



Code of Ethics

Introduction

Massage therapy is an unregulated health-care profession in Nova Scotia. MTANS members are currently governed by the *Titles Protection Act (2019)* and MTANS By-laws.

To support Registered Massage Therapists (RMTs), MTANS has developed this Code of Ethics which outlines the ethical principles and values that are foundational to the practice of massage therapy. The principles set out explicit expectations with respect to ethical behaviour and complement the Association's standards of practice, policies, guidelines, and position statements. As unregulated health professionals, RMTs must ensure they maintain the public's confidence in the profession and provide the highest level of safe, ethical, and quality massage therapy care. RMTs may encounter situations in which they will need to apply their professional judgment in interpreting and applying relevant principles and guidelines.

The Code of Ethics provides guidance to all MTANS members, regardless of practice context. It can also be used by massage therapy students, educators, researchers, and others associated with or working with RMTs in Nova Scotia.

Four ethical principles

The Association's Code of Ethics is grounded in four ethical principles:

Principle 1: Benefit clients and serve their best interests

To fulfill the goal of benefiting clients and serving their best interests, Massage Therapists endeavour to positively contribute to their clients' health and well-being.

Principle 2: Treat all clients with respect and dignity

To fulfill the goal of treating clients with respect and dignity, Massage Therapists treat all clients with compassion and consideration of the client's right to be the decision maker in their health care.

Principle 3: Not harming clients

To fulfill the goal of not harming clients, Massage Therapists take every precaution to prevent harm to clients.

Principle 4: Be Responsible and Accountable

To fulfill the goal of being responsible and accountable, Massage Therapists act in the best interest of the client and not in the interest of the Massage Therapist. Massage Therapists are accountable, not just for their own actions and behaviours, but for those of the broader profession as well.

Behaviours, actions, and attitudes to support principles

More details on the behaviours, actions, and attitudes that support the four ethical principles are outlined below.

Principle 1: Benefit clients and serve their best interests

To fulfill the goal of benefiting clients and serving their best interests, RMTs:

- Commit to benefiting clients and serving clients' best interests by using their knowledge, skills, and professional judgment;
- Ensure that their professional knowledge and skills are current and evidence-informed, based on continuing professional development, clinical research, practice context, client perspective, and practitioner experience;
- Clearly provide clients with the information they need to make informed decisions about their health care;
- Encourage client engagement and focus on client goals and preferences;
- Use oral and written communication to facilitate client understanding and conflict resolution;
- Are aware of and attentive to transference and countertransference in the client-Massage Therapist relationship; and
- Are knowledgeable about other regulated health professions, and work collaboratively with other professionals to improve client care, reduce risks, increase client safety, and optimize health outcomes.

Principle 2: Treat all clients with respect and dignity

To fulfill the goal of treating all clients with respect and dignity, RMTs:

- Recognize clients' ethical and legal rights to be the decision makers in their health care;
- Obtain the client's informed consent to treatment prior to providing care, and respect the client's right to accept or refuse all or any part of the treatment at any time without prejudice;
- Recognize the power imbalance inherent in the client-Massage Therapist relationship and maintain professional boundaries;
- Keep client health and personal information confidential, except with the consent of the client or as required by law;
- Provide clients with advance notice and a referral when discharging them from care; and
- Provide fair and equitable access and consistent quality of care to all clients, free of discrimination based on protected characteristics and protected areas outlined in the Nova Scotia *Human Rights Act*.

Principle 3: Not harm clients

To fulfill the goal of not harming clients, RMTs:

- Refrain from participating in behaviour that could potentially harm clients, and make every reasonable effort to prevent harm to clients;
- Do not, under any circumstance, participate in any form of sexual behaviour with clients, including "consensual" behaviour¹;
- Do not, under any circumstance, participate in any form of harassment of clients, colleagues, other health professionals, or employees;
- Ensure they are not impaired in their professional ability by any permanent or temporary physical or mental condition or disorder, and have the knowledge, skills, and judgement to practice massage therapy safely;

¹ Sexual contact with a client is defined as sexual abuse by MTANS. It is not a defence if the client "consents" to the sexual touch. Please refer to the Standard of Practice: Maintaining Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse and the Maintaining Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse Guidelines for additional information.

- Practice only within the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy, recognize their limitations, and refer, when appropriate, to a colleague or other health professional whose expertise can best address client needs;
- Act with honesty and transparency if harm does occur, take responsibility for disclosing this harm to the client, and initiate steps to minimize the harm and prevent future occurrences;
- Ensure they provide clients with the information they need to make informed decisions regarding treatment, and obtain clients' informed consent prior to treatment;
- Ensure ongoing consent for longer term ongoing client care;
- Avoid dual relationships;
- Ensure that the client-Massage Therapist relationship is not exploited by the Massage Therapist for any real, perceived, or potential personal, social, emotional, and/or financial reason(s) or conflict of interest;
- Provide therapeutic touch thoughtfully and tactfully in a sensitive and professional manner;
- Maintain a clean, hygienic, and safe work and office environment; and
- Ensure that client and business records are securely retained.

Principle 4: Be responsible and accountable

To fulfill the goal of being responsible and accountable, Massage Therapists:

- Individually and collectively have a professional responsibility to maintain public trust and confidence;
- Conduct themselves with personal and professional integrity at all times;
- Assume responsibility for their actions and decisions as health-care professionals;
- Assume responsibility for upholding their ethical and professional obligations and for advising employers when these conflict with employer expectations;
- Maintain clear, legible, and comprehensive client and business records;

- Meet all mandatory reporting obligations², and consider reporting any other unethical behaviour;
- Meaningfully participate in advancing professional competencies and continuing professional development through self-evaluation of practice, and appropriately respond to the outcomes of evaluations and assessments;
- Recognize the importance that self-care and health and wellness can play in an RMT's personal life as well as their ability to deliver optimal treatment to their clients;
- Recognize their right to refuse care to clients who:
 - Sexualize or attempt to sexualize the therapeutic relationship;
 - Physically abuse or threaten to abuse the Massage Therapist; or
 - Are unable or unwilling to provide payment for care requested;
- Responsibly use private and public health-care resources to care for clients;
- Responsibly use electronic communication, social media, and other forms of digital technology;
- Do not participate in any kind of fraud, including, but not limited to, fraudulent billing practices;
- Do not participate in any form of conduct, advertising, or promotion that discredits or reflects poorly on the profession or breaches public trust and confidence;
- Demonstrate the integrity and professionalism expected of a Massage Therapist as an unregulated health professional³; and
- Do not justify unethical behaviour by rationalizing that such behaviour is not explicitly articulated in this document or other legislation or regulation.

Relevant documents

- *Human Rights Act* (Nova Scotia)
- Maintaining Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse Guidelines
- Mandatory Reporting Policy

² An overview of mandatory reporting obligations can be found on the MTANS website. Please also refer to the Mandatory Reporting Policy.

³ Participating in conduct which could bring disrepute to discredit the profession is called "conduct unbecoming" in the MTANS's Professional Conduct Policy.

- Glossary of Terms
- Professional Conduct Policy
- Standard of Practice: Maintaining Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse