

# *Negotiating for BDSM Play & Relationships*

## *Negotiation Master List*

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### **Terms of Consent & Negotiation**

- ★ **Negotiating Style** The first thing you need to decide is which style of negotiation you are engaging in.
  - Opt-in
  - Opt-out
  - Include elements of CNC or resistance
- ★ **Safeword, Safe Signal, Plain Language & Revocation of Consent:** How will you communicate that something is wrong or that you have revoked your consent?
  - Safeword or Signal
    - What is it?
    - What does it mean (stop immediately or check in)
  - Will you use plain language as well, or do you want to be able to say things like “no”, “stop”, etc.
  - Are there other things your partner should look out for? For instance, do you go non-verbal, and what should they do if this happens?
  - If you need to remove your consent during the scene, how will you do that and what should your partner do (untie, stop touching in any way, find your friend, etc)

## Personal Details

★ **Aftercare** You should always ask about aftercare and not assume it will or will not happen. Things have changed over the years. Aftercare never used to be a big thing, but now it's quite common to see people doing aftercare at parties. Both tops and bottoms (or doms and subs) may need or want aftercare, depending on the scene and the individual. There is no right or wrong when it comes to aftercare, only compatibility.

- Do you need to receive or give aftercare?
- What type of aftercare do you need?
- How much aftercare do you need?
- Will you outsource aftercare? (Have a friend or partner who can do aftercare instead of the person you played with.)
- Do you need a call or check in a few days later?

★ **Health Concerns** You don't need to divulge any information you don't want to, but there may be some health or mental health concerns that your partner needs to know about. A bad knee that hurts if you kneel might be a good thing for a dominant to know. A person with breathing or blood sugar issues may want to tell their partner what to look for and what to do in an emergency. A person with anxiety may need reassurance during play. Someone on blood thinners should give a needle top a heads up that there may be a bit more blood than usual. People with disabilities may need to do things a bit differently or may require other accommodations during play that able-bodied people may not need.

Keep in mind that you can talk about the effects of your health or mental health issues without disclosing the reason, if you feel more comfortable doing that.

- Do you have health issues that could affect the scene?
  - How could they affect things?
- Do you have any mental health issues that could affect the scene?
  - How could they affect things?
- If engaging in sexual play, do you have any STIs?
- Do you take any medication that could affect the scene?
  - Is this a temporary medication or a long-term one?
- What warning signs should your partner look for?
- What should they do in an emergency?

- Do you have rescue medication that they should give you?
  - Where is it?
  - How do they administer it? (dose, method, etc)
- What does an emergency that requires medical attention look like?
- Does your partner need to do things to accommodate your physical, mental or emotional needs?
  - What does that look like for you?
- Do you have specific workarounds that you've already figured out for your needs and this type of play?
- Is there any specific equipment that you need during play?
  - Does your partner need to get it for you or operate it in some way?

★ **Level of Experience:** You may wish to discuss how much experience you have in BDSM in general or in the specific activities that you are engaging in. Sometimes this isn't relevant, but sometimes it is. For instance, if it's your first time topping in an activity, you should tell your bottom. An experienced rope bottom is different from tying than an inexperienced one, a top may choose a less strenuous tie or choose to go slow and check in more. While some people may view a lack of experience as a negative, most don't, and some even enjoy being someone's first. Keep in mind that a person who plays once a year for 10 years and a person who plays multiple times per week for 10 years can both say they have 10 years of experience. Finding out how often they've played, under what circumstances and which side of the slash they've played on can be important information.

- What is your general experience in BDSM?
  - Real time or online?
  - Casual play, relationships, professional or client?
- How much experience do you have in this activity?
  - Where did you learn?
  - How often have you done it?
  - Have you ever had any serious incidents while doing this activity? What were the circumstances?
  - How risky or dangerous is this activity vs how much experience you have?

