

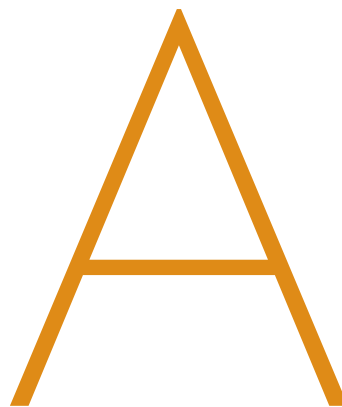
DRAPING DILEMMAS



DEAR ART

My clients and I both love working in nonneutral and side-lying positions to release spasms and increase range of motion. But some very effective positions present difficulties with draping. How can I get better at draping?

—DRAPING DUMMY



DEAR D.D.,

This is a common challenge. The reality is that quick and effortless draping is simply impossible with certain positioning options. This assertion is in no way intended to minimize the importance of skillful draping. But, if draping prevents you from implementing the full range of your bodywork skills, then you may need to examine your priorities and possibly change your image of massage, rather than just trying to get better at draping.

Proper draping is primarily for your clients' physical and emotional comfort—warmth and modesty. It also protects you from accusations of improper behavior or from the possibility of clients' exhibitionistic or improper behavior.

My feeling: although it can be artfully done, for goal-oriented therapeutic bodywork, draping is not meant to be an art form where therapists can demonstrate their creativity—form over function. We're here to do bodywork, not wrap clients in swaddling clothes. It makes sense to be flexible and amend your views of draping to the type of work you perform, rather than attempting to compromise your skills to fit the limitations of draping.

COMPLAINTS

As important as it is, draping—and especially overly fastidious draping—does come with a price. Following are some complaints I hear from both therapists and clients.

- “Draping is time-consuming. I have had massages where virtually every new area being worked necessitates precious loss of time as the smooth flow of the session is interrupted like driving in start-and-stop traffic.”

- “Draping divides the body into isolated blocks. Good bodywork should create a smooth connection to unify the body. If each separate section has to be meticulously uncovered and covered, your massage turns into piecework without integration. Finished with that leg? Let’s wrap it up and say good-bye for the rest of the session.”
- “Draping does not guarantee your clients’ safety or your safety. Overemphasis on draping can actually place undue attention on sexual issues. It’s like the suggestion: ‘Don’t think of elephants,’ that prompts one to think of elephants. Clear, professional intention and proper boundaries provide more integrity than a thin piece of fabric.”
- “Discomfort with draping skills restricts the implementation of useful techniques, especially in a side-lying position. The client loses out on the benefit of your skills, and you miss out on doing your best work because both of you are confined by a straightjacket.”

SUGGESTIONS

There are several ways to improve your draping skills and challenge your creativity.

- Practice draping with fellow therapists in the effective body positions you utilize, so you are confident during actual sessions.
- Involve clients in the process by having them hold the drape in side-lying or other positions and use pillows or additional towels to cover difficult areas.
- Use a drape material that isn’t slippery, such as a very large beach towel. It is less likely to slide off, and clients enjoy the comfort and warmth. The texture of a towel lets you work on sensitive areas much more effectively, allowing you to work through the drape and grasp the tissue under the towel, rather than negotiating slippery material.



- Finally, veteran therapists might consider altering their vision to include working on clients who are comfortable wearing their underclothes or minimal sports clothing in the session with or without a drape. Most of the experienced therapeutic bodyworkers I know work this way all the time and it’s surprising how many clients prefer it. Your work will be much easier—more fluid and integrated—allow more time for better work, and will allow you to perform any technique with ease.

TRANSITIONING

As in all facets of massage, the keys to transitioning to this way of working are communication and negotiation. I usually tell clients that if they are comfortable leaving their underclothes on, it makes for a much smoother session, even though I offer draping. After a few different

positions, most clients simply volunteer that the drape isn’t necessary.

So don’t toss in that towel (or sheet) on your effective body positioning options. Your recognition that you aren’t giving your clients the full benefit of your skills is the first step in solving the problem with an open and creative mind. **m&b**

🗣️ *Art Riggs is the author of the textbook Deep Tissue Massage: A Visual Guide to Techniques (North Atlantic Books, 2007), which has been translated into seven languages, and the seven-volume DVD series Deep Tissue Massage and Myofascial Release: A Video Guide to Techniques. Visit his website at www.deeptissuemassagemanual.com.*