

A close-up photograph of a metal padlock with a red heart-shaped object attached to it. The padlock is silver-colored and shows signs of wear, including scratches and discoloration. The red heart is a solid, glossy color. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

# **DISCIPLINE**

**ADDING RULES & DISCIPLINE TO YOUR BDSM RELATIONSHIP**

**LILY  
LLOYD**

# Contents

[Title Page/Discipline: Adding Rules and Discipline To Your BDSM Relationship](#)  
[Copyright Page](#)  
[Dedication](#)  
[About The Author](#)  
[Welcome Invocation](#)  
[Why Have Rules At All?](#)  
[Before We Begin: Introducing Your Guide](#)  
[Getting Started: Assessing Where You Are Now](#)  
[Rules](#)  
[The Three Basic Types of Rules](#)  
[Rituals and Protocols: The Manners and Methods of Pleasure](#)  
[Standing Orders: Having It Their Way](#)  
[Behavior Modification: Using D/s to Drop Old Habits And Form New Ones](#)  
[If There Are Three Types of Rules, Are There Also Three Types of Dominant?](#)  
[What Should A Dominant Control?](#)  
[Your Heart's Desire](#)  
[A Tale of Two Scenes](#)  
[Rules: Don't Do That!](#)  
[Dominants Get To Have Limits Too](#)  
[Rules Workshop: Building A New Rule](#)  
[Rules Worksheet](#)  
[A Foundation For Your Dynamic](#)  
[Up And Running: Getting \(And Keeping\) Your Rules Working](#)  
[Troubleshooting: What Should I Do When A Rule Isn't Working?](#)  
[Retiring A Rule](#)  
[Discipline](#)  
[Is Discipline Necessary?](#)  
[The Dimensions of Discipline](#)  
[Rules Cookbook: Recipes for Your Relationship](#)  
[Discipline Cookbook](#)  
[Discipline Yes/No/Maybe Checklist](#)  
[Ask Me Anything](#)  
[Resources](#)  
[Photo Credit](#)

# Discipline

Adding Rules & Discipline To Your BDSM Relationship

by Lily Lloyd

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*For Bryce, who was willing to take the trip*

# About the author

In 2008, the author had a husband, two children, and a white picket fence.

In 2009, she had a husband, two children, a white picket fence, and a huge amount of bondage equipment.

In 2010, she had a husband, two children, a white picket fence, a huge amount of bondage equipment...and a girlfriend.

She is living her kinky, freaky, happily-ever-after in Cambridge, MA, where she lives with her husband and two children.

Lily is the author of *The Black Leather Belt*, a blog about kink and non-monogamy that is one of the Top 100 Sex Blogs 2011. You can find her blog at: <http://theblackleatherbelt.com>.

Lily maintains a profile on Fetlife. You can find her profile at: <https://fetlife.com/users/93045>

# Welcome!

Welcome, o my beloved perverts, my grand and wonderful tribe, my kinky fellow travelers. You are Daddy and boi, Master and slave, servant, submissive, girl and pet and property, Dominant, Lady, Mistress and Sir.

You hail from every corner of the endless starry galaxy of gender and every hill and dale of the verdant green groves of sexuality — some of you love one, while others love many; you are straight and gay, bi, pan, asexual or just plain *fabulous*.

I am so glad you are here, because we have work to do. There are heaps of intimate boredom to be banished, bins of broken sexual and romantic connections to be repaired, circuits of the heart and mind to run power through, engines of pleasure and connection and love to be fueled, oiled, and started up once again or built from scratch for the very first time.

For those of you who connect to something deep and real in yourself and in others through giving orders or through faithful and courageous obedience, I bid you welcome. Please consider this a humble shop manual to one of the important moving parts of your practice.

Let us go forth! Let us fix things, build things, and revel in ourselves and each other!

Best,

Lily

# Why Have Rules At All? What Are Rules For?

We have rules because they're hot. We have rules because they're sexy. We have rules as a way of showing each other who's in charge.

Some people might think it's the whips and chains that make us kinky, but to my mind, the longest border, the Berlin Wall, between the United States of Vanilla and the Democratic Republic of Kink are not floggers and nipple clamps — but rules.

I'm sure all of you, my dear readers, are above the immature desire to shock someone with your sexuality...but I'm not! Okay, okay — I am too, but I admit, sometimes I do fantasize about it. Every once in awhile I have one of those days — the kind of day where I have the misfortune of being seated at a restaurant next to a table whose occupants going on and on about how awful those latex cat-suited perverts are, and I think, I could tell them about the fact that I own 200 feet of premium bondage rope and you know how to use it. It might raise their eyebrows a bit, though in this Fifty Shades world, not very much. But if I really wanted to flip them right out? I'd tell them that I determine my girlfriend's bedtime.

But we don't have rules just for the sake of being more trendy, hip, or extreme than the next perv. We have them because they satisfy a deep desire; because they give us new ways to play the great game of sexual attraction, desire, and sometimes love.

So in the end, there are only two reasons to have a rule. Call these the Three Core Rules, the rules that govern all the others.

*One, it brings the two of you closer together.*

*Two, it helps you build the dynamic you both want.*

*Three, adding the rule to your relationship enhances the well-being of both partners.*

Rules can be serious and they can be silly. Rules can last a day or last forever. But to make them work, we must be cunning and we must be clever as we construct them — and we must be utterly ruthless when they don't work. When a rule does nothing to bring you closer together or build that kinky, freaky heaven on earth for two?

We need to take that rule out back and shoot it.

In this book, we're going to cover how to make rules that don't fall apart two days later, drive you crazy, or push you to the brink of breaking up. We'll talk about how to build rules that bring you closer, make things hotter, and help you create the dynamic that's right for you. We'll also talk about how and when to implement rules, and help you figure out your personal philosophy for how rules work in your life and in your relationships.



## Before We Begin: About Your Narrator

I learned a great deal of what I talk about in this book from my two delightful partners, Bryce and Holly. We are polyamorous — that’s the practice of multiple loving relationships with the knowledge and consent of all involved. When dinosaurs roamed the earth, the arrangement we have probably would have been called an open relationship. I am a switch; I can find pleasure on either end of the flogger. In my relationship with Bryce, he is the D-type. Holly is an s-type; in our relationship, I am the dominant partner.

You will hear me recount experiences I’ve had with Bryce and Holly — cases where we did it right, and cases where we did it wrong — throughout the book.

Oh! And one more thing: I use “D-type” (dominant) and “s-type” (submissive) as umbrella terms for the universe of titles and roles that people choose to adopt in the kink community. You’ll see those throughout the book, too.

## Point of View

One of the things you’ll realize very quickly is how central the idea of consent is to me and to this book. As you read this book, what I’m proposing is a method for you and your partner to arrive at rules & discipline that work for you — by talking through them and consenting to them.

Now, some of you reading this book may be in relationships where there’s a more blanket or global concept of consent. If you’re the s-type in your relationship, you may have agreed a long time ago to go along with whatever your D-type wants, either across broad areas of your life, or even your whole life.

Andrea Zanin, BDSM educator and writer of the wonderful blog [Sex Geek](#), writes about the kind of total power exchange relationships she pursues with her partners:

*It must be 100%, by which I mean not time-bound (i.e. limited to the bounds of a scene or a specific time frame of any other kind) and not bound by the limits of a specific “territory” or area. As such, an ongoing relationship in which the PIC’s [Person in Charge] authority is limited—say, their territory includes the POA’s [Person Obeying Authority] sexual practice, dress habits and school pursuits, but they have no say over the POA’s health or parenting or finances—doesn’t count in my framing of things, even if such relationships may have a lot in common with This Thing, and may be far more common than This Thing, and may even happen between two people who are each on their respective paths. Just because one person in a relationship is on the path of mastery and the other on the path of “slavery” doesn’t mean they are master and slave to each*

*other, any more than two dancers who fall in love must necessarily dance together.*

You know, when I read that, my main reaction is: that's so romantic! And I mean that in a way that is utterly and completely free of snark — I actually think it's a wonderful goal for a couple to have to expand the area of consent over time, and I know that some folks enter relationships with global exchange of power as a criteria up front.

However, this book isn't really written from that perspective. It assumes that even if you've been together for a long time, there are still areas that you're interested in exploring, and that you're going to explore those areas by talking about it, and change your relationship consciously and via mutual consent. That's actually what Andrea is talking about too, even if the mechanics of consent may be different — in fact, she says later in the same essay: “I don't think it can truly be This Thing if you don't actually ever talk about it.”

If you are in a relationship where the D-type does have the authority to make many decisions, I think this book can still be useful to you. As a D-type, I'm passionately interested in doing things that work. Even in cases where I could make a sweeping decision just because I want to, I often don't, simply because the fate of the relationship is more valuable to me than many of my particular desires. I'm sure many of you feel the same way. I hope that this book will help you suss out how you and your partners can get more of what you want out of your relationships.

There's one more thing this book isn't about: it isn't about “Christian Domestic Discipline,” or indeed, any form of gender essentialism where one gender is considered inherently superior by dint of evolution or religion.

## Getting Started: Assessing Where You Are Right Now

No matter what kind of relationship you have, you have rules. Many of them are probably unspoken rules; you probably have rules about what constitutes cheating; about what holidays you celebrate, and which side of the bed is yours.

If you're in a new BDSM relationship, you now have a whole new arena in which the two of you can create rules together to enhance your sex life or your bond.

One of the big relationship upgrades you'll get with the very first rule you make for the D/s portion of your relationship is this: you now have experience arriving at rules via mutual consent by talking out loud. One of the major issues with too many relationships is that many of the "rules" are unspoken, and often we believe we share assumptions about important issues like finances, fidelity, sex, and family, only to find out at the worst possible time that we really don't.

### Thinking Through Your Rules

If it's hard to pick out specific "rules" that you follow in your relationship, that shouldn't be a surprise. Many of those rules are so much a part of your lives that they almost disappear into the fabric of your lives. But let's just take a few:

- What side of the bed is "yours"?
- If one person cooks, who does the dishes? The cook, or the diner?
- Is it okay to flirt with someone other than your partner? How about if it's the 80-year old coat check guy at your favorite restaurant?
- What constitutes cheating?
- Who's home for the holidays, and where do you celebrate them?
- If you live with your partner, what time do you need to call if you're not home yet?
- Would you be upset if your partner shared details of your sex life with an intimate friend who they knew would never repeat it?
- If you had a problem in your relationship and your partner posted a thread asking for advice on Fetlife, would you be upset?

Why think through the rules you already have? One, it's a chance to get on the same page if you're not, and two, if you're feeling a little apprehensive about the idea of adding rules and discipline to your dynamic, recognizing that you *already have a dynamic*, and you already have rules may make you feel a little better. The only thing that's really changing is that you're taking conscious control of

your dynamic and your rules to craft the relationship that you want, rather than autopiloting based on rules handed down to you from the broader society and assumptions about what your partner thinks. That change? Is a change for the better.

## We Were Supposed To Be Talking About Hot Kinky Stuff, But We Ended Up Arguing Instead

As you establish new kinky rules, you may find yourself reflecting more on the bedrock vanilla rules you've already got. Emotions run high whenever you're starting a new relationship or introducing BDSM into an existing one. Sexuality is a hot button issue — what could be more personal? As a result, it can be hard to back up, get some perspective, and not take things so personally.

My first kinky partner was (and to my delight, still is) my husband, who is also my dominant. It was me who introduced the idea that we might try some kinky stuff after many years busily building a life and a family during which our sex life was relatively mainstream. My experience with this — one that I'd like you to be able to avoid — is that I fought a lot with my husband about vanilla issues when we introduced BDSM into our relationship. Digging deep into how sex worked in our life together inevitably unearthed how we felt about other important facets of our relationship. Our relationship was so radically improved by having this kind of open communication that I do not regret it all and would not go back to the way we were before, but I won't lie: there were some rough moments.

I'd love it if you would learn from my mistakes — at least then someone gets something out of them! Here's a few things I wish I knew then or did differently at the time:

- If you can, try to assume good faith in your partner.
- Assume that they're not trying to demean or hurt you when they tell you about a fantasy or an idea that they may have never told anyone before.
- Assume they value you and your relationship.
- Don't go along with scenarios or rules that give you a gut feeling that they're not going to work out, or that make you feel like your partner doesn't value you or your relationship.
- Don't jump to the conclusion that they're a rotten beast and yell at them just for communicating what they want.

I was really worried about damaging my relationship or even causing a breakup by revealing my sexual interests and prodding my partner to either participate with me or allow me to find a way to experience those things with someone else. In my case, we didn't break up, and I'm really glad and thankful for it. However, sex and cases of sexual mismatch really can be a factor in a relationship breakup. Talking about intimate desires that stray far from the mainstream can feel awkward and embarrassing. Working on deep issues is, well...work.

Wait. Why are we doing this again? Well...

## Things We Love About Being a Pervert

Whether you're a dominant or a submissive, or a switch like me, you can find something to love about kink. What you love might be entirely different, but I'll share mine with you.

What is the best part of being a dominant?

- That gleeful kid-in-a-candy-store feeling of knowing that I can have *anything* I want. Anything! Having a partner who's so willing to do what I want makes me feel happy and secure and loved. And like ravishing them, right now!
- What we do tends to provoke intense emotions, including intense feelings of reverence and desire. Seeing those on my girlfriend's face — and being the object of those feelings — is truly intoxicating.
- Related to #1: One of the interesting things about being a dominant is that you're not only allowed, you're encouraged to demand things from your partner that would be off-limits in many relationships. One of the end results of that for me is that I feel more accepted, because things I used to refrain from demanding or even talking about wanting are things that I get just because I want them, and Holly is not only not resentful or ticked off but very happy to give them to me.
- The sex. Have I mentioned the sex? Holy shit, the sex.
- Being dominant makes me feel sexy, dangerous, desirable.

What's the best part of being a submissive?

- I have never felt closer and more connected to my husband than I do when I submit myself to his whims.
- I discovered BDSM not long after I had a breakup with my deity I affectionately call my old Boyfriend in the Sky, Mr. God. After the breakup, I still had a lot of free-floating reverence, and for me, it settled on sex. Today, sex is the primary way I experience being connected to something greater than myself. Some of the peak experiences of my life have been reverent, ecstatic, transcendent scenes that grew out of nothing more complicated than a collar and a few candles and a willingness to just go with it.
- Playtime! It's no accident that many kinksters refer to some of the things they do with a partner as "play." Kink is fun! Kink brought a delightful, playful levity into my sex life that hadn't been present before. Bryce and I laugh a lot during sex.
- Flogging, spanking, whipping, caning — oh, how I adore the awful ouchy terrible wonderful fabulous delights of what we do!
- The sex. Have I mentioned the sex? Holy shit, the sex.
- Novelty. There's always something new to try that we can explore together. I never get bored.

What If You Really Can't Make It Work?

I tend to be a relationship optimist, probably because my own experience in introducing kink into a previously vanilla relationship was such a resounding success. My friend Laura reminds me, though, that not all relationships will survive the transition. Here's what she has to say:

*What happens when the relationship starts out "vanilla" but one person begins to discover their kinky side? Well the rush of discovery is almost irresistible and for many, this rush leads them right down the path of relationship destruction. For those with an otherwise healthy relationship, this destruction and reinvention of the previous relationship can lead to an amazing and increased depth. For those whose relationship is already on the rocks – well not so much.*

*For those in relationships that are not going well, introducing the kind of radical honesty that BDSM requires to work is almost certain death to that relationship. Rocky relationships are like a house of cards – they are living in the edge of destruction and even the slightest breeze of change threatens their very existence.*

*But for the person beginning to open themselves to kink, the lure is irresistible, and for the other person, almost inexplicably odd. The other has set themselves almost in stone with their expectations – change of the magnitude BDSM requires is unthinkable. Sure, at first, the heightened response of their partner may be exciting but then reality sets in. Their partner actually expects the core of the relationship to change and this can cause real consternation on the part of the "vanilla" partner. "This has been perfectly fine for me so far. Why are you making all this new stuff so important? Why are you expecting me to change?"*

*See, there were no rules in place and my ex-husband did not want or couldn't be bothered to maintain the level of attention to the kind of rules D/s or BDSM or kink or whatever you want to call WIITWD. Therein lies the rub – time, care and attention. Kink requires an ongoing willingness to invest yourself, your time, your care, your love to another (or several) people. It is called devotion. And rules demand devotion. When you don't really care about another person it is difficult to devote yourself to following rules laid down in service of that relationship – from either end of the D/s spectrum. Cause let's face it — both sides have to devote themselves to rules.*

*Whoa there li'l lady! WTF? Rules for the big, bad Dom?! Frankly, rules are probably a bigger deal for the D-type than they are for the s-type. Which is why I am not married to my ex anymore. Rules require energy expenditure on the part of the D-type. They have to set them and maintain them. The sub simply has to follow them – which is in no way to belittle the concept of following or negotiating rules. But without a leader, well the battle and indeed the war is lost. And the D-type is definitely the leader when it comes to rules.*

*BDSM requires work to make it work. It ain't easy being green and it sure ain't easy being kinky. Rules are tough mistresses – they require both people to think about those changes on a real regular basis. And to communicate when they are working and especially when they aren't!*

*But approaching a partner of 20 plus years who doesn't like change...well either it is going to be a watershed event that takes you to a golden anniversary or more likely it is going to mean packing your stuff and splitting the sheets. For me, it was a watershed event that also meant*

*splitting the sheets with my ex-husband and finding a new husband that I expect to spend the rest of my life with.*

*Rules are part of my daily existence now. As is communication. This “life-style” may seem like the stuff of porn fantasies (and fuck yeah it is!) but it is also a lot of work to make it stay wet and wild and fucking fun. But strangely fun work and compared to my past life, a whole lot easier and satisfying in the main. And happier too. It turns out that rules are a really good thing.*

As you read these words, you may have a gut feeling about whether or not the relationship you’re in now is destined to become the kinky relationship you’ve always wanted.