- Will you have a mentor or safety person watching if you're new to a dangerous activity?
- ★ **Relationships** For some people, engaging in BDSM play means being in a relationship. Others enjoy pick-up play and playing without romantic or other relationships. Many people like to play with people they are friends with.
  - Does playing together change the nature of your relationship?
  - Are you or do you want to be involved romantically?
  - Is this a bit of fun between friends?
  - Are you play partners now?
  - Is this pick-up play with no strings attached?
- ★ **Names & Titles** For many people, part of kink is the titles used to refer to each other. These need to be negotiated as much as any activity.
  - Will you use special names for each other or use real names?
  - Do you have a title that you prefer?
    - Master or Mistress
    - Domina or Dominus
    - Sir or Ma'am
    - Daddy or Mommy
    - Fluffy Bunnykins
  - Do you like the idea of stripping a person of their name & identity? How will you refer to them?
    - Number
    - Generic term (slave, come here)
    - Insult
    - Animal name (pig or Fido)
  - If you use these terms outside of play or for extended play, how will you address each other when others are around?
    - Pet names
    - First names
    - Nicknames
    - Other

★ **Sobriety** Each person needs to decide for themselves if playing while under the influence of recreational drugs or alcohol is right for them. Many people prefer to leave the intoxicating substances until after they play, if they indulge at all. It is important to note that intoxication makes consent hazy at best. Some people believe that you can consent to an activity before becoming intoxicated, and that's okay; others believe that intoxication negates consent, and still others believe that you can give consent while intoxicated. There are definitely a lot of nuances around this subject, so make sure you're on the same page.

- Are you okay with recreational drugs or alcohol during a scene?
  - For the top?
  - For the bottom?
  - If you're okay with them, which ones?
    - Alcohol?
    - Marijuana?
    - Hallucinogens?
    - "Hard" drugs like cocaine or heroin?
    - "Party" drugs like MDMA, meth, ketamine, or GHB?
- How much is too much?
  - One drink or a little high?
  - Noticeably intoxicated but still standing?
  - Wasted?
- Is this a planned state as part of the play?
  - Do you want to include alcohol or drug use as part of the scene?

★ **Triggers & Trauma** Talking about past trauma is not what most of us want to do before starting a scene, but it can be important if you have any triggers that your partner should know about. I will often tell a casual partner about a trigger (if there is a chance that it could come up), but not the underlying trauma that caused it. If a partner is more intimate, a good friend or a romantic partner, I will likely tell them about the underlying trauma at a time when it is appropriate. How you handle these things is up to you and what you feel comfortable with.

- Do you have any triggers that could come up in the course of play?

- What should your partner do if a trigger happens?
  - Talk you down
  - Hold you
  - Leave you to process, but stay close by
  - Something else
- What should your partner do if they hit a hidden landmine (trigger)?
- What does it look like if you are triggered?

## Scene Details

★ **Overall Feel** I wasn't sure how to sum up these questions other than the overall feel of the scene. These can be very useful when people want to achieve a certain feeling but are not sure how to get there or what to do. It looks at the end result of the scene and then sorts out the finer details, rather than starting with activities.

These questions can be particularly useful for new people or those who have established trust and want to have an element of surprise using pre-negotiated activities.

- How do you want to feel during the scene?
- How do you want to feel after the scene?
- What do you want to get out of the scene?

★ **Type of Scene** For many people who are doing opt-out style negotiation or who have established trust and know which activities their partner enjoys, choosing a more general activity or activities can be an effective way to negotiate. You can pick what general categories of kink will be involved and go from there.

- Bondage
- Impact
- Service
- Sensation
- Sensory deprivation
- Primal
- Sensual
- Humiliation/degradation

★ **Play Style** While style can go hand in hand with the activities chosen, sometimes it helps to define what style you will use first. You can combine styles if you like to create the right mood for you and your partner. If I know that I want to do a strict, punishment-style scene, I can put away the feather and vibrator; it's time to break out the iconic whips and chains!

A special note for brats and those who engage in bratty behaviour. There is a wide range of what people consider bratting, so be very clear about what you mean by brat. Gentle teasing, butt wiggling, and playful banter? Straight up SAM (smart ass masochist)? Mouthy, hides the toys, embarrasses the top or dominant in public? Everyone has different preferences and tolerances. This is one situation where the top or dominant needs their own safeword.

- Bratty
- Strict
- Playful
- High Protocol
- Funishment
- Punishment style (or actual punishment)
- Nurturing
- Aloof and unfeeling
- Objectification
- Goddess/God worship
- Interrogation/institutional

★ **Warm Up & Endings** How you start and finish a scene can have a big impact on the feel of it and how much everyone enjoys it.. For instance, warm-ups can help get the bottom ready for more intense play and give the top time to get into the right headspace.

- Do you want to do a warm-up?
  - What type, how long?
- Signs you're ready to move on to more intense play?
- How do you like to end a scene?
  - At high intensity
  - "10 more strong strikes and we are done!"

