FACT SHEET

Negotiating a Scene

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What is negotiation?

It's communicating the activities that people are interested in doing together. Partners talk about what they do and don't want to do before starting anything. Explicit negotiation is a norm in most kink communities[1].

What is it for?

Negotiation is one difference between consensual kink and abuse, with real legal implications[2,3]. People should *agree in general* to what is planned and what should be avoided, particularly around risk and enjoyment. Agreeing in general does not mean things can't change during a scene if everyone wants them to, it just sets some guidelines for you and partner(s) about what is going to occur.

You may hear terms like **S**afe **S**ane & **C**onsensual (SSC); or **R**isk **A**ware **C**onsensual **K**ink (RACK). These frameworks are popular in kink and describe risk tolerance, but don't tell us how to negotiate risk tolerance[2].

What do I negotiate about?

People tend to talk about six things[4-6]:

1. The type of scene (including equipment) and the sensations/feelings desired from that scene
2. Where on the body can be touched and the type of touch permitted, especially how intimate or sexual it is
3. Any boundaries that need to be respected because of existing physical injuries, emotional experiences or personal preferences
4. The types of risk taking permitted and preferred risk mitigation, particularly around physical and emotional safety
5. Communication style, particularly how to give feedback and how to end the scene if desired
6. How to look after each other and recover after the scene, especially if something goes wrong

How do I negotiate?

Negotiation norms vary, but remember negotiation sets guidelines for a scene only, it is not blanket approval, people can change their minds (consent is ongoing!)[7,8]. The process of negotiation is the responsibility of every individual involved; You should[9]:

- **Think** through your preferences for each of the six things above. Don't think in yes/no, think in yes/probably yes/probably no/no, as it reflects that you may not be certain about what you want
- **Communicate** your preferences (and any uncertainty) clearly and directly. You can use either conversation or written communication.
- **Listen** to the other person's preferences (and uncertainty) and look for where they overlap or contrast with your own
- **Probe** with clarifying language so that you both know you are using terminology the same way to ensure maximum understanding
- **Agree** on how everyone involved will get their preferences met
- **Plan** for how you will handle any miscommunication during the negotiation that is discovered later on in the scene

There can be a power exchange as a part of a scene, try not to let it impact negotiation[3,8]. You and your partners must be clear and direct[8].

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Source of Risk during Negotiation	*Ways to Mitigate Risk*
Power dynamics impact negotiation[1,3]. One person, often the more experienced person, takes charge or leads negotiations. This is a problem if the other person feels less able to speak up.	• Get people to focus on others' needs not their own; power then helps rather than hinders[9]. • Change to written (explicit) communication so it is easier to get your message across[1,10]. • Have the less powerful person lead the negotiation to change the 'script' being used[5].
Uncertainty about a particular activity can be hard to communicate and deal with. e.g. "I don't know if I will enjoy this, but I want to try it?"	• A person may desire to try an activity even when they're unsure whether they'll enjoy it. In this case, negotiation should focus on lots more communication during the scene so that ongoing consent is maintained. Increased communication ensures safety is maximized under this uncertainty[8]. Everyone also must agree that finding something unpleasant and stopping is okay, and is going to at least be a good learning experience together.
Negotiation is used in a predatory manner[1]. Either applying pressure to say yes to things, or as a contract to negate future consent. e.g. "You said X was ok during negotiation, but when I went to do it you said no; I don't like that".	• Change to written (explicit) communication to reduce interpersonal pressure[1]. If pressure persists, this is a red flag. Red flags should see a person directed to education and avoided in the meantime[7]. • Remind everyone negotiation is NOT blanket consent. It sets some guidelines, but consent is ongoing and can change[1]; failure to understand that is a red flag.
Working out how much risk to take, and how much is too much. e.g. I can't afford to lose any feeling in my arms during this rope bondage as I have work tomorrow	• Total safety is impossible for most kink activities, accidents and misunderstanding will happen, but you may be willing to take more or less risk with your (or others') bodies. Define the outcomes you want to avoid (the 'edges' in your edge-play) and how close you are willing to come to them[2]. • Specify all the ways you want risk mitigated e.g. extra wraps in a rope bondage tie, not putting rope on some parts of the body. This may involve learning more about how to do the activities you are interested in[1].

Sources

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