

# Plays Well With Others

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**The Fine Art of Etiquette, Negotiation, and Getting Action at Events!**

## Overview

So, you've made it through a munch or you're attending your first public event and now it's time to face the play party. Palms sweaty, you look through your closet for your fetish best, wonder what toys to bring, how you'll find a play date... We'll cover it all!

Playing at events can be difficult if you don't already have a partner with you. This class will cover ways to get involved, meet people, and negotiate scenes at an event. We'll explore the types of play you may encounter and how to communicate expectations and limits for each. We'll also talk about volunteer opportunities and good classes for meeting new friends.

## Bio

I'm a fun-loving rope geek and sex educator who has found a home in the Midwest kink community. When I'm not traveling to events, I contribute to the Iowa State University CUFFS group, and serve on the board of Minneapolis TNG group Min-KY. Although I'm a relatively new member of the scene, I've presented at numerous events across the country, including Kinky Kollege, Shibaricon, Denver Bound, and Beyond Leather.

As a presenter, I aim to provide a comfortable down-to-earth learning environment for all genders, orientations, and experience levels.

My long list of presentations, events, and class materials can be found at <http://www.kinkfriendly.org>

Enjoy yourselves!

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## **You Mission, If You Choose to Accept It: Have Fun!**

*Exercise: "Why are you at this event?"*

Chances are that somewhere on your list of reasons for attending an event include: having fun, learning, meeting hot people, and shopping for new toys. While many of those reasons depend on outside factors such as class quality, play partner availability, and vendor selection, the one element that is completely within your control is having fun.

The good news is that if you're having a great time, it will show in your actions, attitude, and posture - all great ways to get noticed by others. So, regardless of the circumstances, please do yourself a favor and have the best time of your life!

That said, you may have to tiptoe out of your comfort zone and experiment a little bit. Below, you will find some ways to get involved, strike up conversations, and hopefully participate in play opportunities.

### **Meeting People & Getting Involved**

Meeting people at events can seem like a a no-brainer. By their nature, events are large social gatherings; however, exchanging more than a passing "hi" at a meet and greet or mixer can be intimidating. Attending classes and participating in volunteer opportunities are tried-and-true ways to meet new people without the pressure of larger gatherings.

#### ***Classes***

Sticking with our top priority of "having fun", the best classes for meeting people are ones whose topics you're interested in - you don't want to be bored in class just hoping that you hook up! Hands-on demo classes provide excellent social opportunities as you'll often be working with a practice partner; however, remember to be very flexible in these settings as you don't know who you'll meet.

If you and your partner are both interested in making new friends, consider attending a few separate classes - you can learn more by exchanging notes afterwards, and you have an opportunity to make connections.

After most classes, people congregate around the presenter to ask one-on-one questions. These are often very good questions to listen to and it's a good time to introduce yourself to other people who are waiting to ask their questions.

#### ***Volunteering***

One of the most effective and appreciated ways of getting involved and meeting people at events is through volunteering. Not only does this give you plenty of opportunities to interact with others, but it also shows that you are willing to support the event or the community by pitching in for the common good.

Most events have a volunteer coordinator to distribute tasks such as event registration, dungeon monitoring, room setup & monitoring, equipment setup, and much more.

While there are plenty of official ways to volunteer, simply offering help or information to others will go a long way to contribute to the sense of community and support at an event. For some unofficial ways to volunteer, consider the following: giving directions to someone who may be lost (or blindfolded!), lend a schedule to someone looking for the next class, participate in a class demo, offer to work together in a demo with someone who may not have a partner.

While these are important ways to get involved in events, taking these ideas back to your community will go a long way in establishing relationships and building your image. While some call this "giving back" or "paying it forward," the result is the same: creating a welcoming and supportive environment for everyone involved.

## Communication

Effective communication is key when meeting new people, and is ultimately one of the foundational aspects of all relationships. Through our words and actions, we express excitement, happiness, and interest.

### ***Nonverbal Cues***

Often, your first impression is the most memorable and consists of nonverbal cues such as posture and body language. Remember that your posture is a reflection of your attitude - by sticking to your goal of having fun, it becomes much easier to present yourself in a positive and engaging manner!