Or you might not. I cringe to think of it now, but when I started I believed that my husband’s sunny, even temperament, patience, and impeccable manners disqualified him from being a dominant. I now realize that those are precisely the qualities that make him a great dominant. But at the beginning, I doubted him, I doubted myself, I doubted us — I really didn’t know if it would work or not.

We had a lot of hot, messy scenes that would end in dire Relationship Talks. It was, in a word, awful. But between those scenes, we felt closer to one another — and even though some of our scenes were a disaster, we kept coming back to it.

That worked for us — but as Laura points out, BDSM tends to shine a light on the weaknesses of a relationship. Sometimes those weaknesses are fixable — but sometimes, they’re not.

## Rules as a tool to extend your dynamic beyond the bedroom...or not

When my partner and I began exploring kink, we were firmly in the “just in the bedroom” camp. When we had our clothes on, we were equals. No orders, no rules, no titles.

Now, I want to take a minute here to point out that there’s absolutely nothing wrong with kinksters who prefer to limit their play to the bedroom. Nor do I believe that “24/7” couples who try to live out their roles at all times are somehow practicing a form of D/s that’s more “real” or better than that practiced by couples who aren’t, or that it’s inherently superior than the kind of play that kinksters do with casual play partners at a party or event.

That said, many of us are curious about or even long for the chance to take the connection that we’re discovering in the bedroom and bring it into the rest of our lives.

Not everybody will be or wants to be living out a dominant or submissive role full time. If you’re a worrywart like me, you might find yourself fretting that there’s a slippery slope when it comes to rules — that if you implement one little rule, even one that you want, that things will spin out of control and you’ll end up in a state where your partner controls more of your life than you’re comfortable with. Or, if you’re the dominant partner, that you’ll end up transforming your current role in your relationship into a grim and thankless management position where you have far more responsibility for another person’s life than you ever wanted or negotiated for.

Though I worried that my kinks might snowball and eat up my life — they didn't. My life is, in fact, very different now than before I began to make the effort to come to grips with my own sexuality. But I like the life I have now much better — and all the things I had before — a job, a role in my community, my authority as a parent — are all still there.

That said, I do think that it is possible, particularly for D-types, to end up with unanticipated responsibilities that weren't arrived at by discussion, negotiation, and consent. Regardless of your role, if you find that you're experiencing a form of relationship mission creep, you should talk about it. I think it's a great idea to set a regular time to sit down with each other to discuss the state of your dynamic — what rules you have, how you feel about them — in a neutral setting once a month. Take your lover out for coffee and talk about it.

My husband and I didn't follow any grand plan to move our dynamic outside the bedroom, and in fact, we didn't even really talk about it (which I don't recommend!) It's just that what started in the bedroom refused to stay there, and over time, little tendrils of what we were doing after dark in the privacy of our bedroom began to creep out into the daylight hours.

My suggestion is to make your first forays into outside-the-bedroom play light, fun, and simple. Maybe you agree that for a day, one of you will obey the orders that they get via text message.

Maybe you'll agree that this week, one of you will be getting up early to pour, prepare, and serve the other one coffee just the way they like it to start the day.

Try it out — and then debrief. What did you like about it? Did you think it worked? Did you find it exciting? Were there any parts that made either of you uncomfortable, or that were impractical to carry out in the context of your daily life? How did doing it make you feel about yourself?

## The Cult of Spontaneity

Some people will respond to all this testing, talking, and negotiating by saying that planning it all out kills the magic.

I will be frank with you: this is a bad idea. It is an idea that belongs on the trash heap of discarded theories about romantic relationships, right alongside the idea that romantic partners should just magically “know” what we really want and give it to us without our having to ask, because if we told them what we wanted, the gesture of giving it to us couldn't possibly be authentic or an expression of real love.

Not talking about what you want and expecting mindreading isn't romantic: it's lazy. Whether you are an s-type or a D-type, dressing up your demands for your partner to be a mindreader in kinky clothing by saying that it doesn't turn you on if you have to ask for it doesn't change things a bit. Attempting to get what we want out of another person without having to ask for it and then being butthurt when we don't has another name: manipulation. The thing about manipulation is that it works in the short term, but it won't last for the long haul. Communication and compassionate, tactful honesty are a far sturdier foundation for your relationship.



## I'm Scared To Tell My Partner About What I'm Into — What Should I Do?

Does the thought of being honest — really, truly honest — with your partner about your fantasies give you a bad, nervous, jittery feeling? Do you quickly switch tabs in your browser when your beloved enters the room? Are you afraid they'll find your stash of porn or erotica?

Oh, perv. I can relate.

When I was just getting started as a fledgling kinkster, I was a total nervous newb. I'd had pervy fantasies since approximately forever; in fact, the first sexual fantasy I can remember having involved bondage and anonymous sex. But I'd kept it a deep dark secret. I mean, I did not tell a single human being at all, ever, not even a little.

Hell, I kept my complete irredeemable pervitude a secret from myself! I'd say things like, "Oh, those are just fantasies. I don't *really* want to do them."

Uh huh. *Suuuuuuuuuuuuure.*

Eventually I did come out of the kinky closet and while hair-raising it was also amazing and cataclysmic and changed my life...and was totally worth it.

But here's what I wish I had done differently. It's only one thing, but it's a big one.

*When I was coming out about my kinks, I wish I had separated my desire for my partner to **know** who I was as a sexual being from my desire for them to **do** kinky perverted things to me.*

Many of us combine those two things and suffer for it: "But what if they don't want to do that stuff with me? What if they think I'm totally awful and sick and broken and disgusting?!"

Oh, my. What a terrible feeling, to feel like the person you love might be completely disgusted by you if you tell the truth about who you are. How horrible and sad!

Our sexuality is so tender and personal that I think it's impossible for us to refrain from taking negative reactions to it personally. What could be more personal? And what could be more painful than being rejected in such a personal, private way by someone you're intimate with?

Yeah. That's hard.

Here's what I think you can and should expect from a partner: I think if you tell an intimate partner something private and sensitive about your sexuality, so long as you are confiding in them about activities between consenting adults and they understand they are under no pressure to engage in any kind of sex they don't feel good about, *they should respond to you in a kind and caring way.* If they don't, call them on it.

Here's what I think we CAN'T expect from a partner when we reveal our kinks to them.

*We can't expect that they want to do the same kinky pervy stuff that we do.*

We can't expect them to instantly get used to the idea and immediately fall all over us doing deliciously awful things to us, or letting us do deliciously awful things to them.

We need to give them time and space to think it over, and although it's sad, we have to accept the possibility that they might never really be into the stuff we're into. (That, of course, is scary, because depending on the circumstances you might end up in "Should I Really Stay In This Relationship?" territory).

So. Listen up, pervs. New game plan.

We're gonna divide. And we're gonna conquer. (Or be conquered -- whatever floats your boat).

If you're going to out yourself to a sweetheart about what a giant perv you are, don't make it about them doing those things with you.

Make it about them *knowing you*.

Wait until you can say that the reason you're telling them this stuff is that you want them to know who you are as an erotic being, full stop.

Tell them that you're talking to them about this because you want them to know you, and while you would love to do this stuff with them, you're not going to pressure them to do any of these things. Ever. At all. And mean it.

That's scary, isn't it? Yeah. What if they never come around to the idea? Is it the end?

It might be. Or it might not be. But if it is, you want to keep your dignity. You don't want to remember that the end was preceded by pressuring them to do things they really didn't want to do. If they don't want to do it, and you decide that it's important enough that you really do need to find a partner who's closer to your own sexual stripe, there's no point in pushing them.

Obviously, that's not the outcome most of us are looking for. So separating the "this is who I am" talk from the "hey remember that stuff we talked about...what do you think?" talk raises the chances for a positive outcome.

Why? Well, I think a lot of people react negatively to a partner's revealing a kink *because they immediately think that they're under pressure to do whatever that kink is, right now, or their partner will be upset*. Add this to the fact that they may have all kinds of extreme and stereotypical ideas about that kink, or that they have to work out how that kink relates to who they are. What if you have a very strongly feminine gender identity and your male sweetheart thinks you would look really sexy in a strap-on harness with a monster cock? Well, for the male sweetie it might be a sex toy, but for the woman it might be an identity crisis with free shipping. What if you want a hot spanking for being a naughty girl, but part of your guy's commitment to being a good man is vowing to never, ever hit an intimate partner? It might take a little time for him to wrap his mind around the ways that consent changes the equation, and a little more time to trust that you won't suddenly change your mind and hate him, or even call the cops, if he follows through on your fantasy.

