

How is a pediatric massage practice different from a regular massage practice?

Tina Allen, L.M.T., C.P.M.M.T., C.P.M.T., C.I.M.T., responds



Children are different from adults in numerous ways, and as such, so is a pediatric massage practice. For the health care professional inspired to practice pediatric massage, there are many considerations to prepare for providing developmentally appropriate touch therapy.

Health care providers often use the term pediatric to describe children in a health care or hospital setting; some will say the word pediatric is an umbrella term that covers all of the patients in that facility from birth to age of discharge from the hospital—often 18 years of age. Others recognize that pediatric is simply defined as health care of children, which may mean in the hospital setting, but can also refer to children who are developing typically.

Some practitioners believe massage therapy is used to treat medical and health care indications, but pediatric massage is also used in conjunction with general health care, as an adjunct and preventative method of therapeutic intervention. Pediatric massage is used in a variety of settings, from spas and professional private practices to hospitals, palliative care/hospices and orphanages.

Education

Further training and education is required to feel fully confident providing pediatric massage. Neither standard medical training, nor massage therapy education, provides health care professionals the customized training necessary to best serve this population.

Pediatric massage therapy is an evidence-informed therapy that can complement the medical care and therapies already being provided.

Children have different physical, emotional and developmental needs than adults, and pediatric massage is designed to address these individual childhood considerations. As young people are growing, their bodies undergo significant physical and developmental changes. Some of these developmental considerations include recognizing that their skin is thinner, more fragile and has much more compact sensory receptors. Their bones are not yet completely fused or ossified, and require a more gentle approach. These considerations are of great importance to those practicing hands-on techniques.

We consider a child's size, developmental aspects and growth in our treatment plan, and also employ cognitive considerations and age-appropriate language adaptations as we build trust and rapport.

Considerations

Obtaining informed consent and permission prior to beginning a massage session establishes respect and understanding of the benefits of healthy touch. In the case of pediatric massage, this may require input from a parent/guardian or another health care provider responsible for a child's medical treatment and care.

For children, we adapt all of our care to include an individual and unique approach. Adapting techniques to their needs and preferences establishes trust and communication. We always do our best, using age-appropriate language, to communicate adaptations and possibilities with the type of therapeutic session we can provide.

Many adult clients do not have a good understanding of the range of modalities and techniques within

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It is important to push forward with a consistent, professional, health-care-oriented message of pediatric massage.

a massage therapist's scope of practice. So, it is not surprising that this can take some explanation when working with children. When you take the time to explain options and choices to the child you plan to work with, it helps to establish the foundation of a successful therapeutic session.

Safety

As in any therapy provided for the care of children, safety and efficacy is of the utmost importance. Physicians, other health care staff and parents will look to the massage therapist for careful scrutiny of a child's health care needs prior to providing massage therapy, and devising an effective treatment plan. When working with pediatric clients in a private practice, we may first ask parents for the child's health history.

For a child with medical needs, communication with health care personnel provides massage therapists with essential information for developing an effective plan and approach for care. In the health care system, such as a pediatric hospital, we review the treatment and medical charts fully, along with asking any pertinent questions of the attending medical team.

Asking a physician or health care provider to simply sign a medical release will not be all that is required when working with children with a variety of health care considerations. Not all medical personnel have background or training in the indications, precautions or contraindications for the use of pediatric massage. This is where the professional therapist must perform due diligence prior to the child's massage session.

For the therapist wishing to work in the medical environment, careful collaboration is imperative and taking the time to nurture those relationships is especially important.

Collaboration


Creative collaboration is important when implementing pediatric massage therapy appropriately, whether this takes the shape of explaining thoroughly or collaborating with the child to help design the session. Parents and caregivers might want to work together on the best treatment plan, as well. As health care providers, we work to convey the best way in which massage therapy can be an adjunct to other treatments the child may be receiving.

One of the messages we work to convey to other health care providers is that pediatric massage therapy is an evidence-informed therapy that can complement the medical care and therapies already being provided. Otherwise, massage therapists may be met with challenges from other medical and health care professionals who may not see massage therapists as equals; or worse, see them as competition. It is an important part of collaboration to communicate how we can work with other professionals to reach the goal of pediatric massage becoming an integral part of an integrative health care approach.

Consistency

Unfortunately, not all geographic areas, private massage practices or health care facilities offer the services of therapists trained in pediatric massage. As families and professionals become more aware of the benefits of pediatric massage therapy, there will be an increasing need for professional practitioners with specialized experience and education to fill these health care needs. Numerous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of pediatric massage therapy as a noninvasive therapy when safely provided by trained health care practitioners.

Today, more people in the general public understand the benefits of massage therapy for adults; however, we are still practicing in a profession that not everyone understands. So, now it is more important than ever to push forward with a consistent, professional, health-care-oriented message in the description and application of pediatric massage therapy.

Tina Allen, L.M.T., C.P.M.M.T., C.P.M.T., C.I.M.T., is the founder and director of the Liddle Kidz Foundation (liddlekidz.com), and an authority on infant and pediatric massage therapy. She has written for *MASSAGE Magazine* on topics including "Connected Touch: A Hands-On Approach to Autism Spectrum Disorders" (February 2013) and "Father-Baby Bonding: Infant Massage Builds Bridges that Last a Lifetime" (February 2014). 



Learn more about pediatric massage from Tina Allen at massagemag.com/pediatricmassage.