

ESD METHOD™ — SESSION FLOW CHART

Somatic + Empathic Regulation Map for Massage & Bodywork Sessions

1. PRE-SESSION PREPARATION (Therapist Centering)

Before greeting the client:

- Ground through slow exhalation
- Soften jaw + shoulders
- Set internal intention: “*Contain, attune, regulate.*”
- Check for your own subtype activation

If dysregulated → **Pause + reset** before beginning intake.

2. CLIENT INTAKE & QUICK SUBTYPE IDENTIFICATION

During the first 2–3 minutes, use micro-cues:

A. Emotional Hypo-Empathy (Type A)

- Flat affect
- Low emotional expression
- Minimal energetic response

B. Emotional Hyper-Empathy (Type B)

- Emotional intensity or nervousness
- Quick shifts in feeling
- Over-responsiveness

C. Cognitive-Dominant (Type C)

- Analytical language

- Explains more than they feel
- Calm but distant

D. Oscillating (Type D)

- Starts “up,” then fades
- Shifts quickly between engaging + withdrawn
- Over-accommodating tone

E. Shutdown (Type E)

- Very still, quiet, withdrawn
- Low response to greetings
- Restricted breath

F. Dark Empathy (Type F)

- Controlled, strategic communication
- Strong boundaries
- Reads you quickly

Once a subtype is identified → follow the relevant branch below.

3. SETTING THE TREATMENT FRAME (Universal Structure)

Use the **ESD Treatment Triad** to set session tone:

1. Somatic Regulation

- Pacing, pressure, rhythm, predictability

2. Empathic Containment

- Your emotional steadiness + limiting merging

3. Attuned Boundaries

- Clarity, gentle structure, emotional safety
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4. SESSION FLOW BY SUBTYPE

TYPE A — Emotional Hypo-Empathy

Goal: gentle activation + embodied awareness

Touch Style: warm, rhythmic, sensory awakening

1. Begin with **slow warm compression**
2. Introduce **varied textures** → stimulate perception
3. Use **tempo changes** to build awareness
4. Offer verbal orientation:
 - “Notice the weight of my hands...”
5. Monitor for dissociation → adjust intensity gently

If they shut down more:

→ Add warmth + broader contact

→ Avoid emotional probing

TYPE B — Emotional Hyper-Empathy

Goal: containment + grounding

Touch Style: slow, heavy, predictable, weighted

1. Begin with **static holds** (sacrum, back, feet)
2. Move in **long, slow, anchored strokes**
3. Maintain **even rhythm**
4. Minimal verbal input
5. Reinforce boundaries:

- “You can let your body rest into the table.”

If emotional flooding occurs:

- Slow even more
 - Add grounding through wide contact
 - Redirect attention to breath or weight
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TYPE C — Cognitive-Dominant Empathy

Goal: embodiment + sensory awareness

Touch Style: sensory awakening + mild variation

1. Begin with **medium pressure** + sensory cues
2. Encourage noticing physical sensation:
 - “See if you can track the temperature change here.”
3. Use **moderate tempo shifts**
4. Integrate **breath-paced movements**
5. Avoid emotional intensity

If they intellectualize:

- Redirect to a specific body area
 - Reduce talking
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TYPE D — Empathic Dysregulation (Oscillating)

Goal: stabilize + create predictable rhythm

Touch Style: consistent, structured, gently anchoring

1. Begin with **midline holds** (cranium, sacrum)
2. Keep rhythm **steady**
3. Use **medium pressure** to anchor
4. Verbal pacing reassurance:
 - “We’ll stay with this pace together.”
5. Watch for shifts (engaged → withdrawn)

If they start oscillating:

- Return to predictable pacing
 - Reduce stimulation
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TYPE E — Empathic Shutdown (Trauma-Linked)

Goal: gentle activation without overwhelm

Touch Style: warm, steady, rhythmic awakening

1. Begin with **broad, warm contact**
2. Add **slow, awakening strokes**
3. Introduce **very small tempo shifts**
4. Invite light awareness:
 - “Notice this area without needing to change anything.”
5. Avoid intensity, speed, or emotional depth

If dissociation signs appear:

- Slight pressure increase
 - Add warmth + grounding
 - Pause and reorient
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TYPE F — Dark Empathy (Strategic/Instrumental)

Goal: structured support + respect autonomy

Touch Style: clear, professional, consistent

1. Begin with **firm, predictable pressure**
2. Maintain **professional distance**
3. Keep communication **succinct + direct**
4. Avoid emotional overtones
5. Give choices to reinforce autonomy

If boundary testing occurs:

- Reinforce structure
- Keep communication clean, neutral

5. SAFETY CHECKPOINTS (Mid-Session)

Check for:

- Breath restriction
- Emotional flooding
- Shutdown or blankness
- Rapid oscillation
- Hypervigilance
- Strategic over-control

If any appear → return to **Somatic Regulation** (slow, predictable, broad contact).

6. CLOSING THE SESSION

All subtypes receive:

- Slow decompression
- Gentle closure strokes
- Clear verbal grounding
- Firm ending boundary

Example closing script:

“Take a moment to notice how your body feels now. When you’re ready, take a slow breath and return to the room.”

7. AFTERCARE BY SUBTYPE

A — Hypo-Empathy:

- Sensory-based awareness practices

B — Hyper-Empathy:

- Grounding, weighted sensations, limit emotional processing

C — Cognitive-Dominant:

- Embodiment exercises, sensory exploration

D — Oscillating:

- Predictable routines, pacing plans

E — Shutdown:

- Gentle activation + movement

F — Dark Empathy:

- Clear structure + autonomy-supporting strategies