

NYCSAFERSPACES HANDBOOK

A resource for negotiation,
affirmative consent, and
building safer spaces.

Introduction

When playing with BDSM, kink, public sex, etc. you are playing with extremely complicated and dangerous things. The only way that works is if all the people you are playing with are on the same page and consent to what ever is happening. This guide is an attempt to educate those new and old to kink events on some best practices for how to navigate the intricacies of play.

In 2016 a group of people from various kink and sex scenes in New York City came together to try and pool our resources and shared experiences and build a document with best practices and advice for making spaces and events safer. This booklet includes some of that information. All of the information that group created can be found at nycsaferspaces.com.

In this guide you will find sections on:

Affirmative Consent A short explanation of one of the most core concepts for a safe space, a space scene, and a safe event.

Bill of Rights Ten rights everyone should have and should respect in a safe space.

Negotiation Guide A starter guide for negotiating a scene (an instance of kink or sexual play) with someone.

Traffic Light System A description of a commonly used safeword system that many find helpful.

Code of Conduct A breakdown of obstacles and best practices for building a culture of consent.

Resources A list of some resources that were used to create this document as well as places to go for more information

Affirmative Consent

Affirmative consent is a knowing, voluntary, and mutual decision among all participants to engage in kink and/or sexual activity. Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create clear permission regarding willingness to engage in the activity.

Silence or lack of resistance, in and of itself, does not demonstrate consent. The definition of consent does not vary based upon a participant's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Bill of Rights

1. You have the right to be treated with respect and made to feel welcome in this space and community.
2. You have the right to be addressed by your true name and gender pronoun.
3. You have the right to your body, bodily autonomy, and personal boundaries.
4. You have the right to consent. Consent is sacrosanct in this space and community.
5. You have the right to change your mind and/or revoke consent at any time.
6. You have the right to your feelings; they are yours and no one may diminish or invalidate them.
7. You have the right to ask questions and request clarification.
8. You have the right to participate at a level of sobriety or responsible non-sobriety. If you partake in substances, you have the right to the same respect, safety, and consent as if you were sober.
9. You have the right to seek comfort and safety. Designated people [insert names/roles] have been assigned to facilitate your comfort and safety, and you may approach them at any time.
10. You have the right to fair and evenhanded judgment if you report a consent violation or are reported for a consent violation. You also have the choice to remain anonymous throughout this process.

Negotiation Guide

DEFINITIONS

(FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS SECTION)

Top The person who DOES something to the other person/people. It is possible for both partners to have top roles in the same scene.

Bottom The person who has things DONE TO them by another.

Switching When the bottom and top exchange roles as a component of the scene.

Limit A restriction on the conduct consented to over the course of the scene.

Scene A single incident of play, including aftercare.

Safe words Words or phrases used to communicate during a scene, including those which trigger the immediate end of the scene.

DM Dungeon Monitor, a person charged with supervising a kink event. (If there are not clear indicators who this is, ask a host.)

NEGOTIATION GUIDE

When negotiating a scene, especially with a new play partner, the following considerations should be made, at minimum.

L – LOGISTICS

Who will be involved in or watch the scene?

What will we do?

Will bondage or restraint be used?

Will there be any sexual contact?

What actions are prohibited (hard limits)?

What actions can only be done in certain conditions (soft limits)?

Where will we play?

When will we play and for how long?

How hard will we play, after how much warm up?

I – INDIVIDUAL ROLES

What will be the roles of each person involved in the scene, including spectators?

Who will be top/bottom?

Will there be an element of dominance/submission?

Is playfulness/silliness welcome or do we want to be serious?
Will there be any role play? What roles do we want to take on?
Is resistance/force desired?
Should the scene create a feeling of safety vs feeling of risk?
Is switching during the scene welcome?
Is the bottom expected to follow the directions of the top?
Will a collar or other symbolic clothing/adornments be used?
What should we call each other during the scene?

M – MARKS OR OTHER LASTING EFFECTS

Where on the body can marks be left?
What kind of marks can be left?
What about other lasting effects, like cut hair, soreness, or visible limping?
Can any permanent marks or alterations be purposefully made?

I – INJURIES AND ILLNESS

Is anyone prone to seizures or other sudden medical issues?
Does anyone have any communicable diseases?
Does anyone have any injuries which might interfere with play?
Does anyone have allergies relevant to the play?
Does anyone have special needs in an emergency (ie, where is your inhaler)?
Is anyone on medication which might affect their physical responses?