Your partner may also feel that you've been faking your enjoyment of the sex you've been having up until that point — so you may need to feel prepared to reassure them that you find them hot and sexy and that you enjoy the sex you have together as a couple.

Separating telling them about who you are from doing kinky stuff is critical because it gives the other person *time* to react as their best self. It puts you in a better place to have a compassionate reaction to them if they're freaked out and think you're going to leave them for the bondage commune.

You're probably going to have to come out more than once, even with the same person. Coming out is a process. It's likely that a partner's first reaction isn't going to be the reaction that you expected or wanted.

What I hope for you is that you tell your partners about all your fabulous kinky pervy stuff and they fall all over you and rip your clothes off because they think it's so uber hot they can't stand it.

And if that doesn't happen, what I hope for you is that your sweetheart does what mine did and eventually comes around to the idea that it is super hot and fun even though they were kinda skeptical about it at first and wondered if they'd have to wear leather chaps, and they're so grateful to you for expanding their erotic horizons and they just think you are the best thing ever.

And if none of that happens, what I hope for you is that you can be kind to each other and keep your chin up. You're not awful and disgusting. You're a badass awesome kinky person from the badass kinky tribe. Don't forget that.

## What if I'm Not In A Relationship, But I Think Rules & Discipline Are Really Hot? Or I'm In A Relationship, But We Want To Keep It In The Bedroom?

That's great! You'll read plenty of examples of how rules and discipline work in this book, but if you're primarily interested in using rules for the duration of a scene, either with a long-term partner or a play partner you met at an event, the basic principles still apply. In practical terms, many of the things that will work for you fall under the heading of ritual and protocol, and you don't necessarily need weeks of negotiation or long relationship talks — much less a long relationship -- to set that up. Check out the section on protocol and ritual in the Rules Cookbook chapter, as well as the Rules Workshop chapter.

# Rules

## The Three Basic Types of Rules

There are at least three different kinds of rules that you and your partner could negotiate: ritual and protocol, standing orders, and behavior modification.

***Ritual and Protocol*** – Ritual and protocol are certain activities or standards of behavior that a D-type and s-type engage in that reinforce their roles. One example might be a greeting ritual. Another might be a ritual to begin a scene in which an s-type presents his or her collar to the D-type and kneels to have it placed around their neck. Rituals are often used to help both partners get into the “headspace” associated with their roles.

Protocol is closely related to ritual, but instead of specifying certain actions, it tends to specify how an s-type behaves in relation to the D-type. An example might be always using an honorific like “sir” or “ma’am” when speaking to a D-type in private, agreeing never to swear, not wearing underwear at certain times or places, or not using furniture without the D-type’s permission.

***Standing orders*** — These are orders that a D type gives an s-type to be carried out on a regular schedule or whenever a particular situation comes up. Example: “Spend five minutes a day in a quiet place focusing on your connection to me. When you’re done, text me the following phrase to let me know that you’ve done it.” That’s a routine standing order — it’s done every day. Other standing orders are more situational, like: no eating chocolate without permission. Or, one of my favorites, no masturbating without permission.

***Behavior modification*** — Rules that are aimed at behavior modification are intended to help an s-type develop a new habit or shed an old one, with the objective of changing the s-type’s life for the better or making the s-type’s behavior or presentation more pleasing to the D-type.

Now, let’s take a more in-depth look at each type of rule.

# Rituals and Protocols: The Manners And Methods of Pleasure

Protocols and ritual are what vanilla folk think of when they imagine BDSM. Some of them may think that we stand around in black leather clothing all the time, that we're always waited on by naked slaves who call everyone Master and Mistress, and that we're forever chaining someone to the wall for a stern beating.

Of course, none of us live that way all the time. I often tell people that despite the fact that I have a husband and a girlfriend and a big trunk of bondage equipment, it's been months and months since I hung anyone from the ceiling, more's the pity, and that my life is actually much more boring than they imagine.

So if protocol and ritual are the stuff of fantasy and porn, why would we spend time trying to make protocol or ritual a real part of our daily lives?

Simple: protocol and ritual help us establish the mood and frame of mind we want to be in, whether that's a submissive headspace or a dominant one. Protocol and ritual are tools we use to "switch gears" from the hurry and worry of our daily lives into a calm, focused state of mind that draws our attention back to our dynamic, our relationship, and who we are to each other.

## *Example: Greeting rituals*

Don't you love watching people picking up friends, family and lovers at the airport?

What if you could have a little of that feeling every single time you saw your partner, even if you see each other every day? Greeting rituals are a wonderful way to reconnect with each other and a bulwark against taking each other for granted. As we greet each other, it's hard not to recognize the fact that one day, one or the other of us might not come home, and how very lucky we are that that day is not today.

They're also a way to fight back against the inelegant and inhospitable way we often make the transition from the outside world to home. Dragging bags up the stairs while someone yells a question at us is nobody's idea of a good way to make the re-entry into the home.

Personally, I often feel crowded in on in an unpleasant way when people rush to greet me at the door, even though I know that they're just eager to see me. I don't want to be tackled with hugs or pelted with questions the moment I open the door — I want to take off my coat and boots, put away work items and anything else I might be carrying, and take a few deep breaths before I greet my family.

Think about whether you want to be greeted at the door — or whether you'd really like to be left alone for a moment, and what you want to happen once you've settled in.

Greeting rituals can also be quite sexy — if you're in a phase of life where you live alone or simply have a few days where you have your place to yourself, what could be better than opening the

door and turning the corner to find a very attractive, naked, kneeling and collared slave?

### ***Connection rituals for long-distance couples***

Not all of us live together, of course, and particularly for long-distance couples, maintaining a sense of connection to each other and to your dynamic can be a challenge.

While I live with my dominant partner, my submissive partner lives in a nearby city just far enough away that dropping by for a cup of tea is impractical. Some couples are even further away and may not be able to see each other for weeks and months at a time.

I ask my s-type to take five minutes a day to go to a private, quiet place and think about her connection to me, and then to text me when she's done. It may seem almost too simple to work, but I can't tell you how important this daily reminder of our connection has become to both of us.

### ***Collaring rituals/beginning of scene rituals***

Like many people, I have difficulty “switching gears” from my normal life into the frame of mind that lends itself to a great scene or great sex. While many people might recommend the use of lube or a glass of wine to lower inhibitions or paper over the gap between the levels of physical arousal in a couple, I personally think it would be great if I never needed or wanted either of those things.

A beginning of scene ritual, sometimes combined with a collaring ritual, can be a huge help in making a shift in focus. Consider whether or not you want to combine this with a short period of reflection — for instance, have the s-type enter the bedroom first, dim the lights, and kneel for a few moments, allowing the concerns of the day to recede, before the D-type enters the room and proceeds to collar them to begin the scene.

### ***Speech Protocols***

Speech protocols control the spoken (and sometimes written) expression of an s-type. An example: some couples agree to a speech protocol where the s-type is not allowed to say the word “no.” In response to a request, an s-type will say “Yes, Mistress,” for an order that is easily carried out, “As you wish, Mistress,” for an order that is less easily carried out, and “Only if you wish, Mistress,” for an order that the s-type has some compelling reason not to carry out. This protocol reinforces the couple's dynamic, but also gives the dominant partner important information and an opportunity to ask questions.

Probably the most common example of a speech protocol is requiring the s-type to use a particular title for the dominant partner. Many couples do this, and either observe this protocol only in private, or create a variation on it that's safe for public consumption, like “Yes, Darling.”

Speech protocols can extend to written expression, most notably in the sad case of “slashy speak,” where an s-type does not capitalize their name or their pronouns, but always capitalizes pronouns and titles that apply to their D-type. This leads to unfortunate constructions like W/we and O/our.

Speech protocols may seem silly, but what comes out of our mouth really does matter. Making a habit of speaking to a partner respectfully all the time, and not just when it's easy, is a habit worth the effort of developing.

### *Where & When Protocols*

Many protocols concern themselves with “where and when,” determining where an s-type should be and when they should do something. Common examples include: “Master is always served dinner first and always begins eating first.”

“Where” protocols concern themselves with where an s-type should be in relationship to their D-type. For example, some couples practice a furniture restriction protocol where there are times when an s-type is denied the use of furniture, or only allowed to sit on something other than the floor after asking for and being granted permission by the D-type.

“Where” protocols are intended to encourage awareness of the roles of each partner. An s-type who is directed to sleep on a pallet at the foot of the Master's bed is getting a concrete reminder of their place that's impossible to ignore.



## Standing Orders: Having It Their Way

Standing orders, when followed faithfully, are intended to create a life where pleasure is a routine and disappointment is as rare as possible.

