General Pediatric Oncology Massage Guidelines

When providing pediatric massage, first obtain consent in writing from the physician and parent of the child you will be working with. Then, follow a protocol that includes:

- Understanding the child’s diagnosis: learn where cancer is currently located in the child’s body.
- Identifying current and/or past cancer treatments and medications the client has received.
- Assessing any side-effects or complications from the child’s diagnosis and/or treatment.
- Reviewing research and medical literature written about the child’s diagnosis, treatments, side-effects, symptoms and how this affects his or her ability to receive pediatric massage therapy.
- Preparing a thorough list of the possible elements of the massage to adjust, such as pressure, positioning, pace, body areas massaged, and use of any approved lubricant.
- Discussing with the child’s healthcare team (physician, oncologist, nurse) any additional input on your comprehensive list of questions, concerns and adjustments.
- Introducing yourself when first meeting the child and family member(s), and asking if they have ever had a massage before.
- Explaining massage to clients in a way they can understand, including demonstrating on your arm. You can describe massage as “good touch” to very young children.
- Updating your approach and protocol to practice all known safety precautions using the most cautious approach necessary to ensure the child’s safety.
- Following all known contraindications to pediatric massage therapy.
- Asking specific questions about positioning and any injuries or fears this child may have.
- Obtaining verbal consent from the child whenever possible.
- Always asking permission to touch and looking for engagement cues when working with a non-verbal child.
- Letting the child know the areas you can massage (i.e. arms, hands, legs, feet, head, face, neck, back) and asking where the child would like to be touched. Asking if there is anywhere the child doesn’t want to be touched.
- Telling children that they can stop the massage at any time and letting them know the total amount of time you can be with them for each session.
- Using appropriate draping guidelines and never partially undressing a child who does not specifically give consent.
- During the massage sessions, asking permission before touching each body area that the child has said is approved for massage (i.e. “Is it alright if I massage this leg now?”)
- At the end of the massage, thanking the child and make sure the child is safely positioned.
- Reporting any concerns to the medical staff (i.e. nurse, doctor).
- Remembering at all times to empower and respect the parent and to make them the expert on their child’s health and well-being.