#### *Exercise: Posture*

Aside from posture, your best non-verbal secret weapon is flirting! While there are many resources to help you learn to flirt, one of the simplest things you can try is making eye contact and smiling. Next time you're walking around, try making eye contact with a stranger and smile. The idea isn't to flash a "cheesy" photo-posing grin, but instead try a simple, lips-closed smile and see what happens.

#### *Exercise: Eye Contact - Bonus points for smiling!*

### ***Small Talk***

One special form of communication is small talk. While you're communicating things like "I find you hot/interesting/fun/etc" the conversation topics meander and include topics like home town, play preferences, and interesting stories from classes. The best part about making small talk at events is that you already share many commonalities with the people you're meeting. For instance, there's a good chance that the person you're talking to: considers themselves kinky, has a favorite type of play, is there to learn about a specific topic, had to travel, etc. By asking open-ended questions and returning to these commonalities, you should have plenty to discuss!

#### *Conversation starters:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Where are you from?                         | Is this your first time here?                 |
| What kind of play do you enjoy?             | Have you seen any good classes?               |
| What classes are you looking forward to?    | Did you find anything fun in the vendor area? |
| Can you recommend anywhere good for dinner? |   |

Because "outing" can be detrimental to people's personal lives, remember to avoid specific questions about people's workplace, last name, and contact information. While general discussion about these topics is okay, do not be surprised if you are answered with generalities.

## Boundaries

By now, you're meeting people, sharing small talk and beginning to see opportunities for play!

Maintaining good boundaries is one of the most important aspects of playing well within the community. By respecting your own personal boundaries and avoiding others who don't, you set the stage for making responsible decisions as well as protecting yourself from disrespectful or predatory behavior. By respecting others' boundaries in the same way, you communicate that you are a safe person to get to know better. Sometimes, discerning someone's boundaries can be difficult. If you are unclear about the boundaries being presented, then ask!

#### *Examples of good boundaries:*

- |   |                                  |                              |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never questioning safewords             | Communicating clear expectations | Accepting the word "No"      |
| Getting/Seeking explicit verbal consent | Taking things slowly             | Respecting negotiated limits |

#### *Examples of poor boundaries*

- |                                  |                        |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Oversharing personal information | Inappropriate touching | Pressure to play |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|

## ***Accepting and Saying No***

While learning about and exploring boundaries, remember that you will often hear the word “No.” Try not to take offense - remember that it may not have anything to do with you! Graciously accepting and respecting the various ways that people say no takes many forms, including: not seeking justification for the refusal, not trying to convince the other person to do something, not judging the answer or its reasoning.

## **Playtime**

Now that you’ve been getting involved, meeting new people, and striking up conversations, you’ll eventually be faced with the next step - setting up a play date!

### ***Wanna Play?***

While not everyone you meet will be interested in playing, the only way to find out is if one of you asks! While immediately springing the question may not be successful, eventually someone has to take the initiative and ask. Don’t let your fear of rejection prevent you from asking to play! Remember, you’re both at a kinky sex convention and having a good conversation - it’s not like it hasn’t crossed their mind too!

As you seek play opportunities and begin negotiations, it’s important to know a few things about your own play style. By learning more about yourself and your reactions during play, you will be able to negotiate scenes more effectively. For instance:

What kind of aftercare do you need?

Which types of play are you interested in?

Should any types of play be avoided?

Is there any play that you do in private but not public?

What do you sound like when a scene is going well?

How does your body react to a good scene?

Do you have any injuries or physical needs?

### ***Head Over Heels In Lust!***

Depending on your play experiences, you may encounter “New Relationship Energy” during or after a scene, especially on a first play date. While these are great feelings full of lust, love, and closeness, remember to respect yours and your play partner’s boundaries by discussing these feelings and not making assumptions! Remember, it is very easy to associate these intense, new, and exciting energies with those encountered in serious Relationships (Note the “R”).

### ***Toy Bag Tips***

**Tops:** When packing your toybag, consider the event rules, flight restrictions, toy portability, and your comfort level playing with the toy in public. Remember also to check class descriptions in case you need to bring specific toys for participation. If you decide to bring a ton of toys, you may want to include a smaller duffel bag so you don’t need to haul your entire toybag everywhere.