### ***Getting Your Act Together: Standing Orders for Living***

#### *Daily To-Do List*

One D-type I know requires her s-type to write up a daily to-do list. Her s-type is prone to both procrastination and being overwhelmed when the list is too long, so the daily list has to fit on a 3x5 index card. This particular couple doesn't live together, and the genesis of the rule came out of the D-type's frustration at having weekly dates cancelled or ruined by an s-type's frantic or tearful mood. The rule has improved the s-type's life, and now, their evenings together aren't routinely derailed.

#### *Don't Let The Gas Tank Get Below Half Full*

Standing orders are just as likely to be about avoiding bad situations as they are about creating pleasurable ones, and dominants who have a lot of that "Daddy" (or Mommy) energy tend to issue a lot of them. A rule like "don't let the gas tank get below half full" averts crises, reassures the D-type that the s-type is avoiding behavior that makes them worry, and can make the s-type feel secure and loved.

#### *Orgasm Control*

Reading a list of standing orders may give you the impression that BDSM is all work and no play, but standing orders can be sexy too. Some D-types choose to "tune" an s-type's libido, either by restricting an s-type's solo orgasms to create a keen appetite for sex when the D-type wants it, or to require an s-type to get off more often to boost a low libido.

## Rules That Are Just For Fun

Some orders are serious, while others are sexy — but rules can also inject a playful, lighthearted element into a dynamic. Here's one that Bryce particularly loves — and it is really fun:

## ***There is Joy in Being an Evil Daddy***

*So, sometimes it's the little things that make a Daddy fun. Like giving out candy.*

*Absurd, over the top ritual, makes it all the sweeter. Like keeping all the candy in a locked box.*

*If Lily wants some candy, she must ask Daddy very, very nicely. Then I get the key, and reveal the treasure.*

*Lily could buy her own candy. But she doesn't. And it's not an effort to police what she eats, in general. Just candy. A Daddy should control the candy.*

*It's silly, and it's over the top. It's a tiny thing. Seems so insignificant. But it has something bigger inside it, behind it.*

*And it's fun.*

You might ask: "Wait, why isn't this in the behavior modification section?" Well, because this ritual, as fun as it is for both of us and as much as it is a lighthearted, playful way to live out our dynamic, it doesn't actually modify my behavior or do anything at all to change my habits. If there was a large bag of candy in the house and it wasn't locked in a box, you can bet money that I'd be eating it!

## Behavior Modification: Using D/s to Break Old Habits and Form New Ones

Behavior modification touches upon something about relationships that we already know: namely, that there's always something that our partners are better at than we are. And it touches upon something about being human that we know, too: sometimes it can help to have the encouragement and assistance of someone who cares enough about us to help us be accountable when we want to break an old habit or form a new one.

For instance, I love the gym — but I have a hard time getting there. To my delight, Bryce was ready and willing to help me out on that front. Here's something I wrote when we began that process:

*I love the gym.*

*No, really, I do.*

*I love being at the gym. I love the machines. I love the exercises. I love the big flatscreen TVs showing the game (which is pretty much the only time I watch the game and yet I feel this weird We Are Watching The Game In Here camaraderie with the guys in the Guy Section of the gym).*

*I go into the gym pissed off at the planet and I come out wondering what I was so angry about.*

*It's a beautiful thing.*

*Now, I wonder if this ever happens to you, pervs.*

*Do you love the gym but spend every minute up until the very minute you enter the door thinking of reasons why you shouldn't go or why you should not go right now and why you should go maybe later?*

*I swear! I do!*

*I have to tell myself to just Shut The Fuck Up And Get To The Gym.*

*And I tell you, it is not a one-time action. That requires repeated applications right up until they scan my little barcode at the front desk and tell me to have a nice workout.*

*What the HELL is that all about? Do you know? If you know, will you tell me?*

*Maybe I have a love-hate relationship with my own endorphins.*

*That would explain a lot, actually.*

///

*Hi! My name is Lily and I'm an endorphin addict.*

*Hi Lily*

*Yup, even when I was a wee lassie, I was hooked on those endorphins.*

*I even joined the track team.*

*(You can see other people in the Endorphins Anonymous meetings wag their heads at this one).  
Some people liked to win. I liked it because it hurt.*

*I didn't really connect it to being a perv back then when I was a little stripling, except in a general awareness that I liked things fast and hard and that made me different than most of my peers, who seemed to go in for this soft fluffy hearts and flowers business that just did nothing for me.*

*I like the gym, and I like clothespins, and I like that big leather strap and the cane! I even like the cane!*

*///*

*I can't say that I really struggle with getting myself into the bedroom and assuming the position, though.*

*If you know what I mean.*

*"I thought you were going to go to the gym," Bryce said, flopping down onto his side of the bed.*

*"Me too," I said.*

*"I don't see you getting your gym bag or your running shoes."*

*"Nope," I say, smirking a little. "Too bad there's nobody here who could take me in hand." I'm practically giggling behind my book now. He reaches over for me — and I know he's going to try to flip me over and give me a few sharp whacks on my backside.*

*"I'm getting away!" I say, laughing and bounding off the bed. I'm not too serious about my escape attempts, and Bryce seizes me, bends me over the foot of the bed, and roughly pulls down my slacks.*

*The spanking feels really good.*

*Knowing he knows and cares about what is good for me, and what I want for myself as well as for us, also feels really good. Suddenly, doing what he wants seems a lot more attractive than lying around in bed reading a magazine. I grab my gym bag and trot off to the gym — and as a bonus, we have wonderful hot sex later that night.*

## **The Politics, Perils, and Pleasures of Behavior Modification**

Rules that a D-type hands down to an s-type for the purpose of modifying their behavior are among the most far-reaching and heavy duty types of rules any couple can embed into their dynamic.

The rewards can be enormous. So are the risks.

*We are what we repeatedly do. - Aristotle*

Make no mistake: when we change a person's behavior, we change who they are. If you have questions about the ethics or wisdom of such a thing, you're not alone.

When I began contemplating my s-type Holly's interests in having me hand down rules that would change her habits, I had doubts.

I asked, "Who am I to do these things to her?"

As it happens, I asked that question in public, and I was answered by BDSM educator and blogger Mollena Williams, [who wrote](#):

*Like most of the people I know who I'd consider ethical and who are thoughtful beings, Lily questions what business she has taking up the responsibility of training someone:*

*"On the other side of the equation, I'm very reticent about training Holly. Training her to do a random, and ultimately trivial collection of things seems like an insult to our bond. But training that is worth the name would actually change her. And who am I to do that to her?"*

*My answer was not one I had to ponder.*

*Who you are is **the one she has chosen to bear that responsibility.***

*D-types, what we offer you when we say we want to serve you, to be owned by you, to belong to you, to be trained and shaped by you is, in fact, the right to change us. In most cases, we aren't looking for fundamental shifts in the core of our beings. In my opinion, someone ready to be the slave of another in a consensual m/s dynamic is someone who is, in fact, pretty fucking rad, badass and awesome already.*

*<cough>*

*You ought to be quite resilient and self-aware to say to someone else "I will be obedient, I will serve you and in submitting to your will, we will manifest the best me that I can possibly be."*

*I'll take myself as a case in point. While I absolutely have no desire to have someone attempt to re-arrange my personality or to suppress wide swaths of my nature, I certainly have things I can learn about myself through submission, and living a m/s lifestyle. Patience, self-respect, standing up to insure my needs are met, self-care are a few that pop to the top of my list.*

*Hence, the slave who says to their dominant that they agree to be trained by them has said **"You are worthy."***

*And that is a Big Fucking Deal, yo.*

*The slave who seeks out training has invested trust that they will be well cared for in that process. And they present themselves to their trainer with surrender, trust and adoration.*

*So who says you, the dominant, the master, are worthy to change us?*

*We do.*

*Your servants, your submissives, your slaves...those who would be a component of your heart and soul and will manifested in another body.*

Mollena's answer pointed out a very important fact: I was ignoring Holly's agency — her ability to make her own decision about what's good for her. Holly is a capable, accomplished and independent woman. If she thinks she can handle it, and if I generally trust her and her judgment, then why all the hand-wringing?

Behavior modification isn't universally popular in kink communities. A lot of kinksters not only don't like it but disapprove of it, and on much the same grounds that caused me to worry about whether or not my taking that role in Holly's life was ethical or not. Kinksters who disapprove of D/s that involves behavior modification generally do so because they feel it raises questions about the agency, independence, and personal responsibility of the s-type.

