

# Skin and Steel: A primer for BDSM knifeplay

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Knife

In BDSM, most discussions on knife play start by describing the activity as edgy, with all the requisite puns intended. This is unfortunate, because it creates the impression that knife play is inherently more dangerous than other types of play. The truth is that using knives isn't riskier than other forms of play. Here's what you need to know to get started.

## Considering Risk

Knives are weapons. The law clearly recognizes this and with good reason. Anyone that wields a knife has the ability to cause serious bodily injury or death. However, look at this in the context of kink play. Bondage, fire and electricity all have the potential to cause injury and death as well. When we play, most of what we do has an element of risk. As responsible, consenting players we work to mitigate as much risk as possible. Don't consider a knife as a weapon in a kink scene, an implement solely intended to cause harm. Instead, think of a knife as a tool, one that demands meticulous attention whenever it's present in a scene.

## What is knifeplay?

Knives can be used in a scene either physically or for a psychological effect. Physically, knives are a sensation tool which can be used to stimulate the skin and erogenous zones. Knives used in this fashion can be compared to Whartenberg pinwheels. Psychologically, knives can be used to enforce control or to instill fear. For some, the mere presence or threat of a knife being used is a powerful addition to a scene. Knives can also add fun

authenticity to a role play scene (Imagine a fantasy interrogator brandishing a blade as they demand answers). This post doesn't cover scenes where the skin is intentionally cut. That is a form of medical play and requires a different degree of preparation.

## **Negotiating Knife play**

When planning on using a knife in a scene, first gain fully informed consent from your play partner. Don't ever surprise a partner with a knife in a scene. As mentioned, a knife is a weapon and using one without explicit permission could be legally considered assault. Educate yourself to the laws governing the jurisdiction where your scene will happen, as well as the policies of any play-space regarding knife play.

Ask if your partner has any experience wielding or playing with knives. Learn about any past experiences that could act as bad triggers. An example would be asking if your partner has been a victim of violence related to knives. Ask how your partner feels about knives. Do blades make them feel curious and excited, or uncomfortable and afraid?

Both partners should disclose medical issues that are relevant to a knife scene. Be aware that minor wounds, cuts and exposure to blood are always a possibility with knife play.

## **Choosing a knife**

Fixed blade knives made from surgical stainless steel are ideal for knife play. Stainless steel blades can be tempered to a player's desired preference. Stainless steel blades can also be disinfected without becoming degraded. Fixed blades tend to be better for body contact scenes, they eliminate places for dirt and pathogens to collect on the knife. The handle of the knife should be made of a material that is chemical resistant and can be disinfected. The blade should be smooth, without serrations intended to tear and rend material.

Stainless steel throwing knives are great for knife scenes, as they have many of the attributes described above. When choosing knives, consider if you're able to control and clean the blade.

Elaborate fantasy knives may be degraded by cleaning chemicals. Switchblades have joints that can collect everything from dust to blood. A steak knife has serrations intended to rend meat (or skin). These knives can't be used for body contact, but may be great in a mindfuck or role play scene. When choosing your knife, choose the right tool.

## **Using the knife**

Continuing our tool analogy, hold the knife in a manner that allows you to manipulate it with confidence. Turn your palm down as though holding a pencil. Now turn the knife so the blade is roughly at a 45 degree angle. This will allow you to apply an even pressure and to use the tip, rather than the full cutting surface of the blade. Place the blade against the

bottom's skin and check for feedback as to their reactions. Never push the blade, instead pull it carefully in measured strokes across the skin, back toward yourself. Begin with light strokes, then begin to vary the cadence and pressure used as the scene progresses.

Blade sharpness is a matter of preference. A dull knife isn't necessarily safer than a sharp knife, any knife can cut if enough pressure is applied. Before using your knife measure .25 inches from the tip of the blade. A cut of .25 inches or more is considered deep, possibly exposing fat, muscle and tendons and requiring medical attention. <sup>[1]</sup>First Aid and Emergencies Deep Cuts. (2012, June 12). Retrieved from <http://www.webmd.com/first-aid/deep-cuts>. Make a note not to depress the knife into the skin deeper than the quarter inch threshold. Not pressing too deeply combined with using the knife at an angle can reduce the chances of accidental cutting

Have your bottom lay on a sturdy object like a bondage bed or massage table for the scene. Make sure you can walk completely around without any obstructions. Keep the floor clear to prevent tripping. Beware of people moving around you, especially someone bumping into you while you're holding the knife. Your bottom will flinch during the scene while you're using the knife, guaranteed. Use your other hand as a brace, to hold the part of the body you may be working with. For example, keeping a firm grasp on the knee while you draw the knife along the inner thigh.

## **Safety and cleaning**

Precautions are needed to protect against pathogens during knife scenes. Ask your bottom to shower before the scene, to decrease bacteria on the skin. Wash your own hands with a sanitizer. Prepare the knife blade by using disinfecting wipes. Choose wipes what contain alcohol or chlorhexidine gluconate. Have a sharps container where you can store the knife after the scene, don't store it in the sheathe or your toybag until it's disinfected. For a full disinfection, consider using Barbicide jars, (the blue stuff from the barber shop). Have a pair of non latex gloves handy if bloodletting is a concern or for clean up. Also, have access to a simple first aid kit for minor cuts and scrapes.

Use knives on the meaty, well protected parts of the body. This includes the chest/breasts, upper back, butt and thighs. Care should be taken drawing a knife across the abdomen. Avoid joints and areas where ligaments, veins and nerves are close to the skin, because in these areas, deep cuts can cause severe damage or even death ( the throat, face, genitals, and wrists for example).

## **Develop the skill**

These tips will get you started, but it's only the beginning. Learn, practice and refine your techniques. Stay safe and keep it kinky.