

BDSM Safety

Introduction

“We are talking here about an activity in which it's common for two people to go off alone together, and for one of them to tie the other very securely and then proceed to beat them with various blunt instruments. Allow me to suggest the radical notion that doing this could be dangerous.” – Jay Wiseman

Life is not without risk, and our lifestyle even more so. Everyday we risk exposure, injury, emotional damage, but we accept those risks. Learning how to be safer and deal with possible problems is a major undertaking not to be ignored.

There are four main types of emergencies encountered in the lifestyle:

- Behavioral – Involve possible violence, criminal, or other mentally unstable behaviors on someone's part.
- Environmental – Involve power failure, fire, heat, cold, snow, rain, earthquakes, etc.
- Medical – Involve medical conditions like heart attacks or seizures, or trauma injuries.
- Exposure – Involve someone, either on purpose or inadvertently, exposing or “outing” someone in the lifestyle.

While we may not be able to prevent these things from happening, we can prepare for and have plans in place to deal with the possible outcomes from them.

We should all be prepared for these emergencies, and trained to the best we can manage to deal with them.'

And always remember, look to your own safety first, you cannot help anyone if you become another victim. Use safety equipment and proceed in a safe manner.

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Emotional Safety

Pain is not always physical, sometimes it is in your head or your heart. And while physical pain heals quickly, emotional pain is slow to heal and leaves lasting scars.

Erotic Power Exchange relationships are based on trust, love and respect, if you are looking for a long term relationship or just playing for a session, the emotional aspects do enter into what it is that we do.

- Be honest, with yourself and with others. If you are not looking for an emotional connection, don't say you are looking for a 24/7 relationship.
- While many in the lifestyle are married to vanilla partners, there are emotional issues to deal with for married people who are cheating on their spouse, make sure the spouse knows.
- Never be ashamed to admit when you don't know something, or to ask questions of those who are more experienced.
- Do not reveal too much about your personal life to people, this leads to heartache and gossip.
- Heed warnings people give you. Take into account it is someone's opinion, but be forewarned.
- If something does not feel right, stop it.
- Don't allow yourself to get dragged into cliques or gossip circles, it might seem fun for a while, but it will always come back to haunt you later when they turn on you.
- Be yourself, trust your instincts, often your subconscious will know we are in danger well before we do.
- No one can tell you what is or is not right for you, only you will be able to determine that.
- If you are dealing with self-esteem issues, humiliation play is likely not for you and you may want to go slower into relationships to prevent becoming dependent on your partner.
- Many bottoms are looking for a protector figure, this can and does lead to dependency relationships.

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Warning signs & Red flags

- Is the other person domineering (there is a difference between domineering and dominant) or bullying?
- Does the other person seem to be hiding something? Do they avoid answering reasonable questions?
- They have no lifestyle references or friends in the lifestyle you can speak to about them.
- Are they inconsistent in what they write or say? Do they contradict themselves?
- Are they presumptuous about the relationship? Do they expect complete submission from a stranger? Are they ready to collar you and move into your home on your first meeting?
- Do they seem more interested in sex than you are? Does it seem like they want cyber sex from the beginning when you're looking for something else?
- Do they respect your concern about safety or do they belittle your precautions and try to coerce you?
- Do they try to isolate you from friends, family, and other people in the lifestyle?
- Do they have nothing nice to say about past partners?
- Do they understand that cyber is more fantasy than real time is?
- Do they use/abuse drugs or alcohol?
- Do they seem a perfect match? Maybe too perfect? Remember, bottoms outnumber tops, any top who wants a long term relation has one, or has hidden issues.

John Edward Robinson AKA “slavemaster” presented himself as a divorced millionaire master in need of a woman to care for his invalid father. He was still married to his wife of 38 years, his father was dead, and his financial empire, like the exclusive "International Council of Masters" of which he claimed to be a member, was all smoke and mirrors.

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Online D/s

Even online there are dangers, both to tops and bottoms alike. We like to think online is safer, but with the realities of stalkers and predators, and the emotional damages we can suffer or cause, online is just as real a danger as in person.

