

What Professionals Need to Know About BDSM
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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(See What Professionals Need to Know About BDSM for references)

1950s Household: A style of D/s relationship modeled on gendered authority and power dynamics of United States family life in the 1950s. The male is generally considered dominant and is the primary economic provider while the female is submissive and responsible for household chores and child-rearing.

24/7: Engaging in some form of BDSM, usually D/s or M/s, 24-hours a day, 7-days a week.

Aftercare: Emotional and physical care after a scene. Usually in reference to a Top taking care of a bottom but sometimes the reverse. Sometimes individuals who were not involved in the scene will be responsible for the aftercare. Aftercare is important to prevent drop (see below).

Age Play: A sexualized interaction where one person takes an older role and one takes a younger with a large age gap between. The relationship does have inherent power exchange, but the interaction is mostly typified by the reliance on someone (or being relied on) for safety and nurturance. Although the typical names used are “**Daddy**,” “**Mommy**,” “**boy**” or “**boi**,” and “**girl**”, these labels are not indicative of the chronological age of those playing but of their youthful exuberance or mentoring/nurturing demeanor. Further, a “girl” could be a female bottom or a feminized male bottom (see forced feminization).

Alpha Sub or Alpha Slave: In a related group of submissive or slave individuals, the one who is considered senior or has the most authority.

Arousal Templates: The internal map of what sexually arouses an individual.

Authority Transfer/Power Exchange/Total Power Exchange: A D/s or M/s relationship structured around one person granting another authority to make decisions regarding some portion of his or her life. The complexity varies depending on the relationship, context, scene or agreement.

Auto-erotic Asphyxiation: Breath play done individually which is considered more risky than breath play since there is not a person present to get medical attention if needed.

Blood Play: Any activity which involves drawing blood, or using menstrual blood.

Boy (Boi): An individual of either sex who displays a youthful exuberance and desires some form of mentoring. The term is not dependent upon the age of the individual, and some boys are significantly older than their Daddies or Mommies.

Bootblacks: Frequently present at BDSM events to keep leather in good condition. They serve an important role in fundraising for leather organizations and there are often bootblacking contests at leather events.

Boot Worship: Highly common in BDSM practice and frequently includes kissing, licking, or caressing a boot when it is worn by a Dominant.

Bottom: One who receives the sensations in a scene and as a sexual identity one who prefers to receive sensations rather than give them.

Breath Play: Any behavior that controls a bottom’s breath, including “holding” it, choking, using ligatures, plastic bags, etc.

Cock & Ball Torture (CBT): A common form of genitorture which focuses on the male genitalia.

Collar: Most commonly an actual collar, similar to an animal's collar worn around the neck. A collar can come in a variety of other forms such as a bracelet, locket, belts, necklace, tattoo, scar, etc. It is often used to indicate some form of committed relationship, usually in a D/s or M/s relationship of some sort. It can be considered in some cases to be analogous to a wedding ring. In other cases it may be merely a piece of temporary jewelry.

Consensual Non-Monogamy: An umbrella term for relationship structures in which the participants engage in non-monogamous behavior in an open manner where all parties have consented to sexual activity with multiple parties. Non-monogamous relationships often have negotiated parameters and rules about how and when who may be with whom.

Consent: In a BDSM context consent is the agreement to participate in negotiated activity. Practitioners often stress that consent is what makes the difference between BDSM being play and it constituting assault.

Contract: An agreement, sometimes written, that delineates the rules and structure of a D/s or M/s relationship.

Cross Dressing: Dressing in the clothes of the opposite gender as a form of role play and/or humiliation play. Some clients will do this in the context of their relationships while many may do this as a solitary activity with or without any sexual component. Cross-dressing in the BDSM community may or may not be linked to transgendered identity (see genderplay).

D/s: Shorthand for dominance and submission.

Daddy: An individual of either sex, but more commonly a male, who takes on a role with a boy or girl that is usually based in mentoring and nurturing.

Domina: A female dominant who embraces a feminine gender role.

Dominant: A person who has (negotiated) authority over a submissive in a scene or relationship.

Dom: A male who is dominant.

