

Preventing Domestic Violence in the Leather/BDSM/Fetis h Community



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Section 1: Abuse vs. Healthy BDSM: Knowing the difference:

What is abuse?

Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." Domestic violence is abuse between family members or related persons. It also occurs in any relationship between two or more intimates. Non-consensual dominance and control, also known as "domestic violence" may come in many forms: actual physical abuse, threats of physical abuse, emotional abuse, threatening telephone calls, disturbances at a place of employment, and stalking. Domestic violence is distinguished from other kinds of abuse because of the special relationship between the persons.

Domestic violence is further defined as the chronic, physical, sexual and psychological maltreatment of one intimate partner by another, with the intent to control in non-consensual or harmful ways. This misuse of power harms the psychological, social, economic, sexual and physical well-being of the victim.

Abuse is often hard to recognize and many people believe it can only happen to submissives or novices. That is untrue. Abuse can and does happen to anyone.

What is healthy BDSM?

Healthy BDSM is when two or more adults consent to exchange energy, power, sensations or experiences (however extreme) in ways that fuel their mutual happiness and personal interpretation of well-being. It can also be when two or more people agree to forego a "formal" or verbal consenting process (often called consensual non-consent). Only you can know when you agree to something.

Many partners use "safe words" as a way to distinguish their level of agreement but a number of other healthy BDSM practitioners do not. The use of safe words is not the only way to distinguish consent. If you are being fulfilled and have increased self-esteem as a result of your activities and your partner claims the same, then chances are you have a very healthy BDSM relationship. Only you can know. A healthy BDSM relationship is one where both parties are actively invested in the well-being of each other and themselves.

What does abusive BDSM look like?

If you have lingering feelings that "this isn't right" or that "something is wrong with this picture" then there is cause for further consideration. It may not be abuse, but it is important to listen to your internal alarms and explore areas of concern. An unhealthy BDSM relationship will have one (or more) partners acting in ways that create harm to another, be it physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, sexual, social or economic. In an abusive relationship you may notice the following:

- abuser decides to violate agreements and/or negotiations or has dominant/submissive behaviors outside of agreed or pre-negotiated spaces

- threats of abandonment or loss of current contract if new demands are not met
- forcing partner to do things alone, together or with others in ways that violate or compromise previous negotiations
- forcing, coercing, manipulating, bribing or seducing partner to have sex with children
- name calling, mind games, denial of human necessities (food, water, shelter as needed, healthcare, etc.), especially in ways that reduce self-esteem
- threats to expose lifestyle to co-workers, vanilla family members or children
- giving someone drugs, alcohol or other substances to elicit or affect their consent

Section 2: What Newcomers Should Know: Preventing abuse within BDSM relationships

What is abusive BDSM?

Abusive behaviors can occur between anyone. It can happen between heterosexuals, lesbians, feminists, two men (whether gay or straight), two co-workers, between a priest and a child – it can happen to anyone. Abuse is often the result of misdirected or inappropriate emotion or sexual energy. Domestic violence is when abuse occurs in relationships between two or more intimates. Domestic violence is about non-consensual dominance and control and may come in many forms: actual physical abuse, threats of physical abuse, emotional abuse, threatening telephone calls, disturbances at a place of employment, abuse of resources or responsibilities, stalking and many others.

In BDSM relationships, the lines between what is abuse and what is not are often confusing since there is very little education or support in mainstream society. Outsiders tend to label all of our activities and practices as insane, violent or abusive no matter how highly skilled we become at them or how long we have mentored or studied our techniques or craft.

Abusive BDSM is when one person harms or misuses another, with the intent to control in non-consensual ways. This misuse of power harms the well-being of the victim. Many people believe it can only happen to submissives or novices. That is untrue. Abuse can and does happen to anyone.

How can I prevent abuse?

There are three basic principles that comprise what many believe to be a healthy BDSM relationship and are often used to help prevent abuse. They are: that the relationship adheres and subscribes to safety practices, that each participant is considered sane and that the activities and the relationship dynamics/parameters are consented to. These are also known as "Safe, Sane & Consensual."

Many newcomers to the BDSM community are overwhelmed with the equipment, the differences in language and/or all the attention they may receive. They may feel that what they have been practicing or fantasizing about in private has now become very complicated. Many newcomers will make unsafe choices simply because they do not know how to care for themselves or do not fully understand the implications of their choices. Many experience players will not engage with newcomers because it puts them at risk until the newcomers learn about what is available and appropriate for them. Knowledge "of" toys and BDSM practices is not the same thing as experience "with" them.

What are some things I can do to be safe?