- Do your homework, this means study up on who you are talking to, learn what is and is not acceptable.
- Don't answer every e-mail or IM, just because someone claims to be a master, dominant, top, submissive, slave or bottom online, does not make it real, and taking abuse or harassment from someone is nothing you **have** to do.
- When you first enter a new chat room, don't talk for a little while, just observe, and view profiles. When you do speak, don't identify what or who you are, just make polite conversation. Show them respect and they will respect you.
- Never give out your personal information in a public chat room, you never know who is watching.
- Never give out your personal information to someone you have just begun talking to and have not checked into.
- Discreetly ask around for references or people who know the people you are interested in. While there may be bad blood to cause some to say bad things, if multiple people say bad things, there may be some truth to it.
- If someone wishes to speak with you on the phone, and you are not sure if you trust them, get their number and disable caller-id information before you call, keep the call brief and friendly.
- Do not move into meeting in person too quickly, even if they are local, get to know them and check references.
- If someone does not want you talking to others about them, ask yourself why, usually they have something to hide.
- If you talk to someone long enough to give them personal information and they won't give theirs, ask yourself why.
- Always remember there are predators online.

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First Time Meetings

OK, so you have been talking to someone, maybe you met them in a chat room, a personal ad or however you got in contact, now it is time to meet, what can you do to be safer?

- Set up the meeting well in advance, this gives both people ample time to arrange safety nets and to be sure of the location.
- Make your own arrangements, if you are traveling, make your own hotel reservation, and do not tell the other person where you will be staying.
- Do not plan any play or sex on a first meeting, while some contact is normal, a first meeting is to talk and get to know one another, if things go well there will plenty of time for play and sex later.
- Arrange the first meeting in a public place, like a restaurant or mall, somewhere a lot of people are.
- The meeting should take place during daylight hours.
- Arrange safe calls with someone you trust, a call as you are arriving and another as you are leaving at the minimum, preferably some during the meeting time as well. Do remember to make your calls, unless you want the police called to your location.
- If you have a good friend, bring them along, there is safety in numbers.
- Don't leave your food, drink, or purse unattended.
- Let several friends know who you are meeting, where and when, make sure they have accurate descriptions of yourself and the person you are meeting.
- Arrange a "Danger" phrase with a friend, if you call them and say the word, it means you need help, make it something innocent like "How is your son doing?" for a friend with no children.
- Be honest, if you don't feel a connection, let them know.
- Have a good time, but be safe, if things work out, there is always tomorrow for more.
- Make sure when you leave that you are not followed.

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Negotiations

Negotiations is one of our most important safety tools, it allows us to know more about what to expect from our partner. It allows us to discuss limits, goals, desires, and past issues.

Negotiations can be very short and to the point, if you are at a party and see someone with a flogger you may walk up and say “I would like you to flog me on my back with that flogger. I can handle medium levels of pain. My safe word is red.” Negotiations can also be long and drawn out over days, weeks or even months.

Some negotiations use checklists of various BDSM activities allowing the top and bottom to list out their desires, limits and experience in a concise and complete manner.

Negotiations for more than a simple session should include:

- Safe words, if any are to be used.
- Allergies (latex allergies are a major one)
- Medical history (including medications)
- Emotional history, fears, and landmines
- Experience (Be honest)
- Hard limits
- Soft limits
- Actual mentoring or training
- Goals and desires of the session
- Fantasies
- Sex – What level, if any will be involved?
- “Deal” breakers, these are things that one person has to have, and the other is opposed to, it happens, move on.
- Aftercare – What if any is needed or will be provided?

Above all, be honest, if you don't tell your partner what you expect or what you have problems with, how can you expect them to know?

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Safe Words

Safe words are a word or phrase a bottom uses to indicate the session either needs to stop or slow down, they are arranged prior to playing, and should be respected when used. If a top ignores a safe word, run, don't walk, away.

Some do not agree that safe words are useful, the words "No" and "Stop" work well enough. The only time a safe word itself is really needed is during a "force" type of session, where the bottom may want to play at resisting. A skilled top should be able to read the bottom well enough to know when they need to stop, but sometimes they do not see the signs.

Safe words are usually more important early in a relationship than later, they help establish trust between the top and bottom. They allow things to progress to levels that may push boundaries. As a relationship matures, they will become less useful as the top learns more about the bottom's desires and tolerances.

If you know you will be or may be gagged or unable to speak, a safe "gesture" should be arranged as well.