Domestic Discipline (DD): Corporal punishment in the form of spanking and caning as a form of maintaining discipline.

Dominatrix: A female dominant. The term is usually used to describe a woman who does professional domination.

Domme: Shorthand for a dominant female; pronounced the same as 'Dom.'

Drop: Physical or emotional exhaustion after a scene that can be experienced by both tops and bottoms. Most common after particularly intense scenes (even if the scene was enjoyed). Drop is often characterized by feelings of sadness, remorse or guilt, physical shaking or chills, crying and simple but profound exhaustion.

Dungeon: A location equipped for BDSM play that can be in clubs or in peoples' homes.

Dungeon Monitors: Located at club dungeons and at play parties and they are in charge of insuring the safety and enjoyment of everyone.

Edge Play: BDSM activities that are considered more dangerous or intense than other forms of play. This is a highly subjective label that can vary considerably from person to person, as well as for a single individual over the course of many years, however it often includes things like breath play and scat play.

Electrical Play: Any behavior requiring the use of an electrical toy, medical or law enforcement device—a common device used in the community is a violet wand, however, more crude devices such as stun guns can be used.

Emotional Masochist: A term for individuals whose masochism manifests through a sense of emotional pain, humiliation, or objectification rather than the reception of physical pain.

FemDom: Refers to female domination, usually in regards to relationships where a woman is dominant and a male is submissive.

Figging: The practice of placing cut or carved ginger root into the anus, vagina, or the urethra of the penis as an irritant or aphrodisiac.

Fire Play: The use of open flame during BDSM play.

Fisting: Insertion of the hand into the anus or vagina (see handballing).

Flagging: Keys, patches, pins, or other items in addition to handkerchiefs as a form of code to identify other people and their preferences (see hanky code).

Forced Feminization: A form of humiliation play in which a man may be consensually forced within a scene to dress in feminine clothing, wear makeup, get his hair done, or behave in a feminine way (see sissy).

Gender Play: A form of playful expression, a form of role play and/or a form of humiliation play. In the BDSM community it is not uncommon for people to dress in the clothes of the other gender or do scenes in which they use pronouns of the other gender or refer to themselves as being a member of the other gender even when they do not identify as gender atypical outside of BDSM play.

Genitorture: Playing in a painful rather than sensual manner with the genitals of another individual. This often involves tools like straps, needles and clothes pins.

Girl: A term that can indicate either a submissive female or slave (or male who has been feminized or is gender queer), to a woman in a Daddy/girl or Mommy/girl relationship.

Golden Shower (or Watersports): The act of urination during BDSM, often on the bottom.

Gor: A relationship where all men are dominant and all women are submissive. This dynamic is maintained through a series of protocols and labels. This model of BDSM is adapted from a series of novels by John Norman.

Goth: A subculture that arose in the '80s often focused on morbid sensuality and Victorian romanticism. It has ties with the vampire subculture and with modern primitives as well as with the BDSM community.

Handballing: The practice of inserting the entire hand into the anus. This is most commonly done by gay men.

Hanky Code: A code of different colored handkerchiefs that were originally devised by the leather community in the '60s and '70s for the purpose of displaying preferences in role (top and bottom) and activity (bondage, watersports, fisting, etc).

Hard Limits: Boundaries set by top or bottom on behaviors/words/interactions that are non-negotiable.

Humiliation Play: BDSM activity that is designed to humiliate or embarrass the bottom for the purposes of sexual arousal. This may include verbal insults or comments but also situational or physical humiliation.

Impact Play: Striking the body usually with a hand (spanking), paddle, cane (caning), or whip or flogger (flogging/flagellation).

Knife Play: A form of play using a knife which may or may not involve blood play. Usually the knife or sword is used as an expression of dominance.

Leather: Pertaining to leather culture and one or more of the various leather communities. The difference between leather and BDSM is the subject of many lively debates.

Leatherdyke: A term for a lesbian member of the leather or leatherdyke communities

Leatherman: A male, usually gay or bisexual, who is a member of one of the leather communities.

Leathersex: An alternate term for BDSM play, more commonly used in older members of the gay leather community.