- Establish and use "safe words" as a way to communicate that you need to slow down or stop

- Talk about what you want, avoid trying things you are unsure of until you learn more about them, attend workshops, ask questions, etc.
- Don't let anyone force, coerce, manipulate, bribe or seduce you into things that you will regret or that may compromise your physical safety, financial security, legal rights, etc. such as sex with children, stealing, harming someone else, disclosing your social security #, etc.
- Do not meet anyone alone without knowing how to take safety precautions first
- Find an advisor or mentor so that you can learn from them and find your footing within the community, check references on potential partners/playmates, etc.
- Do not allow someone to give you drugs, alcohol or other substances to elicit or affect your consent
- Learn about safer sex practices and make them your habit rather than your exception
- Go slow; learn how to do short simple scenes or contracts before diving into something more extensive and/or long-term
- Schedule check-ins after each scene and at periodic intervals during contracts; discuss what worked and what didn't honestly
- Trust your instincts! - they may be all you have

Section 3: Polyamorous Considerations

Distinguishing abuse in these special types of relationships:

What are healthy Polyamorous ("Poly") relationships?

A Polyamorous person is one who has, seeks to have or is inclined to have multiple relationships with more than one partner in sexual and/or romantic ways at the same time. Each partner within a polyamorous relationship gets to set their own parameters about what is appropriate "poly" behavior for themselves. Most partnerships are formed when two or more parties agree on what the parameters for their involvements will be. It is hoped that each participant agrees only after they are informed or knowledgeable about what the agreement actually means to each of the other partners. This is called "informed consent."

In healthy poly relationships this agreement fuels each participant's overall individual and collective happiness and personal interpretation of well-being. Healthy poly-oriented individuals will seek to make their relationships win-win and often go to great lengths to ensure that they make choices that work for all parties concerned. Poly relationships are not an invitation to violate current agreements, promises or commitments, they are an opportunity for sexual or romantic self-expression between consenting adults who enjoy it. It should be noted that Polygamy (marriage to more than one person simultaneously) is illegal within the U.S.

What is abuse within a Poly relationship?

Since many poly relationships are often complex and have the capacity to be or become emotionally intense, participants will likely be very careful in their approach to any structured agreements so that trust might be built over time, ensuring the ongoing safety and health of each participant. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." When one partner coerces, manipulates, bribes or threatens another to agree to something, especially something as potentially intense as Polyamory, it is possible that the relationship is abusive and, if the partners are or have been intimates, then it may be considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does an abusive Poly relationships look like?

If you have lingering feelings that "this isn't right" or that "something is wrong with this picture" then there is cause for further consideration. It may not be abuse, but it is important to listen to your internal alarms and explore areas of concern. You may notice the following

- demands that someone accept, tolerate, or change to accommodate bouts, outbursts or feelings of jealousy
- forcing someone to make agreements they aren't comfortable with, adjust to new partners too quickly, change current agreements without re-negotiating, etc.

- withholding support, affection, care or other agreed upon exchanges if a partner does not agree to include someone new
- violations of "shared airspace" by sounds of sex, intimacies, secret conversations, BDSM activities, etc. without previous check-ins and/or agreements
- chronic ridicule or extreme criticism of other partners and/or playmates; constant venting or complaining about one partner to another, especially if they are also intimates
- repeated breaking of confidences either directly or indirectly
- belittling of sentimental items or gifts from other partners
- setting a partner up to feel guilty about their other interests/partners
- manipulating, coercing, bribing, forcing for more time, space or attention than other partners, especially primary one.

Section 4: Master/slave Considerations

Distinguishing abuse in these special types of relationships:

What is a healthy Master/slave ("M/s") relationship?

A Master/slave relationship is one where the dominant person or persons has agreed to take on or claims the ownership rights (to any degree) of another or others. Each partner agrees to the level, type and style of ownership, as well as the limitations of it. It is hoped that each participant gives this agreement only after they are informed or knowledgeable about what it actually means. This is called "informed consent."

In healthy M/s relationships this agreement fuels each participant's overall individual and mutual happiness and personal interpretation of well-being. Human ownership is not legally recognized within any country worldwide and thusly one person cannot own another (within the BDSM context) without their agreement.

A good Master or Mistress usually wants to protect and safeguard their property and will often go to great lengths to ensure the safety of those in their care. Mistresses or Masters will frequently seek to increase the value of a slave by teaching them service, focus, discipline, technique or endurance skills. A good Owner is one who prevents harm rather than causing it. A good slave is one who seeks to keep their agreements with a healthy Owner.

What is abuse within a Master/Mistress/slave relationship?