Using a safe word is **not** a failure, a bottom should never be ashamed to use their safe word, sometimes things are just not right and need to be corrected. Sometimes your body reacts differently to different stimuli.

For the tops, do not punish the bottom for using their safe word, this is a useful communication tool, and if you punish them, they will not feel safe using it to let you know when they are having difficulty.

Remember, safe words do not make you safe, you are only as safe as the top makes you, if they do not honor the safe word, what good does it do you?

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First Session Safety

Before you play for the first time, it is a good idea to really get to know the person you will be playing with. Think long and hard about what you expect and desire from the play.

- List your hard and soft limits for the other person to see, yes tops have limits. Hard limits are the things you will not do, soft limits are things you might do, but prefer not to.
- Arrange a safe call, just like a first meeting, a first session is a time that a safe call should be done, often a first session will be at someone's home, which is a potentially dangerous place. Make sure your safe call knows where you will be, including a motel room number if you are at a motel.
- Tops, have safety equipment and phone numbers for local emergency services ready, sometimes a bottom will have an unexpected reaction to something.
- Keep your first session light, you can always make something more intense later, but it is difficult to back down if you go too far initially.
- Do not attempt something you have no experience or training doing without proper supervision.
- If you choose to use safe words, keep the simple, like "red" for stop, and "yellow" for slow down. For a first session, you can simply use the word "stop" or "no more", a force session where resistance is normal, is not really a good first session, it would be better saved for when you know each other more.
- Do not do full bondage in a first session, the bottom should always feel they can get away if they need to.
- If at any point you feel uncomfortable, stop, get dressed and talk it out, play can always wait until the issues are dealt with. If you still feel uncomfortable after talking, leave.
- Bring a condom, if things progress to sex, make sure you have one, this is not the man's responsibility, it is both partner's responsibility.

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Aftercare

Aftercare is every bit as important, and in some cases more important than the actual play. BDSM sessions can be exhausting, depleting the bottom's internal resources. As a result, frequently the bottom requires emotional support, comfort, reassurances, and/or physical tenderness. Along with this, they may experience everything from exhilaration to emotional trauma.

Depending on the participants and the intensity of the session, anything from blankets, to juice, to chocolate may be needed after the session. Touching, comforting and cuddling are also major factors in aftercare.

Aftercare in its most simple form is just being there with your partner for a sufficient time period that they feel safe and no longer feel the need to cling to you. It is equally important to recognize that aftercare is for both the Dominant and the submissive. If either person leaves too soon then their partner may feel abandonment or loss far exceeding the apparent parameters of the interaction

Aftercare may include a review or debriefing of the activities from experiences of both the top and the bottom. How soon this occurs, after such a session will vary.

Why aftercare is often ignored:

- Very little is written about it in the “major” texts.
- Unlike play, techniques vary from person to person.
- At a party, one or both people may be in a hurry to get to another partner or session.
- It is more intimate, and some have trouble there.
- Lack of knowledge, many think the session is just the play.

Good news though, aftercare can be improved by simply caring about the person you play with.

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Bondage Safety

- Be respectful that bondage has inherent risks.
- Make sure your rope is in excellent condition.
- Have a safe word and a safe gesture set up ahead of time.
- Know your bottom's physical condition & health issues (Surgeries, bone issues, breathing and cardiac issues, etc).
- Know that once the bottom is bound, safety is up to the top, this is a major exchange of power.
- **Never** play when you are not at your best, be that from lack of sleep, drugs, alcohol, etc.
- **Never** put rope around the front of the neck.
- **Never** leave someone in bondage alone.
- Tie the wrists and ankles last, these areas are most prone to having issues, prolonged compression can cause nerve damage or numbness.
- Be constantly aware of the bottom's breathing.
- Use shorter ropes, this allows more options in emergencies.
- Plan, plan some more, and go over it again just for the fun of it before you begin.
- Plan for the worst case.
- Make sure to have something handy to cut the ropes, ropes are much easier to replace than your bottom is. EMT shears work for this, but unless they are sharp, this will be work.
- Leave your ego at the door, do not attempt anything you are not well trained in, leave advanced bondage and suspension for those who know what they are doing.

