

Ethics and Self-Accountability

By Ben Benjamin, PhD

Author's note: The following article is adapted from "The Ethics of Touch" by Ben Benjamin and Cherie Sohnen-Moe.

Ethical Principles

The topic of ethics can be confusing, difficult and, at times, downright baffling! Somatic practitioners encounter ethical issues and dilemmas that do not always have simple, obvious solutions.

Expanding practitioners' grasp of ethical principles helps them understand the impact of their behavior on clients and provides the knowledge and tools to act accordingly. Not all ethical breaches are gross violations of conduct. Many unethical behaviors are subtle; practitioners may inadvertently act unethically because they have not considered the relevant issues. The purpose of ethics is to guide us in a fashion that makes the client's welfare our first priority. Being ethical is not limited simply to knowing and following ethical codes, laws and regulations. Ethical behavior also involves striving to bring our highest values into our work and aspiring to do our best in all interactions. It is doing the right thing in the right manner, for the right reasons and with the right attitude.

Self-Accountability

As individuals, it is our capacity for self-accountability that keeps us functioning ethically and responsibly. While people may be accountable to others, they may not be as accountable to themselves when there is no one else to observe, monitor or hold them responsible.

Self-accountability is the cornerstone of ethics: It is who you are and what you do when no one is watching. When you have a well-developed sense of self-accountability, you are honest with yourself, and are

answerable and responsible for what you say and do. You have the ability to look beyond the immediate moment to consider the consequences and know if you are willing to pay them. You have personal ethics.

Personal ethics is the precursor to professional ethics, since we are not likely to be more ethical in our professional life than in our personal life. As the saying goes, "No matter where you go, there you are." In other words, if we are dishonest in our personal life, we are likely to be dishonest in our business affairs. Likewise, if we cannot keep the secret of a friend, our client's confidentiality is also at risk.

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