- “Once this inverted, single limb suspension is finished, I will take you down.”
- Cool down (the opposite of the warm-up)
- Playing until the safeword is used or to tears

## Scene Specifics

★ **Specific Details:** There are a number of practical things you will want to talk about before starting any scene. Some may need to be talked about each time, while others will depend on the situation.

- Who is involved in the scene?
- Are others allowed to join during the scene?
  - Who decides who is to join?
  - What will they be allowed to do?
  - Will one of you negotiate with them individually?
  - Will they be vetted beforehand?
  - Will those others be involved in the negotiation formally?
- What roles will each person play?
  - Who will be the top and who will be the bottom?
  - Will you switch during play?
  - Will you fight for control?
  - Do you have already defined roles?
- Will there be elements of role-play?
- Where and when will the scene happen?
  - Specific time?
  - Sometimes at the play party, the top will grab the bottom?
  - Will the scene start when one walks through the door?
- How long will the scene last?
  - Will it be a specific amount of time or until you are tired?
  - Will you stay in roles for a day/weekend/week/etc, and play intermittently during that time?
- Will there be a power exchange?
  - Dominant and submissive vs top and bottom
  - How much authority will the dominant have?

- In what areas will the dominant have authority?
    - How long will that authority last?
  - Will there be resistance play or elements of CNC?
    - What does this mean to you?
    - What areas can be “forced”
  - What are each person’s hard and soft limits?
    - Will there be any pushing or testing of limits?
  - Are there any warning signs that things may not be going well (other than the safeword/signal)
  - Do you need to negotiate specific activities? What are they?
    - Do you have a checklist filled out?
    - Do you want to negotiate each activity?
- ★ **Risks** To get informed consent, we need to be aware of the reasonable and predictable risks of a situation. Some of these risks will depend on the skill of the top and the skill of the bottom in some cases. A needle scene with someone who is new and uneducated in asepsis is much more dangerous than the same scene with someone who has had professional training and years of experience.
- ★ **Marks** I mentioned needing to negotiate marks earlier. For some people, marks are no big deal; others love them and don’t feel satisfied unless they are covered in bruises, still others don’t like them or can’t have them seen by others.
  - Do you have strong feelings for or against marks?
    - Do you need marks/bruises to feel satisfied?
    - Are marks a hard no?
    - What happens if you are marked accidentally?
    - Is your aversion to marks so strong that you will forgo certain activities to avoid them?
  - Do you need to keep marks in areas of the body that will be hidden?
    - What parts are they?
    - Ass only?
    - Covered by a bathing suit
    - Covered by shorts & T-shirt?
    - Covered by pants and a sweater?
  -

- Do you want to engage in activities that could result in facial bruising or marks?
- How do you feel about permanent marks (ex., Scars from piercing)?
- ★ **The Face** I tend to negotiate any activity which involves the face separately from other activities. For instance, if I have consent to do an impact scene, I don't assume I can slap my partner in the face. People can have very strong, visceral reactions to things happening to their face, so if you want to include things like facials or slapping, make sure to include them in your negotiations.
- ★ **Humiliation or Degradation** For a lot of people, humiliation and degradation are a part of BDSM. For others, they have strong feelings (good or bad) about these activities. Before you go calling someone a worthless worm, make sure you have negotiated it.
  - The difference between humiliation and degradation for you
  - Verbal humiliation/degradation?
  - Situational?
  - Public?
  - What is humiliating or degrading for you?
    - Which ones are good?
    - What to stay away from
- ★ **Bondage** Like humiliation, many people look at bondage as an obvious thing to be included. Others do not. Make sure you negotiate bondage if that's something you want to do in a scene.
  - Physical or mental bondage?
    - Rope
    - Restraints
    - Leather
    - Fabric
    - Zip ties or police/military restraints
    - Mummification
  - Breast or genital bondage
  - Predicament bondage

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★ **Sex and Sexual Activity** Once again, we come to a subject that many people feel is an inherent part of BDSM. Even if you agree to no sex, there are many different definitions of what that means exactly. Don't leave things up to chance; if there are activities that you do not want to engage in, make sure you make it very clear. Also, be clear if you are okay with giving or receiving specific actions.