Since some M/s relationships do not use "safe words" as a way to distinguish their level of agreement, they will likely be very careful in their approach to any commitments so that trust might be built over time, ensuring the ongoing safety and health of the participants. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." When one partner coerces, manipulates, bribes or threatens another to agree to something, especially something as potentially volatile and intense as ownership, it might be assumed that the relationships is abusive and, if the partners are or have been intimates, then it may be considered domestic violence. In either case both parties should get help quickly.

What does abusive Ownership look like?

If you have lingering feelings that "this isn't right" or that "something is wrong with this picture" then there is cause for further consideration. It may not be abuse, but it is important to listen to your internal alarms and explore areas of concern. You may notice the following

- requirements of large or increasing amounts of control too quickly or too early on
- safeguards are not set or maintained
- health care is refused when needed
- control extends beyond agreed upon areas like work, school or parenting

- activities that reduce self-esteem for more than a day or two are forced or repeated
- repeated threats are made to abandon partner or expose lifestyle to the police
- extreme mismanagement of items, affects or resources in either party's care
- being coerced into taking on or giving up more control than is comfortable/feels safe
- being ridiculed without appropriate safeguards and/or aftercare
- consistent denial of downtime or rest for periods longer than a day or two
- physical activities that create permanent harm like broken bones, transference of disease, injuries requiring stitches, surgery, etc.
- failure to notice or heed psychological warning signs like thoughts or attempts at suicide, depression, withdrawal, violence at self or others, drug or alcohol abuse, etc

Section 5: Considerations for Sex Workers

Distinguishing abuse to and with those in this specialized type of profession:

What is a healthy Sex Worker?

A sex worker is someone who provides some sort of service for fees, usually physical or sexual in nature. Often they will have clearly defined boundaries and limitations and take necessary mental and physical health precautions to remain safe and healthy in their profession. A sex worker can be a lesbian or dyke and still provide sexual services to men, be a gay male and provide services to women, identify as heterosexual and provide sexual services to members of the same sex, may identify as "a-sexual" or "non-sexual" on a personal level and still provide sexual services to others, etc. It is also possible that they may not engage in any type of one-on-one contact or sex with clients, but may instead be a dancer or stripper, a professional Dominatrix, a professional submissive or may be a phone sex worker or a "porn" star, appearing in pornographic videos. Any person who identifies as a Sex Worker is entitled to the same safety and peace of mind considerations that any other person receives in other fields of employment and/or business ownership. Sex workers get to set their own parameters about what is appropriate behavior for themselves within their chosen line of work, as well as within their personal and interpersonal relationships.

It should be noted that many types of employment within the sex worker industry are still considered illegal within most U.S. states.

What is considered abusive to or with a Sex Worker?

Since many forms of sex work are considered by mainstream society as either a) illegal or b) morally wrong or c) both, relationships with these individuals have specific needs and areas of concern. Due to the specific type of legal ramifications and social restrictions sex workers face, care must be taken not to perpetuate institutionalized discrimination and shame or guilt based philosophies. Partnerships with sex workers are often complex and have the capacity to be or become emotionally intense. Abusive behaviors towards sex workers may come in the form of judgments, condescension, resentment of success or type of work performed, raging jealousies or invalidation of their authenticity and sincerity in private or personal sexual relations. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." When one partner coerces, manipulates, bribes or threatens another to abandon something they value or agree to do something they don't want, especially something as potentially intense as sex work, it can be assumed that the relationship is abusive and, if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse towards Sex Workers look like?

- demands are made that someone accept, tolerate, or change to accommodate bouts, outbursts or feelings of jealousy
- expectation of special favors or appreciation for "tolerating" their line of work

- withholding support, affection, care or other agreed upon exchanges if the sex worker does not agree to non-negotiated demands
- justifying violations of monogamy agreements because one partner is a sex worker
- derogatory comments or extreme criticism of skills, pricing, gender or quality of clients, length of appointments, lack of repeats, area of specialty, mode of dress, body style, etc.
- threats or acts of withholding escorts or safety back-up as agreed
- repeated withdrawal, fits of anger or guilt trips after client sessions
- manipulating, coercing, blackmailing or forcing for more time or attention than clients, especially during peak seasons or times
- physical abuse and/or damage to equipment, clothing or toys used for work
- blackmail to do "other things" in exchange for safety or protection from police exposure

Section 6: Considerations for Transgender/Transsexuals

Distinguishing abuse to and with these individuals:

What are healthy Transgender/Transsexual ("Trans") relationships?

A transgendered or transsexual person is one who is or has been in some form of transition from one gender to another or seeks to remain somewhere between them. They may or may not seek surgical reassignment and may complete part or all of a transition as they desire or see fit. A trans person may have breasts, a penis or a vagina or not, or any combination thereof. They may seek legal recognition of their sexual identity or they may decide not to. Sexual identity is not related to sexual orientation, nor is it related to gender assignment at birth.

