What is sexual misconduct?

This is conduct that exploits the physical therapist (PT)/physical therapist assistant (PTA)-patient relationship in a sexual way, whether verbal or physical, and may include the expression of thoughts, feelings, or gestures that are sexually based or could reasonably be construed by a patient/client as sexual. All PTs/PTAs are trained and educated to know this kind of behavior is illegal and unethical.

PT and PTAs are trusted and respected by their patients/clients. However, a PT/PTA who accepts or encourages the expression of these feelings through sexual behaviors, or tells a patient sexual involvement is part of physical therapy, violates the therapeutic relationship. This abusive behavior can cause harmful, long-lasting psychological effects to the patient/client.
What to do if you suspect inappropriate conduct

• It is difficult to file a complaint during an upsetting time for you, but filing a complaint is important in order to begin an investigation into the PT/PTA and the surrounding circumstances.
• File a complaint to the appropriate licensing board via the respective state board’s website.
• Your complaint will be investigated and you will be notified of the findings.
• Licensing boards serve to protect the health, safety, and welfare of consumers.
• In addition to filing a complaint with the licensing board, you may need to contact local law enforcement depending on the circumstances.
• You can verify the status of the PT/PTA’s license and complaint history on the licensing board’s website. Use this QR code for links to licensing boards:

What can I expect in a PT session?

• You should be treated with respect and dignity and have your questions answered.
• The physical therapist should explain therapy procedures to you before they happen and get INFORMED CONSENT.
• You should have privacy and appropriate coverage with a gown or drape if the exam requires exposed areas.
• You have the right to ask for a chaperone during physical therapy if it involves a sensitive area for evaluation/treatment.

What is not OK during physical therapy?

• PT/PTA not explaining what procedures they will do and why
• Unwanted physical contact/inappropriate touching/advances
• Being asked to expose areas of the body that are not part of the treatment
• Exchanging sexual favors for treatment
• Excessive out-of-session communication (social media, text, phone, etc.) not related to physical therapy
• Telling sexual jokes or stories
• Dating
• Inviting a patient/client to lunch, dinner, or other social activity

What is informed consent?

• PT/PTAs should clearly explain what will happen during the session, obtain your consent to proceed before beginning, and confirm ongoing consent during treatment sessions.
• You have the right to decline a procedure or stop, refuse, or withdraw from physical therapy services at any time.