

Suggested Guidelines for Safe Teaching through Touch

Touch is a powerful tool for teaching and for healing and transformation. It can be an effective and useful nonverbal way to instruct and share information when communication is clear and open. Peoples' experiences and feelings about touch are quite varied and are informed as well by their cultural and societal orientations. Here are some ground rules and guidelines for working in this way.

Some Useful Ground Rules for Teaching through Touch

Ask permission to begin the contact through touch and state where.

Make a clear beginning to contact.

Use a neutral touch when beginning contact, to locate a sense of meeting.

Both people participate in teaching through touch; it is a mutual dance of communication.

Pay attention to oneself when touching another.

Give and accept permission to stop touch at any time for any reason.

Give and accept permission to alter the type of touch, and give feedback at any time.

Don't straddle the person being touched.

Don't stroke the skin.

In a class, when beginning touch, position yourself so the person can see you.

In a class, don't leave other students in a pose for a long time while you work with one person.

In a class, look for those "vibing" you to stay away.

In a class, pay attention to social factors, like jealousy or humiliation.

Set your intention before you make contact, then move in and out.

Ask if okay to touch and if not okay, be ready with next statement like, "Sure, so what I'd like for you to do is . . ."

If not okay, perhaps choose other options like, "Move your knee toward my hand.", or "Place your own hand on your left knee ...".

Come to a mutual place of closure within a time frame.

Guidelines for Giving Feedback

Touch and language are important aspects of yoga therapy. Ask your partner, in this training, for feedback at any time, especially if you are not clear about what is happening. The person being touched has the responsibility to let their partner know if the teaching through touch is not right for them at any time. Feedback is often best heard when given with "I" statements, such as, "I need to pause just now." "I feel energy moving upward and need to pause", or whatever it may be. The teacher role partner may also wish to verbally say things like, "I'm not sure what I'm doing", ask, "Does that seem to be the edge of your scapula?" or something else. This is a mutual learning situation. If touch becomes uncomfortable for any reason at all, it's better to pause and possibly stop than to continue contact. Pausing gives time for any learning to become more integrated, as well as for other information to be brought into conscious awareness.

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

An essential skill as a yoga teacher and therapist is finding a way to receive feedback from a nonjudgmental place; neither judging oneself or one's partner. Often a person's need to pause or stop has nothing to do with the person doing the touch training.

Hands-on Practices: Deepening and Review

Why would we decide to do hands-on teaching?

1. In class adjustment
2. To help student/client identify and FEEL something in body or energy sheath
3. To improve alignment by giving information through touch about where body parts are in space in the field of gravity
4. To guide tissues into released expansion
5. To guide joints into even space for healthy and balanced joint use
6. To balance the tone of ligaments
7. To facilitate ease of movement, alignment and better body use especially in one or more joints
8. To witness/ be present through touch
9. To suggest new pathways of movement
10. To remind body (neuro-muscular system) of more efficient pathways of movement.
11. To support connections and better body organization
12. To access the organs and thus improve their function, or other attributes
13. More . . .

Exercise One

Mountain pose assessment: Take a moment to go within to be still (and know ☺). Take the next moment to be still with your partner(s). Observe partner in Mountain Pose. You are looking for impediments, things that catch your eye, things that make you curious. Things that are possibly not allowing the practitioner to fully embody “perfect” or complete mountain pose alignment:

- A. What do you observe at any of these levels of being?

Annamayakosha-

Pranamayakosha –

Manomayakosha-

Vijnana/Ananda –

- B. At Annamaya, what actions of the 5 basic actions would you coach in your partner in one or more body parts. (ex. Push with your feet, or reach with the top of your head, or yield your feet into the floor, etc.) Notice what they do in response. (Try other poses...)
- C. Make a hands-on adjustment. Ask permission first and let them know what you’ll do. What is the response. Talk with your partner about it. (Do more...)

Exercise Two

Choose a bony area or entire bone of the body on yourself that you would like your partner to bone trace. Share what you are thinking and noticing while you work with one another. Trade.

Exercise Three

Working toward balanced joint space by elongation and approximation of relevant ligaments on the different sides of a joint.

Exercise Four

Movement re-patterning (neuro-muscular re-facilitation). A standard sequence: (a) you move partner’s limb or body part, (b) they move with you as you guide pathway, (c) they move along the pathway and you provide a little bit of resistance, (d) they do it alone, (e) they do the movement alone with resistance. Or rather choose to explore in movement, dialogue and touch.