Each trans person gets to decide for themselves what their level of disclosure will be and with whom, as well as the timing of it. New romantic or sexual encounters, partnerships or marriages are formed or created after some level of disclosure has been made about the trans-person's transition. These commitments are often made only after a full disclosure has been made and where the full implications and considerations can be examined by each committing party. This is called "informed consent."

Anyone who identifies as a trans person is entitled to the same safety and peace of mind considerations that any other individual receives. Trans persons do not deserve to receive discrimination, abuse or ridicule in any form.

What is considered abusive to or with a Trans person?

Since mainstream society is still just becoming aware of who and what transgenderism and transsexualism is, fear, moral or social judgments and discrimination are still commonplace. Due to the lack of education and awareness, abuse and domestic violence are frequently overlooked, discounted or tolerated. When given an opportunity to engage or relate to and with a trans person, care must be taken not to perpetuate institutionalized discrimination and shame based philosophies. Abusive behaviors towards trans persons often come in the form of chronic criticism, belittling and demeaning, isolation, violence and/or severe restriction on their contributions or inclusion. These individuals often find themselves invalidated for their gender authenticity and/or denied their right to participate in gender specific activities or events. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." When one partner coerces, manipulates, bribes or threatens another to agree to do something they don't want, or abandon something that is important to them (like transitioning), it can be assumed that the relationship is abusive and, if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse towards a Trans person look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that someone delay, postpone or abandon their pursuit of transitioning from one sex to another

- ridicule or criticism of physical changes, choice of clothing, mannerisms, body style, etc.
- continuous talk about how "so-and-so" is prettier, more feminine, more handsome, more masculine, more male or more female, etc.
- intentional disruption or denial of medical or clinical support, access to chemical treatments, prosthesis, right gender clothing, withholding of shared resources or support, etc.
- threats to expose personal or transitional details to friends, family, spouses, children, employers, landlords, police, etc.
- manipulating, coercing, bribing, or forcing someone to act outside of their gender identity during outings, holidays, company parties, family visits, etc.
- physical abuse, damage to gender related clothing/accessories/prosthesis, physical abandonment to dangerous people or unsafe areas of town, repeated verbal assaults, etc.
- chronic refusal to adjust pronouns and gender references, especially in their presence
- references that the trans person will never really be their gender "biologically"

Section 7: Considerations for Submissives

Distinguishing abuse to and with these individuals:

What is a healthy submissive?

A submissive is a person of any race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, etc. that seeks to serve and/or give some measure of control over themselves to a counterpart, usually a Dominant, Mistress, Master or Daddy. Submissives often enjoy submitting their will or power to another trusted individual interested in receiving (or taking) it within this consensual power exchange. A submissive may prefer to remain alone, giving of themselves in more community-oriented ways, they may decide to run for a leather "title" so that they can be "in service" to their community or they may just submit themselves to internal desires that compel them to write or teach or create art. Many submissives learn things of interest to them or that might increase their value to a potential dominant partner like boot-blackening, leather care, formal table or valet service or sometimes they may try and learn ways to expand their ability to submit and/or their tolerance for pain, if that is what they are into.

Some people within the BDSM community have the misconception that submissives want to relinquish power to a dominant partner because they cannot handle that power, because their life does not work when they are in control of it or because they are passive or weak. A healthy submissive is usually none of these things. They are someone whose life actually works well; they have good relationships with their friends, make appropriate safety and partnering choices for themselves and can operate independently with a high level of self-sufficiency. Many submissives are very careful about whom they choose to become involved with because they believe their submission is valuable and they want to safeguard themselves against abuse or maltreatment.

Healthy submissives will take the time to learn good negotiation skills, seek to stop behaving within old patterns/paradigms that may be left over from childhood or past hurts, will take responsibility for their mistakes and practice healthy conflict/resolution skills. They will also take their time getting to know someone before they trust them, will be honest about their concerns and will not need to manipulate someone to get their needs met. They will seek relationships that are win-win.

What is considered abuse to or with a submissive?

