



# Consent 101 – Play Protocols

March 2020



Papa ONYX

## Introduction

Safety in BDSM play is guided by core philosophies such as SSC (Safe, Sane, Consensual), RACK (Risk-Aware Consensual Kink), and CNC (Consensual Non-Consent). Each of these emphasizes informed decision-making and involves strict protocols for consent, communication, negotiation and aftercare.

## Core Principals

**Consent:** This is the absolute foundation of BDSM / Kink play. Consent must be **F**reely given, **R**eversible at all times, **I**nformed, **E**nthusiastic, and **S**pecific. This is often referred to as “FRIES”.

Silence or lack of explicit refusal does not indicate consent. Consent must be actively and verbally given. Pressure or coercion is a major red flag. A common mistake in BDSM / Kink play is that the “specifics” comprising a consent agreement are not sufficiently conveyed or understood.

**Communication:** Open and honest dialogue is essential. This includes pre-scene negotiation, ongoing check-ins during play and post-scene debriefs.

**Education:** Participants should educate themselves on the proper techniques and specific risks for activities they explore. This may involve various media (videos, books, online materials, etc.), attending workshops, or seeking mentorship from experienced members of the community.

**Caution / Risk Awareness:** All BDSM activities carry inherent risks. Participants should be aware of potential physical and emotional dangers and take steps to minimize them.

## Negotiation and Boundaries

Before any play begins, all participants should discuss:

**Hard Limits:** Activities that are completely off-limits and non-negotiable. Limits may involve specific acts, words, scenes or anything else that is directly or indirectly part of an activity.

**Soft Limits:** Activities that might be okay under specific conditions or with caution. Those specific conditions should be addressed upfront. Limits may involve specific acts, words, scenes or anything else that is directly or indirectly part of an activity.

**Desired Activities:** What each participant is specifically excited to try. Remember, it is critical that both the Dom and sub be honest about their knowledge and experience with regard to the activities they pursue.

**Health Concerns:** Any physical or mental health issues, medications, etc. that could affect the play should be disclosed.

**Aftercare Needs:** Specific physical and emotional comfort required after the play ends.

## Safe Words and Signals

A clear system for communicating comfort levels during a play is mandatory. The classic traffic light system is a common one most people understand:

**Green:** Everything is fine; continue or go harder.

**Yellow:** Slow down, check in, or reduce intensity.

**Red:** Stop immediately. All activity must cease at once.

**Non-verbal signals** (such as a specific number of taps or hand squeezes, or dropping an object) should be established for scenarios where verbal communication might be difficult due to gags, hoods, or intense sensations.



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## Physical Safety Measures

**Hygiene and Health:** Practice good personal hygiene and use barrier protection (gloves, condoms, dental dams) to prevent STI transmission, especially with blood, scat, or urine play.

**Equipment:** Use high quality, body-safe equipment. Inspect gear for wear and tear before each use. Ensure equipment is properly cleaned, as disinfectant of equipment may vary greatly by material and type. Understand what type of play / type of gear should not be shared across partners regardless of cleaning. Improper cleaning of equipment and gear is a common mistake made by many participants during BDSM play.

**Anatomy Awareness:** Learn basic human anatomy. This is essential and particularly so for Sadomasochism (S&M) Play in general, as well as Bondage / Restraint Play, Impact Play, Choking / Breath Control Play, Cock & Ball Torture (CBT) Play and Wax Play to name a few. Avoid striking vital organs, the spine, joints, or areas with major nerves.

**Bondage:** Ensure circulation is not restricted (check for tingling or color changes in extremities). Have safety scissors or other quick-release tools readily available in case of an emergency.

**Substance Use:** Avoid alcohol or drugs, as they impair judgment and reaction times, making safe play difficult. These substances disrupt brain regions responsible for judgment, impulse control, and emotional regulation, leading to poor decision-making, increased risk-taking, and impaired problem-solving abilities.

Participants “under the influence” of alcohol or drugs are seldom aware of the ways and degree of these impacts. Likewise, these substances when combined with certain play scenarios are often contributing factors to other medical emergencies or unsatisfactory play.

**Emergency Preparedness:** Have a plan for emergencies, including a phone nearby to call 911 (or local emergency services) and a first-aid kit.

## Aftercare

Aftercare is a critical emotional and physical cool-down period after a scene. It helps manage adrenaline / endorphin crashes (“DOM-drop” / “sub-drop”) and reinforces trust. Aftercare can include cuddling, conversation, snacks, water, a warm shower, or quiet space, depending on individual needs.

## Play Philosophies / Protocols

The philosophies listed below are crucial for fostering ethical, respectful, and fulfilling experiences within the BDSM / Kink lifestyles. They build trust between participants and prioritize the physical and emotional well-being of everyone involved by encouraging clear communication about limits and comfort levels.

### I. Safe, Sane, Consensual (SSC)

**SSC** is a philosophy that emphasizes that activities should be safe (risks are known and minimized), sane (participants are of sound mind and judgment), and consensual (all parties agree freely and without coercion).