T – TRIGGERS OR OTHER LIMITS

Are there any words or actions which could cause unexpected or severe emotional reactions?
Do you have any mental health problems which may be relevant to the type of play?
Is deception of any kind allowed during play?
Are any negative emotions going to be purposefully stimulated?
Is anyone under the influence of any mind-altering substances, medical or otherwise?

S – SAFETY AND SAFE WORDS

What training/experience do the players have?

Is the top qualified for the type of play they are doing?

Does the bottom think they can handle the play?

Do anyone have first aid training in case of an emergency (in the scene or nearby, like a DM)?

Are all necessarily tools and supplies readily accessible like

- Keys for all locks,
- Sharps/biohazard container
- Emergency supplies, such as safety sheers, towel, etc
- First aid supplies
- Phone to call emergency services

How will you communicate during the scene?

Is plain language acceptable?

What safewords will be used?

If there could be a gag used, are there non-verbal signals which have the power of a safeword?

What are the specific safewords meant to communicate?

What aftercare do the participants require?

What follow-up communications or actions will happen?

Adapted from the LIMIT system, created by Cross (cross@xcbdsm.com) on **XCBDSM.com**.

Traffic Light System

A commonly used safeword system is the Traffic Light System. It is a way to have three distinct words to quickly communicate where you are in a scene. Red, meaning stop. Yellow, meaning slow down. Green, meaning keep going.

Though often used, they aren't universal. If you want to use this system as a safeword, talk to your play partner about what exactly the terms are going to mean during your scene.

In general if someone says "red" at a play party, it is accepted to mean stop or safeword.

Here are what the three words often mean:

GREEN

Green often means that everything is good. You are comfortable in the scene, can take more of whatever your partner is doing, and are able, willing, and ready for your partner to continue or increase the intensity of the scene.

YELLOW

Yellow often means that things are okay, but getting intense. You have not reached your limit, but you are getting close. It is a sign to slow down what ever you are doing or change to another act. If someone yellows, you want to check in with them again in a few minutes to see if they are more or less comfortable.

RED

Red means that you have reached your limit with whatever is happening. It can also mean you are hurt, triggered, your consent had been violated, or for any other reason need to stop whatever is happening. If someone says red, all people involved in the scene need to stop the scene immediately and tend to whomever said red. Ask what they need, take them out of any rope or other bondage they are in, give them air, water, and what ever else they need.

REMEMBER

The only way a kink scene works is if everyone communicates and affirmatively consents. Let your partner(s) know where you are in a scene. Check in with each other often. If someone ignores any safeword/yellow/red, ask a DM or host for help.

Code of Conduct

OVERVIEW

At its core, a Code of Conduct is about the culture of an event. Essentially, culture concerns the environment, the values and behavior of its host(s) and attendees, and the rules of engagement when participating (or not). By encouraging attendees to read and agree to the Code of Conduct before an event, a host may effectively manage the expectations of guests and set the tone and culture. Over time and consistent practice, regular guests may adopt and align to this prevailing culture. In turn, these guests will model and thus extend the culture to new attendees. By encouraging a Code of Conduct—especially one in which consent is at the fore—a happy and healthy culture can take root and thrive at events and play spaces.

CULTURE OF COURTESY AND RESPECT

- Be kind, considerate, welcoming, and gracious. We are creating a safe and inviting atmosphere for sexual play, and that starts with how everyone feels *before* sexy times.
- Leave your surroundings in a state of order and cleanliness
- Please no smoking indoors or other venue-specific rules
- Practice safer sex that is consistent with your needs
- Honor others' gender pronouns, gender identities, and gender expressions
- Voyeurism is participation; the more intensely you watch, the farther away you should be
- Exercise discretion: do not take photos or videos at the event and never publish its location on social or any other media
- Exercise confidentiality: guard the identity and respect the anonymity of fellow guests and the deeply intimate acts you have shared with them (i.e. don't kiss and tell)

A NOTE TO HOSTS

This culture is a two-way street—treat your guests with the utmost courtesy and respect and they will return in kind, as well as follow suit. You set the tone. Also, be mindful of the privilege you carry as a host. You might be inclined to make requests (sexual or otherwise) of your guests, but realize that they may feel a certain obligation or pressure to please you.

