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# MASSAGE *Message*

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# Integrating CranioSacral Therapy Principles into Other Manual Therapy Techniques



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I have been a licensed massage therapist for 11 years. I was trained in Bend, Oregon at Sage School of Massage and Esthetics and have been licensed in Oregon and Texas. I have a private practice where I specialize in clinical massage therapy. I use a combination of CranioSacral Therapy, Visceral Manipulation, myofascial release, Reiki, and Swedish massage techniques to treat my clients. In 2010, when my family moved to Austin, Texas I took my first introductory Upledger CranioSacral Therapy class. I knew nothing about the modality other than it helped one of my massage school classmates with her migraines (1). The 12-hour introductory class intrigued me enough to continue with the curriculum. I have since taken 11 seminars and can unequivocally say that studying CranioSacral therapy has changed my touch, presence and results no matter which “modality” I use.



If you are looking for a way to develop your palpation skills, studying CST is a great place to start. Once you tune in and perceive the craniosacral rhythm, you become aware that there is a world of subtlety that the hands can perceive. In 2013, a Swedish study showed that human (2) fingertips can feel a “bump corresponding to the size of a very large molecule.” Imagine what we can perceive when we have our hands on our clients: the subtlety of temperature disparities, the quality of the tissue, the signs of tissue release, etc. Practicing the techniques of CranioSacral Therapy helps to develop more sophisticated palpation skills and awareness of what is going on inside the tissues.

Learning to perceive the symmetry, quality, amplitude, and rate of the craniosacral rhythm can give us insights to where in the body there is restriction and/or dysfunction. The craniosacral rhythm can be used for whole body evaluation, giving you a global idea of what is happening in the body. You can take this quick and easy evaluation and use it to inform your treatment plan.

“Treat what you find” may sound obvious, but I know how easy it is to listen to a client’s story, create an idea of what is happening with them based on past experience and begin treatment based on the most likely scenario. While it is important to take client history and your own experience and knowledge into account, it is also necessary to look and see what the client’s body is presenting with on that day. CranioSacral Therapy prioritizes assessment over common treatment protocols.

Upledger teaches that the most profound therapy happens when the therapist comes to the session from a place of neutrality. While we use techniques and study anatomy and physiology, the client’s body has its own agenda. CranioSacral Therapy allows the client’s inner wisdom to direct the session to serve the client best. Neutrality is a skill that takes practice. To be truly neutral, one must forgo the idea of an agenda and attachment to a result. This does not mean we throw out all of our experience and knowledge, just that we come to each client in each session with openness and a desire to really listen to what the tissues under our hands are telling us at that moment. When working with children and animals, neutrality becomes imperative. A child, pet or horse will react immediately if they sense you are not neutral. I became aware of my neutrality limitations through the CranioSacral Therapy: EcoSomatics Equine 1 course. I am not an animal therapist but experiencing working with horses illustrated when I was maintaining neutrality. Horses will literally walk away from you if you are not neutral. Practicing “profound neutrality” will yield better manual therapy results. Often the desire to help can interfere in the therapist’s ability to let go of preconceptions of what the client needs. I cannot tell you how many times I have explained an idea of a treatment plan to a client to have that change as soon as I put my hands on them. Neutrality allows us to be flexible and responsive to the body under our hands.

In the SomatoEmotional Release and Advanced CranioSacral Therapy classes, students learn to work, not only with the tissues under our hands, but also with the expression or release of an emotion that has been retained

in the body, mind, spirit or psyche of the client. We often use dialoguing and imagery to aid the body’s release. When working in this manner, it is imperative to meet the client where they are. For example, if a client speaks about their own faith, world view, or belief system, it is the therapist’s job to put our own beliefs and opinions aside and be present with the client through their experience. During the treatment session, the client’s story becomes the template for our session. After all, the client enters the treatment room with a lifetime of experiences and medical history which may or may not be contributing to their symptoms. Each manual therapy treatment session should begin with the understanding that the client’s history, experience, and world view has shaped what they are feeling in their bodies. For example, I have two clients who are siblings and seek treatment for different reasons. Each of them has shared experiences of their childhoods that seem contradictory. They each feel that they acted as the older sibling and “raised” the other. Does this mean that one of them is lying? No, each of their experiences is part of their story. Upledger courses teach us that meeting clients where they are individually allows the body (and mind) to feel heard, and the therapist to therapeutically hold space for the body to heal.

During his research, Dr. Upledger noticed that the craniosacral rhythm pauses when the body is doing something significant during a session. By learning the feel of the “significance detector” the practitioner can tell that they are on the right track at that moment. It is like having a cheat sheet to the client’s session. Learning to listen to the craniosacral rhythm can ensure that you are acting as effectively as possible during that session. Sometimes, if I am debating what to do next during a manual therapy session, I can pause and tune in to the craniosacral rhythm. By following the rhythm, the body will eventually show you where it really wants your hands.

Continuing education in massage therapy is imperative to hone our skills, re-energize and inspire us and, sometimes, to remind us of what we already know. I highly recommend exploring CranioSacral therapy as an option for continuing education hours. Even the first course (CS1) will change your touch, your perception, and give you techniques and skills that can make other modalities more effective. Studying his light touch technique has, on the most basic level, enabled me to deepen my awareness of what is happening under my hands. Further study and experience with the advanced courses have illuminated my shortcomings and helped me to practice becoming a more present, neutral and, therefore, a more effective therapist.

#### References:

- 1 Upledger Institute International <https://www.upledger.com>
- 2 Lisa Skedung, Martin Arvidsson, Jun Young Chung, Christopher M. Stafford, Birgitta Berglund, Mark W. Rutland. *Feeling Small: Exploring the Tactile Perception Limits. Scientific Reports*, 2013; 3 DOI: 10.1038/srep02617