

What is Negotiation?

- A way to ensure consent (consent is constant, iterative, and enthusiastic!)
- A way to assess and agree upon acceptable risk
- A way to develop and agree on the activities and elements that will make a great scene
- A sexy, fun, kinky way to get to know someone, and plan something exciting!

Negotiation is a **SKILL**, and you will get better at it, and everyone screws it up or forgets something sometimes. It's a skill you learn from and improve every time you do it.

Negotiation does not mean obligation - if you have negotiated something, you don't have to do it. You do not have to scene with anyone, even if you've spent hours negotiating with them.

Responsibility:

- Negotiation takes place between 2 or more adults.
 - If your persona in a scene is that of a little, or animal, or object, or anything else, you still must be approaching negotiation as an adult.
 - Negotiation should take place between equals - consider eliminating or severely reducing power dynamics to make sure everyone feels safe owning what they do and don't want
- Try not to come to a negotiation with 'I don't know...whatever you want to do'.
 - Bring some ideas to the table! A toy, a feeling, a mood, a curiosity.
 - **Use explicit language to discuss things clearly - mixed messages can be confusing and dangerous.**

Negotiating and finding out that you **shouldn't** scene is just as good! Ex. A bottom who only really plays with emotional catharsis with a top who is very triggered by tears.

Creating a sandbox:

- The purpose of negotiation is to map a safe space to explore during the scene
- Discover limits and boundaries:
 - Limits are hard and should never be tested or broken. Find the edges of what that scene will look like and



- discuss them clearly
- Tops have triggers, limits, and concerns too!
- It's always better to hear 'I really wanted more of X... so next time....' than to hear 'you totally went too far, that wasn't cool'.
- Negotiation changes as you become established in a relationship. Negotiations will be very detailed and exact with new people, but people who have known each other for a long time may negotiate a scene with just a few sentences, since many of the other points have been pre-negotiated.
- Assumptions are always risky, so be careful when you're starting out so you can build solid foundations for later.

All parties should take ownership of what they want, need, don't want, and will not allow. In this way, parties share responsibility for what happens in a scene, and are in a better place to work together to make a scene great and to support each other if a scene goes wrong.

Elements of a Complete Negotiation:

Try not to make assumptions - ask and check-in instead.

- **Mood:** how do we want this to make us feel?
- Desired **power exchange dynamic or roles**, and who will take active or receptive roles
- What **activities** will be included, with discussion of:
- **Risk-Awareness:** discuss the possibility for risk. As a guideline, scenes should honor the least risk-tolerant participant's concerns.
 - physical injury, including marking
 - infection
 - emotional impact
 - social issues
 - other
- Understanding of **level of experience** of each party
- **Lines and limits** for these activities:
 - Overall triggers and hard limits, or a review of what you do and do not know about these for yourself.
- Address **sexual contact** (yes, no how, and other limits on this) directly.
- **Boundaries:** are we negotiating something that is difficult for either party?
- **Communication styles:**
 - What does "having fun" look like?
 - What are signs of distress?
 - How do you like to communicate during the scene
 - Desired forms of address
 - Chosen safe words
 - How to wind down/end the scene

- **Bodies:**
 - Are there physical limitations either party should be aware of?
 - Injuries, allergies, other conditions which may be relevant?
 - What kind of marking is OK, if any?
- **Time:** How long can the scene go for? When and where? (If this is a firm need, who will check the time?)
- **Relationship formation:** What kind of relationships are being assumed, or hoped for, around this play?
- **Aftercare and Follow-up:**
 - What do think you will need immediately afterwards? (Tops need aftercare too!)
 - What does 'normal' look like for you afterwards?
 - What do you need in the days following?
 - What kind of commitments can you make for follow up?
 - How will you handle any problems that may come up?

Tools and techniques for scene creation:

Sometimes it's helpful to use a framework to come up with a scene. Some approaches we've had good luck with include:

1. Start-middle-end

- Decide how a scene will start
- Decide what happens in the middle (choose 1-3 tools or activities.)
- Decide how a scene will end.

2. Checklists

- Google "bdsm checklists" and you will find printable or spreadsheet-able tools to compare common interests

3. Read each others' Fetlife interests lists.

4. Card Deck: Use Erotic Awakening's "Kink Starter" cards to start a conversation. (www.eroticawakening.com (and no, they aren't paying us!))

5. Incorporate a "calibration" section with verbal feedback (often 1-10 pain scale plus qualitative feedback) to test an unfamiliar element of a scene when one party hasn't tried it before but is interested.

6. Use erotic story writing to pass back and forth ideas for hotness.

When it doesn't feel safe:

- Negotiation is one way of identifying red flags; when people are negotiating from a place of selfishness. Some specific things you may encounter:
 - 'Gotchas' - people should not allude to treating your negotiation as a way to 'trick' you
 - Gut feeling
 - Ignoring space boundaries by initiating unnegotiated touch
 - Guilt language around any sort of stated boundary
 - Assumptions about what you do and don't want
- It is very possible that you will identify these red flags after an interaction with someone that didn't go how you expected
 - that's ok. It's not your fault. Look after yourself.
 - A lot of us have experienced this. It's something we're trying to talk more about in communities to raise awareness, and make sure everyone's on the same page and having fun.

Pushing boundaries:

- Limits should not be pushed, but there may be challenging or scary things someone would like to experiment with.
 - When you do this, you need to be able to talk about what those things are, why they are hard, how they can be played with safely, and what care will be needed before, during, and after.
- Pushing boundaries is emotionally and physically risky, so it must be well negotiated.
 - Both partners must understand what could happen if things go wrong, and have supports in place to manage that possibility.
 - Pushing can be an important element of powerful, intimate, and cathartic scenes, but is not vital to achieve those states. Tread carefully, and be compassionate with those you play with.

If Things Go Wrong:

We all hope your scene will be fun and go as planned, but sometimes this doesn't happen. Because we play with fear, pain, and control, when things go wrong, this can be emotionally difficult. If something goes wrong, we recommend:

- Try and stay connected and present, and stop the scene.
- That you discuss how you will follow up if something goes wrong ahead of time.
- That you have a friend available who can provide emotional support and discuss the problem with you.
- Be kind to yourself. This stuff is hard, and you did the best you could.