Since many people who identify as submissives are engaged within a consensual power exchange, it may be more difficult to discern abuse. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." Abuse and domestic violence within BDSM relationships, especially D/s (dominant/submissive) ones, are frequently overlooked, discounted, tolerated or accepted because there appears to be no public support or there is the fear of "outing" or of being "outed" about their BDSM interests. Abuse of submissives often comes in the form of restricted activities and friendships, isolation, inappropriate or harmful punishments, invalidation or restriction on their contributions or involvement, etc. Abuse can and does occur to submissives, even by other submissives, and if the

partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse towards a submissive look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that they do things they do not want to agree to or demands that they give over more control than they are comfortable with or at a pace that feels wrong to them
- refusal to provide for the submissive's needs, combined with refusal to allow anyone else to fill them or refusing to allow the submissive to renegotiate to get their needs met outside of the relationship
- non-consensual control, dominance or abuse of the submissive's children, or making demands that go against the maternal or paternal responsibilities the submissive may have; restricting access to children as a way to punish
- harm or non-consensual control of the submissive's pets, belongings or their own submissives (when the submissive is a switch and has others in service to them)
- prevention, interruption or refusal of medical attention, emotional healing, therapy, religious counseling, spiritual advisement or professional support when needed
- physical abuse, blackmail, repeated verbal assaults, chronic belittling, refusal to adhere to safety practices as negotiated or refusing to allow renegotiation when the submissive needs it, etc.
- threats or acts to expose lifestyle to co-workers, vanilla family members or children
- forcing, manipulating, coercing, demanding or bribing the submissive to have sex or provide service to anyone or in any way that violates agreements or previous negotiations
- negotiating someone into agreements without their full informed consent, especially long-term contracts with newcomers; manipulating someone into financial or emotional dependence without taking precautions should conflict occur or the need to leave arise
- giving a submissive drugs, alcohol or other substances to elicit or affect their consent

Section 8: Considerations for Dominants

Distinguishing abuse to and with these individuals:

What is a healthy Dominant?

A dominant is a person of any race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, etc. that seeks to direct and/or receive power or some measure of control of a counterpart, usually a submissive, slave, or bottom. Dominants often enjoy exerting their will or power over another trusted individual interested in submitting to it within this consensual power exchange. A dominant may prefer to remain alone, using their power and/or leadership abilities in more community oriented ways, they may decide to run for a leather title so that they can use their influence or power to benefit their community or they may focus their control solely on themselves and allow their energy to assist them financially or creatively through writing, teaching or the creation of art. Many dominants learn things of interest to them or that might increase their enjoyment of a well-matched submissive partner like flogging, cutting or military-style training methods and they may sometimes seek to learn new ways to expand their ability to consensually control or may explore the ethics behind ownership, if that is what they are into.

Some people within the BDSM community have the misconception that dominants want power over a submissive partner because they are on an "ego trip," or because their own life doesn't work and they want someone to pick up the slack or because they are perpetrators of some sort. A healthy dominant is usually none of these things. They are someone whose life actually works well; they have good relationships with their friends, make appropriate safety and partnering choices for themselves, go to great lengths not to harm others and can operate independently of submissives with a high level of self-sufficiency. Many dominants are very careful about whom they choose to become involved with because they believe their dominance is to be exerted with care and they want to safeguard those who come to them against abuse or maltreatment.

Healthy dominants will take the time to learn good negotiation skills, seek to stop behaving in old patterns/paradigms that may be left over from their childhood or past hurts, will take responsibility for their mistakes and will learn how to practice healthy conflict/resolution skills. They will also take their time getting to know someone before they trust them, will be honest about their concerns and will not need to manipulate or make promises to get their way. They will seek relationships that are win-win.

What is considered abuse to or with a dominant?

Since many people who identify as dominants are assumed to be the ones in control or the person responsible for an abusive relationship, it may be more difficult to discern abuse. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." Abuse and domestic violence within BDSM relationships, especially abuse against dominants, are frequently overlooked, discounted, tolerated or accepted because there is no public support of BDSM or the dominant will be seen as weak or unable to be in control if it is discovered they are being abused by their submissive. Abuse of dominants can come in the form of

ridicule, extreme jealousy or hysteria if the dominant does not give the submissive what they want or refuses to see others that they negotiated for time with, back lashing a dominant after an agreed upon punishment is administered, etc. Abuse can and does occur to dominants, even by submissives or other dominants, and if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse towards a dominant look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that the dominant do things they do not want to or demands that they go at a pace that feels wrong to them
- refusal to provide for the dominant's needs as negotiated, combined with refusal to allow anyone else to fill them or refusing to allow them to renegotiate to get their needs met outside of the relationship
- non-consensual manipulation, control or abuse of the dominant's children, or making demands that go against the maternal or paternal responsibilities the dominant may have; forcing them to make a choice between their submissive and their children
- harm or abuse of the dominant's pets, belongings or their other submissives as a way to get back at them
- manipulating to prevent or interrupt the dominant's medical attention, emotional healing, therapy, religious counseling, spiritual advisement or professional support
- physical abuse, blackmail, repeated verbal assaults, chronic belittling, refusal to adhere to safety practices as negotiated or allowing re-negotiation when the dominant requests it, etc.
- threats or acts to expose lifestyle to co-workers, vanilla family members or children
- forcing, manipulating, coercing, demanding or bribing the dominant to have sex with or share their submissive with anyone or in any way that violates agreements or previous negotiations
- negotiating agreements without the dominant's full informed consent, especially long-term contracts with newcomers; manipulating someone into financial or emotional control without taking precautions should conflict or the need to leave occur
- giving a dominant drugs, alcohol or other substances to elicit or affect their control or interest

Section 9: Abuse Based on Size

What is "size-ism"?