**Safe:** This is defined by all participants ensuring risks are understood and managed to the greatest extent possible. Participants must handle their activities responsibly.

**Sane:** Sane means that you are aware of the risks and the limits and can fully ensure that nothing can cloud the judgement / decision-making of you or your partner(s). More specifically, participants must be of sound mind and capable of making informed decisions. Boundaries must be set in advance and respected by all partners.



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**Consensual:** This is the core pillar of BDSM and all play philosophies / protocols. No matter how intense, pleasurable, painful, or controlling, what happens between you and your partner(s) must entirely consensual with the understanding that consent can be immediately revoked by any partner at any time without explanation.

Anything else is at best unacceptable and at worst abuse and should be treated as such. This should be exercised by you talking and planning each scene, being able to use safe words, and also allowing you, if you are submissive, to trust yourself to know your limits and the risks and so you can submit to your Dominant willingly without fear or coercion.

## II. Risk-Aware Consensual Kink (RACK)

**RACK** is an alternative philosophy to SSC that some members of the BDSM community prefer, feeling it better addresses perceived limitations regarding the subjective nature of "safe" and "sane".

Some members of the BDSM / Kink community feel RACK places a greater emphasis on being aware of and informed about the specific risks of an activity. This includes placing a strong emphasis on the responsibility of each participant for their own well-being and risk assessment.

RACK provides a structure for participants to engage in more higher-risk activities as long as they are fully informed, consenting, and accepting personal responsibility for those risks. However, RACK should not be viewed as an excuse for blanket permission to higher risk play.

**Risk-Aware** acknowledges that no activity is entirely without risk. It holds the view that some play is "safer" and some play is "less safe" – but no play is fully "safe". It emphasizes that participants should be fully informed of potential dangers and personally responsible for managing and accepting those risks before consenting.

**Informed Consent** is a key component of RACK, stressing that consent is only meaningful when all participants are fully informed of the potential risks and outcomes.

## III. Consensual Non-Consent (CNC)

CNC is a mutual agreement to be able to "act" as if consent has been waived. Participants agree to behave in a manner that "mimics" non-consensual behavior. The key here is that consent has still been agreed to explicitly in advance with defined boundaries.

However, these play scenes truly are consensual because they have been discussed ahead of time and have a framework for communicating consent. Consent during CNC play can still be reversed at any time.

Consensual non-consent is considered a show of extreme trust and understanding. It is often controversial within BDSM circles by some community members due to concerns that it blurs the requirements for consent and introduces concerns regarding safety and abuse.

## Vetting Play Partners

In addition to learning, understanding and applying play philosophies and protocols, it is important to conduct proper vetting of a potential play partner. Proper vetting techniques are widely discussed in most online BDSM forums. Some general vetting suggestions include:

**Mentors:** If you are a dominant, then look for another dominant who might be willing to mentor you. If you are a submissive, try to find another submissive experienced in the type of play you desire.

**Consent:** Consent is non-negotiable in BDSM and Kink. If you are not discussing consent, or being asked to provide your consent, or being told what to do without having provided your consent for those actions, it is a red flag.

**Assess Experience and Skill:** Seek out partners who have more experience and can guide you safely through your exploration. Experienced partners should also be cautious about playing with beginners and ensure that they are educated about safety practices. Be aware that just because someone is experienced, an educator or a DOM/SIR/



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Master that is not a guarantee of skill and knowledge. Sadly, there are some members who may use these positions of power, or that power imbalance, to take advantage of others who are less experienced.

**New Play Partner:** When playing with someone new, start with light play and build intensity over multiple sessions as your trust and comfort levels increase. Remember that their spoken knowledge about specific play and kinks may not match their practical experience or their practical experience with a partner of your skill level (whether novice, intermediate or advanced).

**Research:** Do your own research. Ask a lot of questions. Ask your mentor. Ask for references from people you trust. Ask other people who may have played with the individual you are vetting.

**Trust Your Instincts:** If something doesn't feel right or raises red flags, take them seriously. Trust your intuition.

**Communication:** Your potential play partner must demonstrate a commitment to open, honest, transparent communication. This includes a willingness to discuss all the topics outlined in this document, such as consent, negotiation, safety, risk awareness, limits, aftercare, etc.

## Final Thought

Play that is considered unlawful, even if consent is freely given by all participants, is strictly forbidden by the general BDSM community and specifically by ONYX as outlined in The ONYX Code (Code of Conduct).

As one of many examples, play that occurs with a partner that is unconscious or impaired from sound decision-making is unacceptable. Besides being unlawful, this type of activity removes or inhibits the ability to freely grant and withdraw consent.

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**Disclaimer:**

*In all of our T.E.A.C.H sessions, our members are intentional in discussing the health and safety aspects of the kinks they are presenting. All kink play has risks, and by taking part in these activities you accept those risks and assume responsibility for them. ONYX cannot accept any responsibility or liability for any accidents or harm that could be encountered during your kink play. Get Educated. Get Consent. Be Safe. Have Fun!*