


# Discussing Limits

One of the BDSM lifestyle axioms is to respect your partners' Limits. What are Limits? Limits are sets of personal restrictions observed by each individual because they have or may present a negative consequence, or because further trust and reliability needs to be established before considering such activity. Those restrictions that have high risk or simply *must* be observed are known as "Hard Limits", while those restrictions which may be lifted *if* certain conditions are met are known as "Soft Limits". Limits are a key part of scene or D/s relationship [negotiation](#).

**Hard Limits** are often things that can cause significant harm to any one of the parties involved, and often involve risk to physical/mental health. Because everyone has a unique history and background, there is no one set of hard limits that can easily be assumed – you need to take the time to discuss Hard Limits, and be informed of what the risks and signs may be.

These can involve a history of trauma, [abuse](#), physical injury/surgery, congenital conditions, etc. Hard limits are just that – Firm and not subject to debate. They **MUST** be respected.

- **Example** – a bottom may have a Hard Limit on face slapping because of past that included physical abuse, so that activity is absolutely off the table.
- **Example** – a Top may have a Hard Limit on verbal degradation because they value a healthy sense of self-worth, versus lowering it.

**Soft Limits** are often things that may increase risk unnecessarily to any one of the parties involved, but may be lifted at a future time or if certain conditions are met. 

More often than not, these are risks associated with earning trust, building a foundation of honesty and stability, and showing considerable regard and respect to the welfare of

the other. In essence, they are limits which may be subject to easing or removed altogether IF the other party's concerns are met. Soft limits are therefore subject to respectful debate – not to be forced, but shown as a sign of trust and/or patience.

- **Example** – a bottom may have a Soft Limit on needle play because they need to establish the Tops sense of responsibility and caution.
- **Example** – a Top may have a Soft Limit on interrogation play because they need to learn more about the bottoms psycho emotional resiliency and stability before indulging in mental edge play.

What follows below is some advice regarding how to discuss and identify Limits...

## Tips & Suggestions

1. **Slow Down**– if you are new and excited and looking to dive in you might be in a dangerous state of frenzy. Take a few breaths and see if you can mentally itemize what you want and what you don't. If you are the Top, take hold of the reigns and slow things down so sensibility can prevail. A discussion of hard and soft limits must take place if you are to be responsible for your actions and ensuring a healthy relationship or set of activities.
2. **Take Notes**– Writing things down helps in two ways, (a) to help commit things to memory, and (b) to ensure everyone is on the same page. There is no need to be wordy, use simple bullet points if needed, no more than a phrase that captures the truth of limits or concerns. The point is to ensure all parties have the same understanding. A brief list such as this is highly suitable as a very basic contract for pickup play or experimentation with a new activity.

- 3. Let the Experienced One Start**– Everyone has limits, tops and bottoms alike, the role matters less than the fact that this is a Person before you. Discussing limits requires accepting the sense of personal vulnerability that accompanies with being honest. If you are more experienced (often, but not always the Top), start with your limits first. Here the Top will “lead by example” in how limits are discussed, identified by types, highlight potential risks/consequences, and even why they exist. This approach should allow discussion to progress from clearly identifiable limits to more difficult or uncertain topics by building conversational momentum and comfort while establishing rapport. For bottoms, please note that discussing the Why of limits is not to justify your feelings or limits, but rather to educate the Top with a glimpse into your genuine self, your challenges, and show them a chain of causality they may have not considered.
- 4. Be Upfront About Health Risks, Concerns, Medications, etc**– These will influence the risks involved and can introduce hard limits with respect to activities or intensities and their impact on your body and health (e.g. poor circulation, diabetes, heart conditions, muscle/joint repair, and other surgeries/procedures). Medications have a big role as well, for example something which might cause sub-space disassociation to progress far more rapidly than might otherwise occurs, or sudden drops in blood pressure or sugar levels while in the middle of a scene.
- 5. Discuss Your Fears, Anxieties, and Traumas**– This includes related items such as night terrors, anxiety/panic attacks, PTSD triggers, etc. These will indicate areas to stay away from and hopefully avoid some adverse reaction to the experience or sensations.

It should be noted that when someone experiences a dissociative mental space, such subspace, it is not uncommon to become confused as to what's present versus past. Dissociation often creates a context-less or "unbound" sense of time, and results in experiencing emotions of the past, but seem to be happening now.

This is especially important when dealing with certain traumas or anxiety, such as from abuse or challenges such as abandonment anxiety.

**6. Err on the Side of Caution**— often the eyes are bigger than the stomach. Yes you want it to be fun, but take your time and realize that this is as much about calibration as it is the enjoyment of the experience.

If you want a smoother transition that allows for more play in a scene, consider organizing it into Phases where progression is allowed if all signs are still favorable, and an all clear is given during check-in before proceeding. Remember, you can always play again or move on to the next phase of a scene if all goes well. Otherwise you risk doing harm and screwing up the entire experience and possibly the connection with your partner.

**7. Adaptability without ego**— Even with the all of the above, one must remain flexible and adaptable while within the provided guideline of limits. Adaptability will help prove one's trustworthiness while allowing for opportunity of surprise and intensity. Where appropriate, one can then change elements of a scene if things go in a different direction yet without taking it personally. *Reality dictates change, not the wishes or plans.* This is why I sometimes advise that one may have Intents, but not hard and fast plans. Be flexible to change and address them with as much grace under pressure as you can manage.

# Closing

Limits exist for a good reason, perhaps not a reason you understand or agree with, but that is irrelevant. The fact is that BDSM and Kink culture is about Consensual relationships and activities, and Limits are therefore to be honored and respected regardless of whether you may understand or agree. If a reason is given, just accept it – do not argue, belittle, or try to lawyer it out of existence. Of course, if you genuinely care about the welfare of the other, one always has the option to simply ask to help you understand. You might be surprised how much more intimate the connection can be if you can come to a fuller appreciation of the person before you.

Sir Vice

Copyright 2015, Limits Unleashed LLC