Aftercare after bondage is important, often when the ropes come off, the bottom will be cold, rope may not seem warm, but it is, so have a blanket ready. Massaging the tied areas can also help restore circulation to the areas that were bound.

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Impact Play Safety

A great deal of BDSM involves impact play in some form, be that spanking, flogging, whipping, caning, or even slapping and punching. Done properly this can be very erotic, and lead to a great time for the top and bottom. Done incorrectly, it can lead to a really bad time, injury or worse.

- Do **NOT** attempt any form of heavy impact play without knowing what you are doing.
- Do **NOT** strike with a closed fist.
- Make sure your toys are in good repair.
- **NEVER** do true impact play on the face, head, neck, finger, toes or over skin that is healing.
- Do **NOT** slap the face unless you know what to expect, some people react violently to face slapping.
- Do not **accidentally** “wrap” when flogging or whipping.
- Remember there may be an emotional component at play, the idea of being “beaten” can trigger the bottom emotionally.
- Practice until you are good, then practice some more, before you attempt impact play on a live subject.

Areas suitable for “very light” impact play: face (light slaps only), palms, back of hands, joints, lower front, back and side (vital organs are here), the spine, and tops and bottoms of feet. These areas should only get a light brushing, no real impact.

Areas suitable for “light” impact play: lower legs, arms, inner arms, breast, genitals, upper shoulders, top of buttocks (near spine), and the muscular ridge near the spine.

Areas suitable for “heavy” impact play: Buttocks, upper back on either side of the spine, thighs, and lower shoulders.

Most impact play has very little risk of transmitting disease. However there is some risk if the skin is broken.

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Temperature Play Safety

We have all seen the hot, *literally*, wax scenes, or the even hotter fire play scenes. Perhaps with the bottom cooled off afterwards with an ice cube. There are safety issues to be concerned with however. Blisters can result in infections, scars or worse. The body can go into shock from dramatic temperature differences.

Make sure the candles, or anything flaming is on a hard, flat, level surface. Nothing ruins a hot scene faster than a fire. Go light on perfumes and lotions, some are flammable.

Not all candles melt at the same temperature. Colored, scented or non-paraffin candles burn hotter than the standard white paraffin candles. Experiment by dropping wax from different heights onto your own arm, if it hurts you, it will hurt your bottom. Wax pooling up in jars or large candles will also be a bit warmer than wax as it first melts. In general harder candles are hotter candles.

In general with wax and fire play avoid areas that are under other body parts or areas that would allow the wax or alcohol to pool. If you do allow wax to pool up, make sure you are using a lower temperature wax.

Fire play comes in many forms and is best learned directly from an experienced person, the risks involved are many and varied.

Body hair could be a problem with fire play, you may want to shave it before it burns, of course that does depend on what you are doing.

Fire play poses other issues as well, things can catch fire. Keep a fire extinguisher around as well as some wet towels. Do **NOT** try to put out a fire with anything synthetic, it will melt.

Training in first aid is always a plus for dealing with burns or shock. And if you catch fire... Remember, **Stop! Drop! Roll!**

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Electrical Play Safety

- Never set up contact pads to create a path across the heart or brain, a good rule of thumb is to never put pads on both sides of the body above the waist.
- Never use electrical devices on someone with a pacemaker or other electrically operated implant.
- Only use heavy extension cords.
- Electricity can cause muscles to contract, allow for this in any bondage or restraints.
- Make sure your contacts are secure, electricity crossing the gap can cause burns.
- Moist skin conducts electricity better than dry skin.
- Do **NOT** use electricity on yourself without someone present.
- Know the equipment you are using VERY well.
- Electrical devices can ignite flammable materials.
- Prolonged use of a violet wand can in effect cause sunburn or if used intensely in a single area, can even cause lasting marks.
- Make sure your bottom has a safe word, it can get too intense very fast.
- Electric Flyswatters, Cattle Prods and other direct voltage items will be VERY intense, and cause very real pain.
- It should go without saying to not use dog bark collars on yourself without someone else around, these things will shock you when you scream, and this will make you scream more.
- Certain items like Tazers and Stun guns can be deadly, just read a few articles about the police injuring or killing someone with them.
- A current of 15mA can make muscles contract to the point you cannot let go.
- Currents of less than 30mA can result in death.
- Learn CPR, I know this gets said a lot, but electricity can induce a heart attack.
- On a personal experience note, wear shoes while playing with the violet wand.