**Bottoms:** While the top is generally the one responsible for bringing the toys, bottoms can pack a few things too! In general, if it involves insertion, bodily fluids, or is required for aftercare. Some items to include may be:

Bottle of Water

Personal Collar/Cuffs/Restraints

Consumables (Needles, Chucks, etc)

Energy Bar

Comfy Shoes

Change of Clothes

Comfort Object

Insertable Toys

Lubes/Barriers

While sexual play isn’t usually the first thing on my list, I always include a “safer sex kit” in my bag. Due to the number of people with latex allergies or sensitivities to different types of lube, I include the following:

Lube

Condoms

Dental Dams

Gloves

Water-based Glycerine & Paraben Free, Silicone

Lubed/Unlubed Latex & Polyurethane

Latex and Polyurethane

Latex & Nitrile

(Remember, even if you don’t plan on using these items, it’s great to be prepared and your play partner will appreciate the thoughtfulness and variety of options)

## ***Play Variables***

Due to coordination issues, differing expectations, playing at events requires flexibility. There are a number of variables that describe the types of play you will encounter at events. Among them are:

**Time** - The length of time for a scene is often hard to measure. At events it will often be governed by the length of a class or due to other play commitments at a party.

*Note: When negotiating a time for a scene during the event, it's often difficult to plan more precisely than "At the beginning of the party", "After my first scene", or "Near the end of the party"*

**Activity Range** - This describes the types of activities that may be done during a scene. This may include which toys or play types to expect and whether sexual contact is involved.

**Partner's Experience** - Depending on the type of play, you or your partner may be learning a new skill or expertly orchestrating a well-planned scene.

**Predictability** - Often the reactions experienced during a scene can be predicted. When done as part of a demonstration, the play is done to support a point, whereas during a more private scene, more.

**Emotional Involvement** - Based on the intention of the play, many emotions may be called upon during a scene. Depending on the class topic, most demonstrations or lab/practice sessions require little emotional involvement between the participants versus a scene that can involve sexual, sensual, loving, and exciting emotions.

**Feedback Type** - Safewords, ongoing commentary, or corrective remarks may be appropriate based on the situation.

**Candor** - While openness and honesty are required for all scenes and negotiation, the attitude with which they're presented will often depend on the situation. For instance, a roleplaying scene may not succeed if one of the participants is unable to play their role convincingly.

**Participants** - Many scenes are conducted between two people; however, sometimes strength in numbers can help - either as help during a takedown/kidnapping, or even to support during aftercare to provide blankets, help cuddle, etc.

**Physical Boundaries** - The types and locations for physical contact and touching will change depending on many factors, including: relationship boundaries, physical limitations, trust, and play type.

## ***Close Encounters***

As you can see above, the types of play that you may encounter at an event will have many levels of variability. Below you will find some examples, ordered from the least variable to most. Note that each has special considerations and assumptions to use when negotiating:

### **In-Class Demo with Presenter**

Least amount of negotiation, often very specific with clear expectations and limits, relying on assumed level of presenter's expertise (backed by their reputation), most attention, less warmup/aftercare, often has a predictable result, very short time limit, often bottoming to presenter (rather than topping), may or may not involve an emotional connection

### **In-Class Practice with Another Attendee**

Very social, provides an opportunity to meet others, instructor-led format leads well-defined activity range, may be impersonal ("Can I borrow your arm?"), may be for a short exercise or continue throughout class, may involve switching roles, partner may be a stranger, little or no emotional attachment.

### **Practice/Lab During Play Party**

Often experimenting within a single skill set, top may be still learning a skill, specific type of feedback is often requested, may be practicing with a group, expectations do not involve headspace/aftercare/etc, little or no emotional attachment, often short time limit.

## Scene at Play Party

Completely variable - most assumptions are invalid or open to negotiation, time often constrained by other play commitments, type of aftercare may be different at event vs. home, feedback may be more formalized (through use of safewords, etc)

## Conclusion

Hopefully these tips will help make your event a wonderful and sexy experience. Remember to have fun and everything else will follow.

PS: If you get a hot play date as a result of my workshop, please drop me a line with your story! :)

Thanks for reading!

LqqkOut

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