The blogger [Dishevelled Domina](#), in a discussion about D/s dynamics that veer into behavior modification territory, had this to say:

*For example, when I hear (or read) that some sub really needs his/her dominant partner to call and make sure s/he is doing his/her chores I get a little squicked out.*

*You know who I have to call and remind to do their chores? My children! It is a sign of maturity that my elder son no longer requires that sort of prompting on a regular basis.*

*Live and let live, sure, but it does weird me out, ok. That is just my reaction.*

*Also (and here we move even further into the realm of my own personal issues about volition and manipulation) there is sometimes this undercurrent of, "I don't want to deal with the actual demands and responsibilities of being a grown up in the world and in a relationship and so I will opt for this other kind of relationship that basically entitles one partner to perpetual immaturity in exchange for obedience, and the other partner gets all the control and all the responsibility."*

So if I was ignoring Holly's agency — her ability as an independent adult to make her own decisions about what was best for her when I initially refused to engage in behavior modification, are there s-types who ask for this kind of dynamic precisely because they want to give up that agency and give up responsibility for their own lives? Yes, there probably are. If you're a D-type and you get a bad gut feeling that your s-type is running away from, rather than running toward the challenges that life holds

for them, it's you who must use your judgment and say no to their requests to build structures for them to hide in.

Remember: what legitimizes your authority is not just their *consent* — it's your *intent*. If you preside over a dynamic that makes an s-type less capable of facing the challenges of daily life, even if they consent to it, it's not okay.

Taking all of those issues into account, are there types of behavior modification rules that can be handed down in a D/s relationship that are ethical and positive? Yes.

One of the most touching things someone can do for me is to invite me into their life as a good influence, and one of the most profound expressions of trust I can make is to invite someone else in as a good influence on me. If you feel the same way, collaborating in the act of behavior modification may be right for you.

# If There Are Three Types of Rules, Are There Also Three Types of Dominant?

There may be, and it's useful to consider it, whether you're an s-type who is trying to figure out why the kind of dominance they want and the kind their D-type wants to give are two different things, or if you're a D-type trying to suss out what kind of dominant you are and will become.

## *The Ritual and Protocol Dominant*

Dominants who focus on protocol may tend to be more “I want what I want when I want it, and I want it right now” dominants. Protocol and ritual focus a couple on things that happen in realtime and in person, and that's what matters to this dominant. The past is over, and the future hasn't happened yet: we're in the now, so let's not waste it.

A dominant who's a very pragmatic person who likes concrete, tangible outcomes may favor protocol and ritual over developing standing orders or presiding over a regime of self-improvement for an s-type. This kind of dominant can develop a wonderfully commanding presence over time simply by engaging in protocol and ritual again and again — practice really does make perfect, and often, this is the kind of dominant who often can really pull off “looking like a dominant,” and can instantly project a sense of dominance into the moment, wherever he or she happens to be.

Ritual and protocol dominants have a real sense of theater — they are the kind of dominants who will browse the racks of fetishwear...and actually buy something. This dominant doesn't have any cardboard boxes that “just haven't gotten unpacked” in their bedroom. You can bet they gave some thought to those sheets, and their inner sanctum is as much a stage set for an intimate performance as it is a place to sleep.

They're the kind of dominant who might be able to step into the role of a Roman Emperor or Empress — lounging on their throne and waiting imperiously for someone to hand them a drink. They may expect an s-type to simply hang around and be available...and use them or not at their whim, because, hey, it's good to be King (or Queen). Not simply “not a planner,” some protocol and ritual dominants are actually anti-planning, since what they thrive on is spontaneity, and too much fussy planning just ruins things by making it feel too much like, well, work. Aware of subtle details in your appearance, attire, and demeanor, this kind of dominance is likely to be maddeningly good at reading your body during a scene. They're very aware of their own presence, and sometimes unnervingly cool to the touch, the James Bond or Helen Mirren of dominants. A dominant whose BDSM practice focuses on protocol and ritual can make the kind of dominant you want to go back to again and again, just to experience the thrill ride of being with them.

## *The Standing Orders Dominant*

The Standing Orders Dominant is the kind of person who's already good at many things that some of us aren't very good at at all — like remembering to change the oil in the car, putting their keys in the same place, and planning in advance for events. They're the dominant that you imagine when just the word “Strict” turns you on. They have standards they live by — and now you're going to live by them, too.

While a Rules & Protocol dominant is interested in making good things happen right now, a Standing Orders dominant may be more interested in making sure bad things don't happen now or in the future.



They're the kind of dominant who will give you an order like: "Never let your gas tank go below half full," where a Rules & Protocol dominant might not care if you hitchhike as long as you show up on time for a night of pleasure.

The dominant who leans towards issuing standing orders often thinks, "Life would be so much better if people did what they should do." A dynamic like this is satisfying to them because, for once, when people aren't doing things the right way...they can fix it.

An s-type who's been under the control of a Standing Orders dominant for a few years may actually feel like they're cheating when they consider how much more well-run and less stressful their life has become now that they've adapted to the ways of their D-type.

A Standing Orders dominant might need practice formulating rules that others can actually follow — some of them are so good at running their lives smoothly that they're perplexed and even irritated when what seems entirely obvious to them is a mystery to everyone else. The Standing Orders dominant might benefit from a few broad hints reminding them of the pleasures of the bed — their long To-Do list and high standards make them the kind of dominant most likely to pass up sex in order to finish up an important task.

Solid citizens whose sense of order and routine makes them unshakable in good times and bad, this kind of dominant may be uniquely suited to either a domestic discipline or "50's Household" dynamic, or dynamics typically referred to as "Taken In Hand," or "Around Her Finger." Frequently found in military or educational settings.

### ***The Behavior Modification Dominant***

As rare as unicorns, rare enough that people wonder if they exist in pure form at all, the Behavior Modification Dominant's motto is *It's For Your Own Good*. A Behavior Modification dominant is capable out of getting pleasure out of very abstract and long-range plans whose outcomes may not benefit them directly at all. They're the kind of dominant who will give you a regular bedtime even when they're a night owl and that actually restricts their own playtime with you. They're the kind of dominant who is willing to commit to supporting you as you make long-term changes to improve your life.

Often geeky and a bit nerdy, this is the sweet, caring dominant who also has a touch of the Mad Scientist about them. They're never happier than when they come up with a new theory about why you do what you do, along with an ingenious new way of changing the trajectory of your life through a few simple rules. They're the ones who disassembled a toaster as a kid, and they're just as obsessed with your inner workings. They are proud of themselves when your life improves, especially if that improvement was related to their involvement in your life. They're proud of you when you decide to move on from old habits, situations, and behaviors that don't work for you anymore.

Their talent for abstraction may make them seem a bit distant or distracted in person; they may need more time to transition into the headspace for realtime dominance than other dominants do.

As rare as this kind of Dominant is, they're also precisely the kind of dominant who's most likely to disappear or fade over time. Their interest in you, and their willingness to invest huge amounts of time, effort, and focus in you and your life, may exhaust their own resources. This kind of dominant

may not believe that they “deserve” anything from an s-type, waving you away when you offer service when you can see that they’re tired or stressed. Unless an s-type can be just as ingenious as they are at figuring out a way to get the Behavior Modification Dominant to get as well as to give, their brilliance will burn out and fade away as their self-sacrifice consumes them.

## What if There’s a Mismatch Between the Kind of Dominance I Want And The Kind of Dominant My D-Type Is?

This is among the most common causes of D/s relationship mismatch. Very often, an s-type comes to BDSM with a strong preference for one of the three types of dominant, only to find out that their mate or new playmate leans towards one of the other two types.

An s-type who longs for someone who will provide them the structure and rules to clean up their life may end up with a Rules and Protocol Dominant, who likes kinky sex in the bedroom (and is great at it) but gives little thought to tomorrow.

An s-type who fantasizes about a hot and sexy dominant who looks great in their head to toe leather gear and effortlessly projects a feeling of dominance may assume that either a Standing Orders dominant or a Behavior Modification dominant isn’t actually dominant at all and doesn’t “have it in them” because they don’t have the wardrobe along with the theatrical ability to set the stage and step into the role of Sexy Evil Dominant. They may browse their favorite porn and despair of their mate ever buying a pair of thigh-high stiletto boots or ditching the Comicon t-shirt for a naked chest that shows evidence of a gym membership.

Try to remember that your dominant isn’t trying to hurt you or deprive you of the kind of dominance that you crave: they’re just being who they are. You wouldn’t put up with someone telling you “well you’re just not submissive enough” when you won’t let go of a hard limit — so throwing “you’re not a REAL dominant” at your partner when you’re disappointed isn’t fair, and if you find yourself saying that in the heat of the moment...well, it might be time to apologize when you calm down.

You and your partner may have already learned how to negotiate and compromise around sexual activity — you might do the flogging one of you loves one night, and the oil massage and naked service that drives your partner wild another night. In the same way, you can both learn to compromise on styles of dominance. The dominant partner can read about and explore other styles of dominance and try out a few new things, and the s-type can open their eyes and learn to appreciate the good parts of their partner’s dominant style. While an s-type or D-type’s core dominant style won’t completely change, we can all change and grow over time.

## What Should A Dominant Control?

*Are there parts of an s-type's life that a dominant shouldn't exert influence over?*

There are wide swaths of Holly's life that I do not seek or want to have influence over, and I think that's pretty normal within BDSM relationships; people pick and choose what aspects of each others' lives they want to transfer authority over. But this question really makes me wonder if we could arrive at an absolute answer for it.

