

## **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.