporting Your Clients Emotionally



an online resource
created to accompany

Pre- and Perinatal Massage Therapy:

*A Comprehensive Guide to Prenatal, Labor
and Postpartum Practice
(Third Edition)*

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Supporting Your Clients Emotionally

With all of our clients, but especially those navigating big life changes and potentially traumatic situations, we should aim to be present for their emotional needs as well as their physical ones. But being present requires that we are clear about our own role as massage therapists, and our own individual abilities. Each of us should aim to support the emotional journeys of our clients, but without pushing beyond our skills, our own training and our own scope of practice.

Below is one technique that can be useful in these situations, and then a variety of further resources for you to explore.

ACTIVE LISTENING

A Way to Help Clients with Somato-emotional Issues

Intentions:

To encourage open, honest expression of the full range of emotions engendered by pregnancy; to provide emotional support to those who are alone in their pregnancy, due to the emotional or physical absence of the partner; to facilitate self-understanding and processing of unresolved issues, traumas, and feelings; to facilitate a more satisfying pregnancy and birth.

*Procedure:*

These steps can be incorporated before, during, and/or after a session, as needed.

- 1) Establish rapport by using direct, calm eye contact, empathetic words, and receptive body language to convey your concern and interest.
- 2) Be alert to what is being said and how it is being said – and just as important, what is left unsaid – in order to fully and accurately understand what your client is trying to convey.
- 3) Repeat back the gist of what they says to be sure that you got their intended message. Acknowledge the value of their sharing. Clarify and summarize both to ensure your own accuracy and to increase their self-understanding.
- 4) Invite more exploration using appropriate, open-ended statements, such as:
 - “How did you feel then?”
 - “Where do you experience that feeling in your own body?”
 - “Tell me more about that.”
- 5) Identify any incongruent information, expressions, body language, or feelings. Be alert to any content that seems particularly intense or charged – words and phrases that feel “hot,” “tender,” “tense,” or “soft.”
- 6) Avoid judgments. Do not offer unsolicited advice. Don’t tell your own stories. When appropriate, state your own feelings by speaking in “I” statements rather than “you” statements; always take responsibility for your own reactions, feelings and decisions.
- 7) If strong emotions emerge during a prenatal massage therapy session, respond according to your preparedness and your qualifications for facilitating a healthy resolution of those feelings.



Precautions:

Many psychological dynamics are outside of the massage therapist's scope of practice and expertise. Investigate and establish a reliable network of professionals knowledgeable and experienced in working with childbearing clients and their issues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are a variety of resources useful for developing your skills in working with perinatal emotional issues.

Books:

Birthing from Within: An Extra-Ordinary Guide to Childbirth Preparation

Pam England & Rob Horowitz

Journey into Motherhood: Inspirational Stories of Natural Birth

Sheri Menelli

The Psychology of the Body

Elliot Greene & Barbara Goodrich-Dunn

Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma

Peter Levine



When Baby Brings the Blues: Solutions for Postpartum Depression

Ariel Dalfen

When Survivors Give Birth: Understanding and Healing the Effects of Early Sexual Abuse on Childbearing Women

Penny Simkin & Phyllis Klaus

Training programs:

[Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute](#)

(courses developed by Peter Levine)

[Rubinfeld Synergy Method](#)

(courses developed by Ilana Rubinfeld)

[Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy](#)

(courses developed by Ron Kurtz)

[Craniosacral Therapy](#)

(courses developed by Upledger Institute International)



[Michael Grinder & Associates](#)

(courses developed by Michael Grinder on the science of nonverbal communication)

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