*Is there any part of an s-type's life that it is inherently wrong for a D-type to control, even if the s-type enthusiastically consents to giving up that control to a D-type?*

I think in order to answer that question, we have to talk about the issue of intent, first. *It is not consent alone that legitimizes a dominant's authority over an s-type. It is their intent.* A dominant who does not commit to the minimum standard of preserving an s-type's well being as they exercise the authority that s-type has granted them over the s-type's life cannot claim any legitimate hold on that authority. (I was about to write "in my opinion," but I'm going to dispense with the weasel-words on this one). I personally commit to a higher standard than "do no harm". It is my goal that the overall exercise of my authority over an s-type should not only preserve their well-being but enhance it. This does not make me a saintly, self-sacrificing D-type — what I'm looking for is overlap between things that drive me at a deep level, things that I want and that turn me on, and things that enhance an s-type's life (or provide many orgasms. Same difference?).

But let's say that we have a D-type who is eagerly willing to accept total and complete authority over an s-type and beyond that is willing to commit to preserving and enhancing the s-type's well being for as long as they are the authority in the s-type's life.

*Is there any type of authority that an s-type should not grant, or that a D-type should not accept?*

- Should a D-type control an s-type's diet or weight?
- Should a D-type tell an s-type how to vote?
- Should a D-type feel entitled to control an s-type's thoughts or feelings, by training an s-type to think or even feel a certain way?
- Should a D-type who has authority over an estrogen-based s-type feel entitled to require or deny birth control?
- Should a D-type be able to enforce a particular relationship structure on an s-type — for example, requiring an s-type to accept polyamory?
- Should a D-type be able to "lend" an s-type to another person for the purpose of sexual services?
- Should a D-type control how or where an s-type works?

I have to say that many of these make me intensely uncomfortable, but if there is enthusiastic consent on both sides, I'm not sure that I can say that there is anything on this list that is inherently wrong for a D-type to control or for an s-type to relinquish control of. I do think there are some practical and moral limits to control. For example:

**All parties must consent.** For example, if I hire an s-type, I do not want their D-type interfering in the management of an employee that I have hired and pay for their work. The s-type might have consented to the D-type's control, but I, as a hiring manager, did not. It's inappropriate for a D-type to try to rope me into a control structure that I didn't consent to.

**Dominance math.** A dominant shouldn't accept authority they can't or won't or don't want to exercise. D-types have to make practical assessments about how to deploy their authority in a way that actually works — if they are too busy giving orders to live their own lives effectively, that's not going to work.

Compared to the incredibly broad authority I talk about above, the actual authority I exercise over my s-type Holly is very sharply limited, both by choice and by circumstance.

My girlfriend Holly is married and lives with her primary partner, with whom she has an open relationship. From the very beginning of our relationship, I was intensely concerned with ensuring that Holly remained entirely free to do whatever she felt was necessary to enhance and preserve her relationship with her husband. I was careful even with symbolic things — when I gave Holly a collar, I initially forbade her to wear it outside my presence.

Over time, I have come to exert some control over Holly's behavior when she is not physically present, but the vast majority of my control over Holly happens in “realtime” — when we are physically together.

During those times, I expect her obedience (I even usually get it!). I choose what she eats. I exercise whatever control over her body and attire pleases me. If we are in private and I want her naked, she's naked. If I want her to wear an insertable remote vibrator while we're out at dinner, she does it.

While she is with me she does not have the right to physical or psychological privacy: if I want to see any part of her body, I expect her to show it to me. If I ask her a question about what she is feeling or thinking, I expect a complete and truthful answer. (This is the part of my authority that Holly challenges or tries to evade the most often, but I consider it so central to my dominance that I insist on it. Since I will only dominate in ways that preserve or enhance her well being, I actually need to know what she is thinking or feeling in order to do be willing to do pretty much anything at all to her or with her).

I expect to be able to use her for my sexual pleasure, and for her to service me sexually according to my own whims. I can choose to grant or withhold sexual pleasure from her when we are together. I can limit her physical movements either via bondage or simply by telling her to stay in a particular position. I can tell her to be quiet.

When she is not with me, Holly spends five minutes a day in a quiet place focusing on her connection to me. When she's done she sends me a text message telling me that she's done this. This small ritual has turned out to be very effective in keeping us close though we don't live close to each other. There are also times when we're apart and we are talking or texting where I will give her a direct order and expect obedience, but again, I'm very cautious about not roping people into our dynamic who didn't consent, whether that's her spouse, bystanders, friends, or anyone else.

## *What don't I control?*

A lot, and we're both perfectly happy with that. I don't control her behavior at work. I don't control her behavior in her relationship with her husband, her friends, or her family.

While I insist on knowing how she thinks or feels, I feel very strongly about liberty of thought and emotional freedom, so I don't and won't tell Holly how to think or feel. I have, however, required her to read certain books, learn and practice relaxation and meditation exercises, in ways that are intended to give her more control over the contents of her own head and to limit the suffering she experiences from anxiety or the stressful things that life inevitably brings our way.

I don't compel her consent to be involved in any particular relationship structure; if I were to take on new partners it would only be after discussion with her and only if she consented.

Each couple will end up with a unique power exchange "fingerprint" that reflects on what they want to control, or not.

## Your Heart's Desire

As important as it is to consider the s-type's unique blend of desires, emotional motivations, and experiences, it's also important for those of you who are D-types to connect with your own desires.

Like a lot of new D-types, I was very concerned with "getting it right." I wanted to be a good dominant. I wanted to be a sexy, compelling dominant. I wanted to be a dominant who knew how to use a flogger without accidentally hitting my s-type in the face!

I spent a lot of time focusing on what to do and how to do it, and not very much time focusing on how I felt about it. Often, apart from excitement — because having a new partner to do these things with was certainly very exciting! — the main thing I felt at the conclusion of a scene was relief: "Phew. It worked."

Even if I'd had a hard day, even if I was tired, even if what I really wanted to do was to crawl into bed and order my s-type to bring me something to eat and then get naked so we could watch The Tonight Show — what did I do? I waded in there with my cuffs and my flogger and got to work.

I had good scenes — even great scenes — but until I built my confidence in myself as a dominant and in my relationship with my s-type, I had a lot of emotionally disconnected scenes. They were scenes that worked for me from the neck up. I wanted to "do it right," and since I was in a new relationship with someone who I was thrilled to be with, I wanted to do things that convinced her that I was the dominant for her.

I'm going to share two scenes with you, one from early in my career as a dominant and only a few weeks into my relationship with Holly, my s-type, and another one from two years later, also with Holly. I wrote these fairly soon after the experience; both of these were drafted within days of the events they describe.

## Performances

This didn't happen.

*I close the door to the hotel room and lean back against it. Holly presses up against me, tilts her head up for a kiss, which I give her. I lift my head and her lips go to my throat.*

*I don't want to say it and I really don't want Holly to look at me when I say it.*

*I push her back a little and look away. "Can we, um, just...sit?" Oh, shit. Please don't let me cry. What the fuck is wrong with me? Shit.*

*"What's wrong?" she says. Hell, now she probably thinks I want to break up with her. "Sit," I say, pointing at the room's couch.*

*She sits. I sit. I put my head in her lap, and she lets me.*

*“Nothing’s wrong,” I say. “Nothing’s wrong between us, anyway. It’s just...I spend all day being the version of me that makes people want to work with me, listen to me, hell, give me money. And I love it, but I expend a lot of energy doing it.*

*I understand that my role here is to throw you on the bed and ravish you, and I love doing that and I have every intention of doing it, but I can’t do it right now...I don’t want our relationship to be just another one of my performances. I hope you want that too.”*

*“I’m so tired,” I say. And now, I can’t help it; I burst into tears and press my face into her skirt.*

*I am the worst boyfriend ever, and yet, feeling her stroke my hair is exactly what I want right now.*

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I don’t do any of that. I’m pretty sure that the outcome would be Holly asking me, “Are you sure you’re not too tired?” every time I ask to see her. And that’s fair; Holly expects to enjoy our time together, and I imagine showing up for a date emotionally disheveled is no better than showing up physically disheveled. So: suck it up, make it work, make it perfect. If you’re nervous (and I’m nervous) keep it to yourself. No excuses.

*Rewind:*

This did happen.

I close the door to the hotel room and lean back against it. Holly presses up against me, tilts her head up for a kiss, which I give her. I lift my head and her lips go to my throat.

“First things first,” I say, stepping into the room and grabbing the thick terry hotel bathrobe that I’d placed within reach of the door when I checked in earlier that day. “Put this on.”

The room’s a hell of a lot bigger than I expected for what I paid; in fact, it’s a corner suite, with a large living room overlooking the plaza in front of City Hall. The bedroom has its own French door, with curtains on the inside for privacy. It was shut when Holly entered, and there’s a reason I indicate that she should change in the bathroom.