Size-ism is the chronic discrimination of someone because they are larger, smaller, less muscular, small-breasted, large-breasted, have a small(er) penis, are robust, fat, pear-shaped, pot-bellied, taller, shorter, etc. than someone else or groups of others. It is much like racism or class-ism. In the United States, the media abounds with images of what our ideal physical standards should be. Even the federal government has established standards of acceptable or "normal" weight ranges and anyone outside of these ranges are considered overweight, unhealthy, fat or even obese. There is still very little literature that exists which actually encourages individuals to be whatever body size/shape they choose, or that the one they have is good just the way it is. Many large people often are as conscious of their health, nutrition and exercise regimes as their smaller counterparts. There is also the false assumption that persons of ample size are less sexual than smaller or more "average" sized persons. Sexual libido/activity is not related to physical size or shape.

Each person gets to decide for themselves what their physical size, eating habits and activity level will be and with whom they will spend their time and/or have sexual exchanges with. Many people in the BDSM community believe that those who weigh more have "more padding," are able to take more physical sensation, are often assumed to be submissive or "in need of control", or are deferred to as an authority figure or even assumed to be "natural nurturers", etc. These are not necessarily true. Each person is an individual and has individual preferences and needs. Negotiate with new partners to determine their comfort level with physical intensity and other interests – do not assume them.

Discrimination also occurs when organizations or groups do not try to accommodate the needs of their members or event attendees by securing or stabilizing crosses or other dungeon equipment so that larger people are not in danger, placing medical supplies out of the reach of shorter individuals, overlooking the need to provide sturdy chairs for those that are not comfortable (or able) to stand for long periods of time or "perch" on something smaller, etc. Anyone who identifies as a "person of size" is entitled to the same safety and peace of mind considerations that any other individual receives. People of size do not deserve to receive discrimination, abuse or ridicule in any form.

What is considered abusive to or with a "person of size"?

Since mainstream society is still not fully accepting of many physical differences, nor are they sensitive as a whole to the needs of those who are larger than what is considered "normal", moral and social judgments and discrimination are still commonplace. Due to the oppression many people of size experience, self-esteem is often lowered in the individual and thusly abuse and domestic violence are frequently overlooked, discounted, tolerated or accepted as "deserved." When given an opportunity to engage or relate to and with a person of size, care must be taken not to perpetuate institutionalized discrimination and shame-based philosophies. Abusive behaviors towards these people often come in the form of criticism, judgments, exclusion, invalidation or restriction on

their contributions or involvement. These individuals often find themselves invalidated for their beauty, sexuality, fitness, healthiness, etc. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." When someone coerces, manipulates, bribes or threatens another to agree to do something they don't want (like surgery, diets or forced exercise), or abandon something that is important to them (like enjoying their body the way it is), it can be assumed that the relationship is abusive and, if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse towards a person of size look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that someone diet, exercise, take medications or drugs (like diuretics, laxatives or diet pills) or have "corrective" surgery
- ridicule or criticism of physical size, shape, proportions, abilities or lack of ability, etc.
- continuous talk about how "so-and-so" is prettier or more handsome because they are smaller, bustier, taller, more petite, work out more, etc.
- refusal to touch or caress areas that "disgust them," emotional distance based on weight changes, forced feeding or food "restrictions," etc.
- threats to abandon or punish if weight expectations/demands are not met
- physical abuse, damage to (often) more expensive larger/smaller sized or custom made clothing, blackmail, repeated verbal assaults, chronic belittling, etc.

Section 10: Abuse Based on Age

What is "age-ism"?

Age-ism is the chronic discrimination of a person because they are younger or older than someone else or a group of others. It is much like racism or class-ism. In the United States, the media still abounds with images of what our ideal age range "should be." Motion pictures rarely, if ever, feature a very old leading lady as the sexy diva, an older man as the perfect choice for rock climbing, a very young man as a person of self-control or a young woman as the epitome of great intellect. Although there has been increased awareness and some legislative improvement, there is still very little literature that exists which actually affirms individuals of different ages as having the same range of skills or value as their counterparts. There is also a false assumption that those who are older have less sexual drive than younger people. Sexual libido/activity is not related to a person's age.

