

MASSAGE AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

by Eirik Tollefsen, The Center for Socioeducational Massage APS

The interest for implementing massage in socioeducational work is increasing. More and more people become aware of the possibilities, this kind of contact implies. In our work as educationalists we will meet people with different kinds of physical and mental inhibitions in their development. In general it is a fact that we in our field meet people whose self-consciousness is developed weakly, and a great number of these people find it difficult to define their body. Massage is considered as a possibility of strengthen these sides.

For instance, at my institution, at which the pupils for instance are multi-handicapped, people hurting themselves or others or people who are difficult to get in touch with due to their psychotic features, massage as body stimulation has become a more and more important part of the training. As a result of massage, the physical and psychical vthaw is one of the elements of implementing other areas such as e.g. sence training, motor dexterity and conceptual learning.

At another institution, a youth center which is an offer to 17 to 25-year-old with social, mental or psychosomatic problems, there is a fruitful co-operation between the medical, the alternative and the socioeducational work. The training consists of e.g. massage combined with conversation - an offer of which many avail themselves. Great importance is attached to the fact that these treatment are based on the receiver's needs and stage of development.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MASSAGE

People with physical and psychical imbalance have bodily, emotional and mental blocades which prevent them from receiving impressions and acting independtly. In this case massage in fixed and structured framework will work as an opening to them and to their surroundings, as it will both give them strength and make them relax.

It makes them relax because it brings them in contact with the parasympathetic part of the nervous system and with a possitive experience which rests body and mind. It gives them strength, because it

facilitates the metabolism, as it helps the circulation system to part with waste which is deposit in muscles and joints. Which again influences the body balance in general.

The skin is the largest organ of the body, and since the skin is in connection with the sence of touch, it is important to stimulate the skin in order to develop this sence. In general the sence of touch is the sence to which we direct least attention, as in our culture it has been difficult to accept touch and massage. When being touched with loving hands, it is possible to be able to exceed these taboo ideas of prejudices in such a way, so that a greater freedom in contact with other people are reached later in life.

MASSAGE IN SOCIOEDUCATIONAL CONNECTIONS

It is not all physically and mentally handicapped who are susceptible to massage, as it may provoke feelings of fear to let anyone get that close to them. It is very important that we are aware of this aspect and above all respect the patients' limits.

The massage in socioeducational connections is based on the same principles as massage for "normal people". However, it is advantageous to learn how to give massage to "normal people" first, as the signals they show, often are easier to perceive and understand. To a person who is trained in giving massage it is no obstacle to work with "conscious touching" to patients with clothes on. This kind of contact is extremely valuable and easy to practise in every day life.

One of the purposes of massage is that the body's energies can be lead to other parts of the body which have a reduced sensitivity or parts which in a conscious way "sleep". This will help to loosen up some of the bodily and emotional blocades which prevent the receiver from opening up and getting in interactions with his surroundings.

Beyond the fact that massage has to be structured, there will be many individual dissimilarities to concider according to functional restraints, psychical state and age. For instance, to the seriously handicapped we can with advantage use our voice

or suitable music to help them to be present in their body and with that present in their consciousness. Furthermore, the use of voice and music aspects contributes to the fact that the necessary relationship of trust between giver and receiver is established.

To the handicapped not that seriously handicapped it might be an advantage to practise massage in silence. Words are often an escape mechanism which prevent the reach of deeper feelings and understandings.

HUMAN VIEW

To be better to mediate the quality, of which touch and massage consists, we have to find a method which goes beyond the traditional system of treatment, a method which is based on individual needs and a wider comprehensive view. It is a challenge which implies that we, as educationalists, have to exceed some limits. To have a close physical contact with the patients we work with, might cost us great efforts. In order to create this contact it is important that we have a relaxed relation to our own body, so that we beyond working professionally, also involve ourselves as human beings.

In order to help other people we must be able to help ourselves. This means that working with other people can be regarded as a stage in our own development. The implication of touch and massage may in this connection add a new dimension to our own process, as it can develop our ability (the analytic, the methodical) to let the brain create a connection to the heart to a larger extent (the intuitive, the entering into the spirit)

FUTURE VISIONS

In order to disseminate this method of work in traditional and alternative institutions we need people who are prepared to open new paths. For instance, I can mention a day treatment which has started a project with the purpose of learning people with Down's syndrome to give massage to other physically or/and mentally handicapped.

The fault in the present treatment system is that the physical and/or psychical handicapped often have to reduce their emotional expressions such as grief, resentment and frustrations. It is due to the fact that we often as educationalists do not know how to handle these expressions and that we still need some frames, within which these can be legalized and adapted. In the future we might hope of a wider general understanding for these mechanisms and that touch and massage can be tools to meet this need in continuation of a wider understanding.

On courses in my institution we teach the participants how they can use massage as an educational tool within socioeducational work and the courses are approved by the Danish Ministry of Education and the National Socioeducational League. Within the teaching in massage based on the principles of healing there are great prospects, as massage and touching give the educationalists an understanding of the holistic human view and the possibility of following these principles. Through the educationalists, handicapped and people in psychiatry receive massage and touching, and they are indeed human beings who need to get in contact with this energy and in this way massage and touching have a better chance of being integrated in society through established educations.

Further information about this subject is available at the author of this article, who is educationalist and massage teacher and works with physically and/or mentally handicapped.

*The Center for Socioeducational Massage APS
Eirik Tollefsen
Bølgevej 52 · 8680 Ry · Denmark
Tel.: 0045 8689 3057 · tollefsen@email.dk*