Leather Family: A ‘family-of-choice’ within the larger leather community.

Lifestyle: A term used by people in the kink or swinger scenes implying that their sexuality is more pervasive in their lives than the occasional scene and is a defining aspect of their relationship(s). It is important when working with clients using the term lifestyle to find out if they mean the kink lifestyle, the swing lifestyle or something else.

Masochist: In the BDSM context, a person who is sexually aroused by pain.

Master: A self-proclaimed title used by individuals in a Master/slave relationship. Sometimes used a general address for dominants and tops.

Master/slave (M/s): A relationship structure where authority to make various decisions has been transferred from the slave to the Master.

Milking: (a female) Requires inducing lactation or forcing an already lactating woman to present milk. **(a male)** Is the stimulation of the prostate to the point of ejaculation without touching his genitals.

Mistress: A self-proclaimed title used by individual in a Master/slave relationship, considered to be the feminine form of master.

Mommy: A term for women who are dominant in a form of age play relationship or scene. Similarly to Daddies. Mommies are usually more nurturing than a traditional Domme.

Mummification: A BDSM practice in which the bottom is immobilized through the encasement of the body with rope, plastic wrap, or some other material that prevents movement.

Munch: An informal gathering at a restaurant of individuals interested in BDSM for the purposes of socialization in a safe, generally non-sexualized environment.

Needle Play: A BDSM activity that involves inserting medical needles under the skin; almost invariably a form of blood play.

New Leather/New Guard: The values and protocols of the leather community of the 1980s and 1990s which were characterized by a rejection of the hierarchical nature of the Old Guard Leathermen and a more open acceptance of heterosexuals and lesbians.

Objectification: A form of humiliation play in which bottoms take on the roles of inanimate or decorative objects within a scene (a chair or table).

Old Leather/Old Guard: Pertaining to the values or protocols of pre-1960s gay leather community which characterized by a masculine ethos and an idealistic vision of military honor and protocol.

Orgasm Control: Restraining oneself from reaching orgasm, usually by the command of a Dominant.

Pain Slut: A colloquial term for a masochist.

Pansexual: A sexual identity that is open to relations with any sexual orientation, sex, or gender identity.

Pansexual Leather: Pertaining to the primarily heterosexual leather community that developed from the new leather movements of the 1980s and 1990s, characterized by a desire for inclusion and acceptance by the mainstream.

Pansexual BDSM: Pertaining to the modern, primarily heterosexual, BDSM community of clubs and conventions that frequently operate in the open.

Pervertable: Any household item that can be used for BDSM play for instance wooden spoons used for impact play or clothes pins used for genitorture.

Play: An umbrella term used to refer to BDSM activity.

Play Partners: The individual with whom another person engages in BDSM activity more commonly used for temporary, non-romantic, or non-D/s or M/s interactions.

Play Party: A gathering for individuals to engage in BDSM activity. The term is more commonly used for an event at a location not usually designated for BDSM such as private residence or some rented location such as the ballroom of a hotel.

Pony Play: Role play where the submissive takes on the role of a horse or pony, often requires the “horse” to pull carts, wear saddles and take on riders. Also there is specific gear for this type of play including tails, bridles and riding crops.

Power Exchange (PE): Power exchange is generally considered a more limited agreement than authority transfer (see authority transfer).

ProDomme: A woman who works as a professional Top and Dominant.

Protocol: A rule or set of rules in which kinksters agree to engage in.

Polyamory: A style of relating intimately which allows for multiple concurrent emotional and/or sexual relationships with the consent of all parties involved.

Puppy Play: The submissive takes on the role of a dog, which often requires the “dog” to communicate via barking and growling, eat from bowls on the floor, and sleeping in a crate.

Pushy Bottom: A bottom who attempts to instigate a scene or control the scene when it has been agreed previously that the Top will be in control.

Rainbow Play/Shower: BDSM activity that includes vomiting.

Rape Play: A negotiated scene in which one person plays the role of forcing their partner to engage in sexual behaviors while that person plays as though they do not want to engage in the

behaviors. *Note: Rape is not condoned by the BDSM community and play outside of the SSC or RACK guidelines is not tolerated and frequently leads to exclusion from a community.*

Rigger: A term for the Top in rope bondage.