Many people within the BDSM community have the misconception that someone who is younger cannot be a Dominant, Mistress, Master or Daddy, or that someone older will not make a good submissive or bottom because they are too "set in their ways." This is not necessarily true. Each person is an individual and has their own identity, preferences and needs. Negotiate with new partners to determine their identity and interests – do not assume them. There is also no reason why adults of extreme age differences cannot be partnered or enjoy each other sexually or physically. No one deserves to receive discrimination, abuse or ridicule in any form, and no judgment should be made about what is right or wrong for consenting adults that do not seek to harm anyone.

It should be noted that within the U.S. there are legal statutes for what constitutes adulthood and most (if not all) BDSM organizations adhere to these rules to determine their own age of consent.

What is considered abusive age-ism behavior?

Since mainstream society is still not fully accepting of extreme age differences in partnerships or the very young or elderly in general, moral and social judgments and discrimination are still commonplace. Abuse and domestic violence within BDSM relationships are frequently overlooked, discounted, tolerated or accepted because there appears to be no public support or there is the fear of "outing" or of being "outed." Abusive behaviors towards the elderly and to young adults often comes in the form of restricted support, exclusion, invalidation or restriction on their contributions or involvement. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." Abuse can and does occur to the young and old alike, and if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse based on age look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that someone do things they do not want to in exchange for accepting or tolerating their age
- ridicule or criticism of age, wisdom, maturity level, etc.; telling them they are "too young to get it," "over the hill," "past their prime," "not mentally ready/able to understand what's being said," etc.
- continuous talk about how "so-and-so" is prettier or more handsome because they are younger, sexier, have less sags, are more agile, are perkier, have more stamina, are more controlled in their physical desires, etc.
- refusal to touch or caress areas that "disgust them"
- taunts or threats to non-consensually abandon or punish if their exuberance, energy or lack of energy are not altered; threats or acts of intentional betrayal with a person in an opposite age range in an effort to harm
- physical abuse, damage to medical equipment, blackmail, repeated verbal assaults, chronic belittling, etc.
- foregoing or refusing to participate in needed safety requirements (like no kneeling for arthritic knees or a bad back, overexposure to novices without appropriate debriefs or aftercare, etc.)
- intentionally withholding promised support, food, medications, transportation, telephone access, etc. without renegotiating first
- treating or calling someone "stupid" just because they are of a different generation and did not have the same life experiences

Section 11: Abuse Based on Physical Ability

What is "able body-ism"?

Able body-ism is chronic discrimination against a person because they have a lowered range of motion or are wheelchair bound, immobile, handicapped, disabled, etc. It is much like racism or class-ism and often goes unnoticed. In the United States, the media still abounds with images of what our ideal physical standards "should be." Motion pictures rarely, if ever, feature the leading lady or man in a wheelchair or a dynamic CEO with one hand or leg. Although there has been increased awareness and some legislative improvement, there is still very little literature that exists which actually affirms individuals with different ability levels than those that are considered "the norm." There is also a false assumption that those who appear to have a physical disadvantage have less sexual drive than "normal" people. Since sex is as much a mental and emotional experience as it is physical for many people, sexual libido/activity is not related to a person's physical ability or handicap.

Many people within the BDSM community overlook the needs of those who are physically challenged. There is also the misconception that someone cannot be a Dominant, Mistress, Master or Daddy if they have a physical disability or are wheelchair bound. This is not true. Each person is an individual and has their own identity, preferences and needs. Negotiate with new partners to determine their identity and interests – do not assume them.

Discrimination also occurs when organizations or groups do not try to accommodate the needs of their members or attendees by providing (and advertising) wheelchair accessible play and meeting spaces, remove obstacles for those who must navigate with a wider range of physical space, are on crutches or who use a cane, place medical supplies within reach of everyone whether sitting or standing, and provide bathroom facilities for those that may have different ability needs than others. Everyone who is a "differently-abled" person is entitled to the same safety and peace of mind considerations that any other individual receives. People with physical restrictions/disabilities do not deserve to receive discrimination, abuse or ridicule in any form.

What is considered abusive to or with a disabled person?