SAFER SEX AND DISCLOSURE

Understand that STIs are an inevitable reality when engaging in sex. (Yes, really.) As such, we aim to build a culture that diminishes the shame and taboo associated with STIs and normalizes the experience of contracting and living with STIs. This normalization can also help minimize the risk of contracting an STI, as an informed community is less likely to unknowingly spread an STI (ignorance and shame do the opposite). The first steps in this paradigm shift entail educating yourself and talking about it.

Education:

- Get a full battery of STI tests regularly; we recommend every 3 to 6 months
- Become and stay knowledgeable on the subject of STIs
- Know your comfort level when it comes to playing with those with STIs
- Be realistic: if you need an absolutely pristine human with whom to play, understand that a play party is not the most likely place to meet a virgin unicorn

Communication:

- Be honest and open about your status *before* play
- If someone discloses their status to you, be kind and gracious; recognize that they are vulnerable in this moment and that they're showing you respect by giving you information that will help you make informed decisions
- In the event that you contract an STI at a play party and do not know how to get in touch with past partners, contact the host(s)– they will be helpful and discrete
- If you contract an STI and do not feel able to notify past partners personally, consider using an anonymous partner notification service.

CULTURE OF CONSENT

- We operating on a model of Affirmative Consent. These are its core principles:
- Yes means yes
- Consent is positive and attractive
- The absence of no does not mean yes
- A yes to one activity is not a yes to another or future activity
- It is much easier to say yes/no if you are aware of and comfortable with stating your boundaries

- Should you receive a “no,” accept it graciously; do not devalue, criticize, pester or coerce
- A yes can be withdrawn at any time and for any reason
- A yes can be compromised by intoxicants

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Although you may arrive at a party with the hope and expectation of having sex and/or experience a certain level or type of sexual play, understand that this may not happen for you tonight, and that’s ok. Also keep in mind:

- Consent is not presumed; attendance to this party does not imply anything
- People can be at different places at different times regarding sex; they may not be feeling it with you but they might with someone else
- There is absolutely no expectation for you to perform or engage in any kind of play

COMMUNICATION LEVELS

Consent may be expressly stated through verbal communication or understood through nonverbal communication and/or previous agreements. When you are at an event and observing others, you may not be able to decipher the relationship or communication style between partners. This is why it’s important to communicate about communication, aka meta-communication. See also: How To Talk To Your Partner About Sex.

CHECKING IN

It is essential to know that consent is a voluntary, mutual agreement and it is dynamic. As such, consent to any sexual act or prior consensual sexual act(s) does not necessarily constitute consent to any other or future sexual act. Additionally, consent may be withdrawn at any time and for any reason. Everyone has the right to change their mind. Because consent can shift and change, we encourage you to check in with yourself (e.g.: Am I still enjoying this? Do I want to stop or do something else?) as well as your partner(s) (e.g.: Are you enjoying this? Can I [insert different play than the one being conducted]?). While this may initially seem awkward or embarrassing, rest assured that everyone has felt awkward and embarrassed navigating this communication. It gets easier! What’s more: it’s how we do things here and we think it’s positive and attractive!

A NOTE ON INTOXICANTS

Drugs and alcohol may lower inhibitions, thus rendering one's consent different from sober consent. Also note that certain drugs, whether alone or mixed with alcohol, can greatly lower one's inhibitions. As such, an intoxicated person's ability to consent may be compromised, and we strongly suggest assuming you do not have consent in such cases.

Resources

This document is only a start, there is so much more information out there. I tried to put as much as I could in something inexpensive to produce and easy to distribute at parties. Here are some other resources about consent, safety, and help:

nycsaferespaces.com A collection of documents about safer spaces, built by a NYC based restorative justice group.

restorativejustice.org The Centre for Justice & Reconciliation is a program of Prison Fellowship International. Its mission is to develop and promote restorative justice in criminal justice systems around the world.

loveisrespect.org strives to be a safe, inclusive space for young people to access information and get help in an environment that is designed specifically for them.

surviverape.org a resource for those who have been harmed to get help.

askingforwhatyouwant.com Insightful gems about boundaries, clear communication, and your tender, fierce desire

ncsfreedom.org The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) was formed in 1997 by a small group led by Susan Wright under the auspices of the New York SM Activists. The goal was to fight for sexual freedom and privacy rights for all adults who engage in safe, sane and consensual behavior.

You can download this document as a PDF at: bit.ly/saferhandbook

Notes