

Domestic violence is a systematic, escalating pattern of coercive behavior where one partner gains and maintains control over another. Relationships can be abusive even if there is no physical violence. Abuse can be verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, financial, or a combination of any of these.

It can be particularly difficult to recognize abuse in a relationship dynamic that already pushes the limits of control and autonomy. However, consent and respect are integral to the foundation of a healthy relationship involving play around dynamics of power.

Examples of Abuse

Emotional: manipulation, gaslighting, blame, denial, guilt-tripping; not knowing when a scene begins or ends; feeling trapped in a specific role; isolation from friends, family, or other members of the kink community.

Verbal: ignoring safewords, blackmailing, threatening to 'out' a partner based on sexual preferences/activities or breaching confidentiality, shaming a partner for boundaries or wanting/using a safeword.

Financial: controlling a partner's income or access money; using a partner's money or credit to purchase specialty items without consent.

Physical: hitting, slapping, pushing, pulling hair or limbs without prior consent; inability to refuse an activity, especially one that's illegal or dangerous.

Sexual: the use of tools or objects without prior consent, coercion of sexual behavior, acts during a sexual scene that violate prior consent, refusal to use safe sex practices

(e.g. condoms) when desired, photos or video taken or shared without consent.

Contractual: ignoring or changing any written or verbal contract without consent.

Note: some of these behaviors are common in D/s scenes, but **if consent is not explicit, informed, and continued, then it is abuse, not play.** Remember that play should *always* be safe, sane, and consensual.

Aftercare is an important component of safe play for everyone involved, regardless of role. A person's need for it should never be ridiculed, refused, minimized, or used as a source of shame, guilt, or manipulation.

Our emotions can be complicated.

You might be feeling:

- Shamed or humiliated
- Angry
- Afraid or depressed
- Isolated or abandoned
- Ostracized by your friends, family, or community
- Misunderstood, especially by people unfamiliar with kink

Some things to know about kink:

"Safe, sane, and consensual."

- "Safe" is being knowledgeable about the techniques and safety concerns involved in what you are doing;
- "Sane" is knowing the difference between fantasy and reality (e.g. what is physically possible or reasonable; consideration is taken for long-term consequences of actions taken during a scene, especially anything physical);

- “Consensual” is respecting the limits imposed by each participant. (tnlr.org)
- Dominant/submissive dynamics occur in a time and place that are mutually agreed upon. It does not have to include every aspect of your life or relationship - in fact, for most kink relationships, it rarely does.
- Clear communication is essential. Never assume what is allowed. Written contracts outlining limits for all involved are perfectly acceptable and even encouraged.
- Sometimes people’s preferences and “play styles” simply don’t match up. Your limits should still be respected. If you can’t find a compromise that leaves everyone feeling good, not everyone’s play styles may be a healthy fit.
- Scenes that address issues of consent, such as rape roleplay or consensual non-consent, need to be negotiated extremely carefully and thoroughly before anything occurs.
- Aftercare is valuable for everyone regardless of role.

If you’re a submissive:

- You have the right to safeword out of a scene for any reason at any time; this might include an act with which you’re uncomfortable, or one which causes too much discomfort or pain. You know your limits best, and there’s a difference between a dom reasonably pushing your limits and ignoring them entirely. Using a safeword *does not* make you disobedient, weak, or a bad submissive.
- You deserve to know that your choice to submit is respected and valued. Being a submissive doesn’t mean you’re inherently weak or less valuable as a person.

- You deserve to have your boundaries respected and not to be mocked for them or have them used against you.

If you’re a dominant:

- You have the right to safeword out of a scene for any reason at any time. Doing so *does not* make you weak or a bad dominant.
- You are allowed to have your own limits; for example, if a sub requests a style of play that makes you uncomfortable or which you feel unprepared for, you have the right to say no.
- You deserve to have your limits respected and not to be mocked for them or have them used against you.

If you’re a switch:

- You are just as legitimate a dom or sub as anyone who is not a switch, and you have the same rights relevant to the role you’re in.
- Safewording out of a scene does not make you less of a dom or sub than anyone else who identifies more strongly with only one of those roles.