

## **Stages of Growth in Our Massage Profession**

I have read and heard some angry voices coming from our massage profession. It has been in our trade publications, our massage organization publications, and even in our local list-serve emails. I have read articles stating that massage is not enough and that medical massage therapy is the only real kind of massage. From another extreme viewpoint, I have read there is no proof that more education makes us better bodyworkers. While others have expressed concerns about organizations or individuals who may be trying to control our profession. I now notice how the stages of childhood emotional growth seem to parallel the stages of emotional growth in our massage profession.

It was 1978 when I heard, "Surprise, you are 5 months pregnant." Was I ready for this parenting challenge and what did I want for my child that I lacked in myself? A friend handed me the answer, *Your Child's Self Esteem* by Dorothy Conklin-Brooks.

This book breaks down the stages of emotional growth necessary to develop self esteem from a toddler to an adult. Each stage of growth needs a specific challenge to master to progress to the next level. When the challenge is not accomplished, you are stuck using your current emotional level to deal with your adult life challenges. After reading the book, I found myself stuck at age 8 and I cried. But the author said it was never too late to seek the challenges to grow. By the time my son, Sky, graduated from high school in 1996, I felt I had met my challenges and was now emotionally 18.

As I look at our Massage Profession, I have noticed a parallel in our stages of growth. The early years in massage school is like the toddler, taking or rejecting guidance, believing everything they are taught, and excited about their new world. They are so full of hope, dreams, and the motivation to help others.

Next, comes the challenge of where and how to make a living. Should they work for a Chiropractor, spa, Massage clinic, or try it on their own? They work on clients with conditions, needs, and wants that they never could have imagined. They don't network with other LMP's who might be able to better help their client because they need the income to pay their own bills. This reminds me of the young child who is afraid that others may steal their toys.

After a year, they are required to attend continuing education classes. They are exposed to new ideas and techniques in a setting with more experienced LMP's. They realize what they thought they knew is small in comparison to what there is to know. Some therapists feel angry while others feel motivated as they continue to take more classes.

Those who want to learn more look for a teacher who appears to be knowledgeable or a technique that claims to fix everything. They use this on their clients, and when it does not help as much as they thought, they believe it

is because they just can't do it correctly or as well as the teacher. They remind me of the pre-teen who feels inadequate.

Many therapists who are angry take classes so they can feel superior to others. They begin to separate themselves from the "other massage therapists." They believe that they are the only ones who know how to do "treatment massage." There is an air of arrogance in their demeanor. They remind me of the defiant teenager who thinks they know it all.

As they meet these emotional challenges, they begin to see that it is their clients who are their real teachers. Their clients start coming in waves all with neck problems, or low back, and so it progresses. Soon they learn that no one method will help everyone. What they need is a large variety of techniques, people skills, and the willingness to refer to other LMP's when appropriate. They learn that they are just a part of restoring their client's health. They have reached the stage of becoming a young adult.

Unfortunately when I look at our current profession as a whole, I think the "teenagers" speak the loudest and are getting too much attention. At some point, they will stop thinking they "know it all" and stop complaining without offering solutions. We are having growing pains but these are the challenges that help us all to grow. As we continue to have a wide variety of individuals at different "stages," I suggest we become more patient and kind with each other.

Many of us have met these emotional and professional challenges and our next stage is to reach out and share what we know with others. We can inspire others by making time to volunteer in professional organizations, a state board, at a massage school, with MERT, or even as a mentor to a new LMP. Think about where you are in these stages of emotional growth in our profession, and embrace your next challenge and remember to help others with their challenges.