

Negotiating Beyond the Norm

Some Tips on Expressing Desires and Boundaries That May Be a Bit Unusual

***A Public Service Announcement brought to you by the
Bureau of Erotic Discourse (B.E.D.)***

We have a lot of models for how normative sex is negotiated well. Many of the principles carry over to more exploratory sex, but it is often harder to state things clearly. This handout is meant to provide a few tips on both the universal and the particular issues around arriving at good sex.

As a quick review of the B.E.D. principles, here's a summary:

- Assess your own desires and boundaries. If you can't be clear with yourself then you can't be clear with a partner. What do you want to explore, and what do you want to avoid?
- Avoid initiating things with someone who is underage, loaded, or otherwise unable to give legal consent. If you want to play while high, make your agreements beforehand.
- Share your mutual desires and boundaries with your potential partner clearly and honestly. Whenever you don't know, ask.
- Consent is required. No means No. Either of you gets to change a Yes to a No at any time (well, not in the past, but you get the idea).

At B.E.D. workshops we often get the question: "how do I get started on these negotiations?" If you have met someone who is a potential partner, or even if you have an intimate friend and you want to expand your boundaries, you should honestly express that you want to try something beyond "normal" sex. This is just as important for same sex partners, since being gay does not automatically mean that one is interested in kink.

In most cases it is good to start discussions gently. You might be on ground where there are old wounds or even trauma. Give yourself and your partner a chance to avoid what is emotionally painful.

One place to start negotiations is to ask about what your partner thinks about certain practices. You can mention a friend you know who likes to be spanked, for example. If you get a positive reaction then you are on the fast track. If you get a negative reaction then you might have a lot more groundwork to do, or you might just be out of luck. But if your partner expresses curiosity or interest then you can work together on a more complete list of interests for both of you (or more, if that's the case).

Remember, being kinky about some things does not mean being kinky about all things. And the levels of activity desired will differ from person to person and time to time.

It may not be easy, but be honest and open about your sexual history. Discuss safer sex.

Sex outside the norm may include sexually charged role play, or bondage, or other fun games that don't involve getting to penetration, or maybe not to orgasm. Or you might want to come so much that your eyes will be crossed for days. Especially on unfamiliar ground, don't assume that the scene is going to run exactly according to your expectations.

We encourage people to express both a desire and a boundary when raising an issue. For example, for many people the throat is an erotic area. You might want to say that you enjoy being held tightly around the throat, but still want to breathe. There's a desire and a boundary.

If your partner expresses a desire, but is not clear about the limits, then you should ask! As an example, your partner might desire bondage. You need to ask about how strong the bonds should be, how tight they should be, and especially ask about what you can do to your helpless victim.

If your partner states a boundary, but is not clear on what the desire is, then you should ask! For example, if your partner says that permanent marks are out, you might ask about just how far would they like you to go. A red bottom is, after all, temporary.

How public do you both want to be? The complementary kinks of exhibitionism and voyeurism are rich areas. We strongly advise staying reasonably legal, but once you are in a sufficiently private area then the issue of an audience can be either a plus or a minus. Ask and find out!

Some kinds of role play involve protesting verbally. It might be exciting to be saying "NO" when you mean "you just hit the right spot." If that's your kink then you really need a safe word (or a safe gesture if you can't speak). It could be something silly that you would never say in your role, like "pineapple" (assuming that your fantasy is not on a tropical plantation). Or you might use the red/yellow/green system, where "red" means "stop now", "yellow" means "be careful, you are at the limit", and "green" means "YES".

Some examples

Here are a few imaginary examples of things you or your partner might say during negotiations. They are not (mostly) from personal experience, but should illustrate what we've been talking about.

- I love being bitten, but I don't want you to break the skin. On the other hand, I am notorious for showing off my marks to my friends.
- Now this flogger is softer than the other one, so it's better for those who are just starting. I do enjoy a beginner.
- So how hard should I spank you with this thing?
- Now this rope is silk, and won't scratch at all.
- I have to warn you that I like to make noise and say rude things. Are you OK with others hearing, or should we move farther away?
- A condom is a must until we really know each other.
- I've been a dom for about three years, and I always respect my sub's limits.
- First I want to go out dancing with you. I want to rub up against you and be really obvious that you are going to take me back and do me. And don't drop the leash.
- Well, that plug might be a bit large, but the medium size one would feel great. I do need a lot of lube, and some fingering to relax.
- I'm a complete switch. There isn't a single thing I like to do that I don't like having done to me.
- So I'm not certain about being tied up. I've never even seen it done. How far have you gone?
- I like nipple clamps going on, but coming off is the best.
- Yes, you can take pictures of me, but you can't show my face. I still need my job.
- I can't believe that we've been sleeping together for two months and this is the first time I've heard about this fantasy. I would absolutely love to act this one out with you, my little vampire.
- I don't feel comfortable with penetration tonight, but I really would like to get you off. Any suggestions?

It's actually fun to make up new examples. Be outrageous, be serious, but above all practice stating desires and boundaries.

Deterring Sexual Assault

Whenever we get into sexuality that is outside the norm we encounter greater risks because we have less support. And given how frequent sexual assault is we need all the support we can get!

If you are assaulted, and it can happen to both women and men, the first thing to remember is that it is not your fault.

While rape is never the fault of the victim, taking some precautions can greatly reduce your risks.

Knowing your partner is not really enough. About 70% of all rapists are known to their victims.

If you are going out, especially to someplace new, take a buddy along. Watch out for your buddy, and listen to your buddy.

Watch out for your neighbors, pay attention to sounds that might be distress, or even to the feeling that not all is right with a situation. Rape is most often a crime of anger, and most often performed by a coward, someone who wants to hurt a weaker person.

If it does happen, report it if you possibly can. Without reports the rapists get a free pass to hit someone else.

Have fun and be safe!