Since mainstream society is still not fully accepting of physical differences in abilities in general, many moral and social judgments are still commonplace. Abuse and domestic violence within BDSM relationships are frequently overlooked, discounted, tolerated or accepted because there appears to be no public support or there is the fear of losing the disabled person's caretaker and of becoming more confined or restricted than they already are. Abusive behaviors towards the differently-abled often comes in the form of restricted support, exclusion or invalidation of their contributions or involvement. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." Abuse can and does occur to the able and disabled alike, and if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse based on physical ability look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that someone do things they do not want to in exchange for accepting or tolerating their ability or disability
- ridicule or criticism of physical differences, medical equipment, gracefulness, autonomy, etc.; telling them they are "never going to be free," "they have to suffer or wait," "helpless and pathetic," "pitiful or disgusting," etc.
- continuous talk about how "so-and-so" is prettier or more handsome because they are more fit, sexier because they are more agile or have less scars, are better lovers because they are physically versatile, etc.
- refusal to touch or caress areas that "disgust them."
- taunts or threats to non-consensually abandon or punish them if their demands are not met
- physical abuse, damage to medical equipment, prosthesis or specialty toys and clothing
- foregoing or refusing to participate in needed safety requirements (like no hot wax or fire on areas where there is no sensation, inappropriate humiliation of disability or equipment, etc.)
- intentionally withholding promised support, food, medications, transportation, telephone access, etc. without renegotiating first
- refusing to accommodate, berating or discounting repeatedly the needs of someone handicapped because they "appear" or can pass as "normal."

Section 12: Considerations for the Deaf

Distinguishing abuse to and with these individuals:

What is a healthy relationship with a deaf person?

A deaf person might be defined as anyone with the inability to hear, a person who is deaf in one ear or has a limited range of hearing. They may identify as a Dominant, Mistress, Master, Daddy, Submissive, Switch, Bottom or Slave. Their identity and the ability or lack of ability to hear are not related. Deafness is not limited by race, orientation, gender, identity or sexuality.

Some people within the BDSM community have the misconception that deaf people only desire to play with other deaf people, are difficult to play with because of their disability or think that the deaf person will be unable to care sufficiently for themselves during a scene or that negotiations will be impossible. These are not necessarily true. Any of these same things could be true of any other BDSM relationship where all partners have full hearing. A healthy deaf person usually does none of these things. They are someone who has taken the time to learn good negotiation skills, has a life that works well; has good relationships with their friends, they make appropriate safety and partnering choices for themselves and can operate independently with high levels of self-sufficiency. Many deaf people are very careful about who they choose to become involved with because they value themselves and they want to safeguard themselves against abuse or maltreatment.

Healthy relationships with the deaf are about mutual respect and care. When each party takes the time to learn good communication skills, seeks to stop behaving in old patterns/paradigms that may be left over from their childhood or past hurts, takes responsibility for their mistakes and has learned how to practice healthy conflict/resolution skills then they are likely to have great relationships. Healthy deaf people and their partners need to take time getting to know someone before they trust them, be honest about their concerns and not manipulate to get their needs met. They should seek relationships that are win-win.

What is considered abuse to or with a deaf person?

Since many people who identify as deaf are engaged with others who are not, it might not be easy to see the abuse at first. Random House Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as "to use wrongly or improperly" and "to treat in a harmful, injurious or offensive way." Abuse and domestic violence within BDSM relationships, especially deaf partnered with hearing ones, are frequently overlooked, discounted, tolerated or accepted because the abuse is not readily apparent to outsiders or the deaf person may not want to appear as a "victim." Abuse of the deaf often comes in the form of restricted communication and access to other deaf people for friendships, isolating them, heavy criticisms about their level or skill of language, invalidation or restriction on their contributions or involvement, etc. Abuse can and does occur to the deaf, even by other deaf people, and if the partners are or have been intimates, then it is considered domestic violence. In either case each party should get help quickly.

What does abuse towards a deaf person look like?

- coercion, threats or demands that the deaf person agree to what you are saying even if they do not understand it or conform to your method of communication (writing, lip read only, etc.)
- refusal to allow them to be part of the negotiation process on things that concern them unless they have agreed in advance to do this; turning away to speak to someone about them so that the deaf person can't read your lips
- non-consensual dominance or control of a deaf person as a "right" due to them for toleration of their disability
- non-consensual prevention, interruption or refusal of hearing aides, writing materials or other method of their preferred communication
- physical abuse, blackmail, repeated verbal assaults, chronic belittling, refusal to adhere to safety practices as negotiated or allowing re-negotiation when the deaf person needs it, etc.
- threats or acts to turn off the lights (preventing communication by writing or signing), binding their hands, gagging or putting tape over their mouth if demands are not met
- forcing, manipulating, coercing, demanding or bribing a deaf person to have sex or provide service to anyone or in any way that violates agreements or previous negotiations
- negotiating someone into agreements without their full informed consent, especially contracts that are designed to intentionally withhold important information from a deaf person that they would have not agreed to otherwise
- manipulating someone into financial or emotional dependence without taking precautions should conflict or the need to leave occur