Risk Aware Consensual Kink (RACK): An alternative ethical credo to “safe, sane, and consensual.” Often used by individuals who prefer activities that have higher degrees of risk.

Role Play: Taking on another identity not your own during a scene. There is usually a power differential in the interaction (teacher/student, maid/owner, mommy/boy).

Rough Body Play: BDSM activity that involves punching, wrestling, and kicking.

Sadism/Masochism (S/M or S&M): BDSM play which involves seeking or giving pain or humiliation (see sadist and masochist).

Sadist: In the BDSM context, a term for an individual who is sexually excited by the consensual application of force and infliction of pain.

Safe Call: A safety protocol used when someone is meeting a new play partner privately for the first time. It usually involves a phone call at a pre-arranged time to a pre-arranged person to let them know that everything is fine. If the call is not made, or if pre-arranged codes are not exchanged, the police are contacted.

Safe, Sane and Consensual (SSC): A statement of what constitutes ethical behavior in the kink community. This is one of the ways in which BDSM is distinguished from intimate partner violence.

Safeword: An agreed upon word that someone in a scene can use to stop an activity if it becomes too intense or they simply need to stop for any reason. Common safewords include “safeword” as well as a traffic light system where red means stop, yellow means slow/softer/need a break, green means continue/more/harder). Sometimes actions are used instead of words when the participants are unable to talk or if the dominant or submissive is deaf.

Scat Play: BDSM activity involving feces.

Scene: A distinct period of BDSM activity or alternatively a reference to the BDSM community as a whole.

Service: A form of D/s or M/s relationship where the submissive performs daily chores and mundane tasks for the Dominant.

Service Top: A top whose primary enjoyment comes from giving a bottom what the bottom enjoys.

Session: A term most commonly used to refer to a scene with a professional dominant.

Shibari: A form of intricate rope bondage that originated in Japan.

Sissy: A term often used for a male who engages in feminization. In the BDSM scene, it is descriptive rather than evaluative.

Slave: An individual in some form of D/s or M/s relationship structure who has ceded some degree of authority over their life to another person.

Soft Limit: A limit which can be more flexible than a hard limit and may be acceptable given a relationship or context in a scene.

Subspace: An altered state of consciousness characterized by varying levels of trance on the part of the Bottom. It is often viewed as the ‘goal’ of play and is often characterized by feelings of euphoria and other ecstatic experiences.

Surrendered Wife: A term used in some fundamentalist Christian households to describe a wife’s need to surrender decision making for many if not all matters to the husband’s authority as granted through divine mandate in a scripturally-based relationship.

Squick: Disgust—not necessarily judgmental but more of an automatic reaction to certain behaviors.

Switch: A person who can play either a top or a bottom role in a scene. Similar to bisexuality, switches do not always fall exactly in the middle of the spectrum, and often lean to one side or the other. Sometimes switches are the top in one relationship and the bottom in another, though people do also switch within the context of a given relationship.

Taken in Hand: A term used to reflect the surrender of decisions by a surrendered wife.

Top: The person (or persons) who administer sensations in a scene and as a sexual identity one who prefers that role in a scene.

Topping from the Bottom: A bottom who attempts to control the scene when it has been agreed previously that the Top will be in control (see pushy bottom).

Vanilla: Non-kink behaviors and/or people.

Victorian Household: A style of D/s or M/s relationship based and modeled on the class power and authority dynamics of Victorian England.

Waxing: Not usually a painful way of removing hair but in the BDSM context involves pouring candle wax on the body, sometimes focused on the genitalia. BDSM practitioners need to be careful about which kinds of wax they use for these activities. Waxes that melt at lower temperatures are preferred.

“What it is That We Do” (WIITWD): A term used by kinksters, usually online, to refer to BDSM behaviors.

“Your Kink is Not My Kink But You Kink is OK” (YKINMKBYKIOK): A term used by kinksters, usually online, to communicate without judgment that they are not interested in another’s behaviors/interests.