- Safer sex precautions
  - Condoms on toys
  - Condoms on penis
  - Dental dams
  - Gloves
  - Plastic wrap on toys
  - Single-use or single-partner toys
- STI status?
- Penetration
  - Giving or receiving
  - PIV (penis in vagina)
  - PIA (penis in asshole)
  - Ass to mouth
  - Manual
  - Toys
  - strapon
  - Dildo
  - Plugs
  - Other objects
  - Speculums & medical toys
- Oral sex & manual stimulation
  - Giving or receiving
  - Cum in mouth
  - Swallowing
- Squirting
- Rimming (anal-oral stimulation)
- Hand-jobs
- Fingering

- Sexual touch or caressing
  - Over clothing
  - Under clothing
  - Genitals
  - Breasts
  - Other areas
- Kissing
  - Mouth (open or closed)
  - Body
  - Genitals
  - Over clothing
  - Under clothing
  - Other areas
- Dry humping
- Other sexual activities

★ **Crying & Catharsis** Sometimes in BDSM, crying happens. Sometimes we want it to happen, other times it's a bad situation. Talking about it and knowing what to do when or if it happens is important. If you are going for a cathartic scene, you should be specific about how that works for you.

- Are you looking for cathartic play?
  - What does that look like for you?
- When you get catharsis, what should your partner do?
- Is it likely that you will cry?
  - Is crying a sign you need to stop?
  - What do you want your partner to do for you?
  - Do you want to keep going despite crying?

★ **Other Needs** while this was a long list of things to consider, it is by no means exhaustive. Do you have other needs that you should address during negotiation? Is there anything else that you want your partner to know?

## Relationship Dynamics

★ **Dynamic** There are a number of details about your dynamic that you should discuss. These may not happen right away, but they should be discussed as eventual goals, if that is what you're looking for. For instance, a 24/7 TPE arrangement doesn't happen overnight, but partners should be aware of it as a goal to work towards from the start.

- What timeline for authority transfer will you have?
  - 24/7
  - Weekends or similar?
  - Bedroom only?
- How much authority will you transfer?
  - TPE?
  - Only certain areas?
  - Sex & play only?
- What style of dynamic will you have?
  - Owner & Pet
  - Master/Mistress & Slave
  - Dominant & Submissive?
  - Primal?
  - DD/lg or variants?

★ **Monogamous, Polyamorous, Open, or Ish?** Deciding on whether you will date, fuck or play with other people is an important point to discuss early on.

- Monogamy only
  - Monogamy in the beginning, open later
  - Monogomish, playing with others is okay, but no sex
- Open
  - Swinging
  - Sex but not relationships
- Polyamorous
  - Hierarchical
  - Relationship anarchy
  - Closed group dynamic
- Open or Poly for switching roles only

- ★ **Punishment Dynamic** Are you interested in having a punishment dynamic? If so, what type are you looking for?
  - Will you engage in domestic discipline style punishments & maintenance spankings?
  - Will you have a brat & funishment dynamic?
  - No punishment dynamic
- ★ **Contact Requirements** People can be very different when it comes to how much contact they prefer in a relationship. This can be a compatibility issue if your needs are drastically different.
- ★ **Ritual & Protocol** Not everyone wants to have rules and rituals in their relationship. You should decide how much of a role, if any, these elements will play for you
  - High protocol
  - Relaxed protocol day to day, high protocol for kink events or play
  - Relaxed protocol
  - No protocol
- ★ **Consent Style** Will you be granting blanket consent or engaging in a CNC dynamic? Even if it doesn't start out this way, if that's the goal, it should be talked about early.
  - CNC or blanket consent
    - Hard limits allowed?
  - Does saying no end the relationship?
  - Saying no triggers renegotiation of the relationship?
  - Automatic consent in certain areas
  - Negotiate long-term
  - Negotiate as you go
- ★ **Contract** Not everyone has a formal contract. Many find them less than useful and a bit silly. Many others like the idea of a contract and find it is a good way to keep track of rules, obligations and agreements.
- ★ **Money** To what degree will the dominant partner control finances, if at all? Will the submissive manage the money, making sure bills are paid on time and consult the dominant before spending a certain amount? Will the submissive's paycheque

be taken, so they are left with a modest weekly allowance? Will finances be combined or kept separate?

- ★ **In Sickness and Health** While we all want to believe that we will be young and healthy forever, it's not realistic. Having an idea of how to handle things like short-term sickness, long-term illness, and disability is important. If finances are combined, how will that be affected if one partner dies?
- ★ **Children** First, let's get this out of the way: NEVER involve minors in your kink dynamic. That said, will you have children? Will one partner have more authority over the kids than the other? If you already have kids, how will they fit into the household?
- ★ **Lifestyle** Are your lifestyles compatible? If one is a neat freak and the other a slob, will it work out? Who will win? Do you have similar life goals? Where do you see yourself in 5 years, 10 years? How does the dynamic play into that dream?