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Blood Play Safety

- This type of play should be learned under supervision, not by trial and error. Very bad things can happen.
- Ask your bottom if they are on an blood thinners or anticoagulants, both can cause you serious issues once the skin is broken.
- Do **NOT** pierce or cut the neck, face, toes, fingers, spinal column, collar bone, hands or lower back.
- Avoid areas above arteries or veins as these can cause excessive bleeding.
- Avoid any major nerves, if you don't know where they are located, best to not attempt this at all.
- The abdomen, labia, and nipples require extra skill and knowledge to pierce or cut.
- Wear sterile gloves and keep them that way.
- Sterilize the area you will be cutting or doing needle play on with alcohol or other disinfectant.
- Never look away from your sterilized area, if you look away, assume it is no longer sterile.
- Once you are set up to be sterile, don't touch anything that is not sterilized with your sterile gloves.
- Make sure to use properly sterilized implements, most disposable needles or scalpels come sterilized.
- A good practice is to keep one hand sterile and another non-sterile, but coordination must be precise.
- Having an assistant to hand you sterile implements can be very helpful, especially for beginners.
- If you are not going to be doing sterile play, make sure the bottom knows this and make sure to disinfect the area as much as possible before and after.
- Keep alcohol, betadine, gauze, a sharps container and whatever other materials you may need close at hand.
- Cutting is more likely to scar than needle play, and cutting with a knife is more likely to scar than cutting with a scalpel.
- Certain diseases can be transmitted by drinking blood.

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Other Safety Notes

- Communication is key, tops, nor bottoms, are mind readers, they might be able to read you well enough to guess, but actually saying “That hurt a little too much” is so much more efficient.
- Learn how to sterilize toys, a 10% chlorine bleach solution will disinfect most toys, however toys that are spongy can never be reliably sterilized and should be only used on one person if they are being exposed to potentially infectious body fluids.
- There are certain cases pending that might show you cannot obtain consent from someone under the effects of drugs or alcohol, in this area it is likely better to keep on the safe side and not play with anyone who is intoxicated or not in their right mind.
- Assorted body fluids can contain blood, if you don't know, assume it does and take precautions.
- Stay hydrated, and keep up your nutrients, many forms of play can result in loss of body fluids and nutrients, making sure these are kept up is important in reducing any bad after effects.
- Give people plenty of space when they play, distracting someone who is swinging a whip can cause them to hurt the bottom, themselves or you. You may also end up in the path of a whip or flogger.
- If you have a doubt you can do it safely, don't do it.
- Certain forms of edge play can never be totally safe and are beyond the scope of this document to try to reduce the risks.
- Learn CPR! This is for the top an the bottom, either could have a medical emergency at any point, knowing what to do can save your partner's life.
- Do **NOT** attempt any higher end skills that are beyond your ability, only you know what you are capable of, but the risks are greatly increased if you go beyond your skill level or abilities.
- Check people's background, never know what you will find there. Everyone leaves footprints.
- Remember if something feels wrong, do **NOT** do it, simple, your subconscious often knows things you are not aware of.

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The BDSM Safety Kit

This list is not a complete list, it is a general starting point for your personal kit. Always investigate which safety items are needed for your specific activities.

1. Condoms (Good for going over penetration toys as well as sex).
2. Dental Dams
3. Gloves (Latex, nitrile or other material)
4. EMT shears or Emergency strap cutter
5. Band aids, gauze, tape.
6. Alcohol pads
7. Rubbing alcohol or Peroxide
8. Arnica Gel (reduces bruising)
9. Cold pack
10. Sterile water
11. Drinking water
12. Candy
13. Water soluble lubricant
14. Sharps container (for needle play)
15. Tweezers
16. Cotton swabs
17. Emergency contact numbers
18. Paper towels
19. Blanket
20. Bolt cutters
21. Extra keys (for handcuffs, locks, etc)
22. Bleach or other material to clean play spaces
23. Hand sanitizer
24. Benadryl cream
25. Backup medications

You can also find BDSM safety guides at the following sites:

<http://www.teachmekink.org/>

<http://www bdsmclasses.com/safetymanual.php>

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