I want “the reveal,” that little moment they have on television commercials where the Dad takes his hands off the kid’s eyes to reveal the really great present.

She comes out in the robe, looking a little tentative. She was wearing such a pretty outfit; it was clear that she’d taken time to prepare, and maybe she’s a little put out at how little time she got to wear it. Maybe she’s disappointed that I didn’t take her out for dinner, or even feels that I only want to spend time with her for the sex. Well, I hope I can make up for it.

I open the door to the bedroom. Inside, on the center of the bed, there’s an artfully placed little assortment of iconic movie candies – Raisinets, Sno-Caps. Popcorn, of course. The large screen TV in the room is paused on the title frame of a movie.

“It’s movie night,” I say.

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“I wanted to do something a little cozy,” I said. “Time for me to get my robe on.” I’d brought mine with me. It’s a very old-fashioned men’s poplin robe, big for me, the kind of thing Katherine Hepburn would wear the morning after, snagging it off a hook in Spencer Tracy’s bathroom.

We lie on the bed together, propped up by the pillows. I press Play to start the movie.

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She’s keeping her eyes closed, just as I asked her to. “You probably saw the harness when you opened the drawer,” I said. “Don’t worry, it’s not the kind of thing I would spring on you.”

“Now this, on the other hand,” I say, bringing out one of the other toys. She flinches a little when it touches her, and I sit back for a beat, wondering if I should go on. Earlier, just after the end of the movie, I’d asked her to stand up facing one of the bedroom walls. “Close your eyes and rest your forehead gently against the wall,” I said. “Your job is to forget everything outside this room.”

This didn’t have the intended effect. I wanted to relax her and give her the sensation that she was the complete focus of my attention. When I pulled out of contact with her, to clear off the bed, she stayed where I’d put her. But she said, quietly, “You’re not going to take pictures of me, are you?”

*Oh no*, I thought. *Okay, this is too much too soon*. I could feel bad about the fact that she thinks I’m the kind of person who might do that, but really, what exactly have I done to earn the kind of trust I’m asking for? I’ve got her, alone, in a secluded place; we haven’t been together long – how does she know I’m not going to have her up on YouTube by daybreak?

I turn her around, and to my surprise, she still doesn’t open her eyes. I wrap my arms around her from behind, and I say, “Listen, I would never do that, but I know I have to earn that kind of trust. You don’t have to keep your eyes closed if that’s too much.”

Later. Holly’s eyes are open now, though to my surprise, she kept them shut through the whole thing, which was amazing and a little unnerving – after what she’d said, I was suddenly aware of the burden of her trust, of how much faith she was putting in me, trusting me not to hurt her, shame her, expose her to ridicule.

“But what do you want?” Holly says. “Isn’t there anything that you want?” I recognize this: it’s the mantra of service-oriented bottoms everywhere. I myself have said it to my husband after he’s rendered me utterly limp with pleasure.

But I don’t want – well, I do, but not right this minute. “Don’t you mess with that afterglow I made. I’m gonna be really peeved if you do.”

Later still, she asks me again. “I’d love to fuck you,” I say.

She says yes and I scamper off to the bathroom to wash my cock.

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*Back up.*

My cock? Yeah, well, not exactly. I do, however, have a leather harness that fits low over my hips, with a sturdy chrome ring that will hold a silicone cock.

Yeah. I know you're curious. Just in case you were wondering, I don't own any realistic cocks. Plenty of people like them, but they're not my style.

Mine's a stylized, black and white marbled affair, like something a Swedish furniture designer might have come up with. Cock by Eero Saarinen. I like it. I think it's cool. If I could get one that was purple with spangles I would like it even more.

"Fuck, you look really sexy," Holly says as I come back in the room.

"Well, that's nice to hear," I say. "I mean, you really don't want to come out and have someone laugh at you when you're wearing one of these things." Holly giggles, and I say, "I can't actually lose my erection, but mentally? Weeeee—ump," I say, making the kind of falling noise one might hear if sex was a Saturday morning cartoon and all erectile mishaps were accompanied by sound effects.

I get up to get the bottle of lube on the nightstand. The leather straps in the rear of the harness are a bit like those on a jock strap – they frame my ass, and I guess Holly can't resist slapping it.

"Oh," I say, leaping back on the bed. "Oh really, missy? Do you think you can spank me?" Holly giggles. "You think so, huh? Do you need to be reminded who does the spanking around here?"

I flip her over onto her stomach. "Come on, you know the drill, ass in the air," I say. I redden her ass, whispering in her ear: *Your bottom is all pink now, do you know that? You're a very, very naughty girl. Whap!*

I hadn't really planned on doing this with her for the first time from behind, but the thought of pressing my thighs against her ass – hot to the touch and definitely crimson now – was just too tempting. I pour some lube on my hand and stroke my cock.

Okay. So, of course, I don't have any sensation in my cock, but holy baby Jeebus, sinking into her is so fucking hot that I groan right along with her.

I hold her hips as I establish a rhythm. On one stroke she makes a noise – I can't tell whether it's one of pain, or pleasure. Now, I can't feel the tip of my cock, so if I'm going too deep I have no way of knowing it. I back off a little, taking shallower thrusts, leaning forward across her back.

Oops. I slip out accidentally. Then again. Okay, maybe this isn't the best position. I ask her to roll over, and I get between her thighs.

I've heard many people say that the missionary position is boring, but there's a reason why it's so damn popular. Fuck. Pressing myself against Holly full length and kissing her while I'm inside her is almost unbearably intense. As the arousal rises for both of us, finding a rhythm becomes effortless.

I don't know how long we stay in that state, rocking together.

At some point, I am on my knees but upright, still inside her, between her thighs and holding her knees, looking down on her and panting. We're both covered in sweat.

“Did you finish?” Holly asks me.

I shake my head, no. “I want you on top,” I say.

The room is dim but not dark. I roll over onto my back, hands up above my head. I’m mesmerized, nipples tight, breathing shallow, as she takes me in her hand and guides it into her.

She’s fully upright, and I can barely breathe as I watch her. I really don’t understand it when it happens, because it’s never happened to me before. As much as I love doing this – and I love, love, love it – I’ve never come from fucking a woman with a strap on, and I don’t even really expect it.

It doesn’t really make a lot of sense when I say, “Squeeze me,” since I can’t feel it, but I feel like I can feel the expression on her face as it changes right in the center of my chest as I reach out to touch her clit as she rides me. And it doesn’t make any sense at all that when she comes all over my cock, it’s as if that is simply transmitted to me, invisibly, and I come too.

Honestly, I just sit there for a minute, speechless. What the fuck just happened? And when can it happen again?

“My leg has a cramp,” Holly says, and dismounts, kissing me on the nose, apparently unaware of the completely unprecedented and miraculous event. I close my eyes and let my head drop back. I can tell her. I can tell her later. Yeah. Later.

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It’s four o’clock in the morning, and I have been up for 20 hours. Except for driving my car from Boston to Providence, I have spent nearly all of that time in the presence of other people, engineering their delight.

There’s a frame of early morning light around the blackout shade covering the bedroom window. I did it. I made it to the end of this very, very long day. I am exhausted and relieved and delighted and yes, pleased with myself. The window blind is the last thing I see, like the back side of a curtain, with all the people safely on the other side.

As you can see, in that scene, I’m acting a part. While in the end, “fake it till you make it” resulted in a scene that was really fun for both of us, how I approached the scene didn’t have much to do at all with what I wanted or needed at that moment.

It took me years to get to the point of having the confidence to act on my own desires, particularly if those desires didn’t look or feel stereotypically dominant to me.

Here’s a scene, again with Holly, almost exactly two years later.

## Totally Fucking Lazy BDSM (Is Love)

It’s easy to get burned out on BDSM, especially if your style is a high-intensity one, like mine is. If what you’re really into is the flailing whipping flogging chains and wax followed immediately by ripping, ravishing, pounding, ecstatic, transcendent, weirdly religious and transporting scenes with

laughing crying biting awe.

That takes a shitload of energy — mental, physical, emotional.

Some days, I tell you pervs — I just do not have the *oomph* for this.

But the problem with that — and it's a problem I'm sure some of you have experienced — is that when that intense activity disappears for awhile, when you guys aren't \*ahem\* Doing It, it can feel like your dynamic disappears as well.

Where did it go? If nobody's dominating and nobody's submitting, are you vanilla now? Is it over? Are we through?

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A big part of my job as a dominant is to actually connect to what I really truly want. Not in general. Not what I think I should want. Not what I think Holly wants. But what I actually really truly want RIGHT NOW, today.

The problem with that is that I find some of the things I want embarrassing.

In particular, I find them embarrassing when the things I want are low intensity things.

Lazy things.

Totally fucking lazy things.

Tying her up and giving her a thorough beating and making her come until she begs me to stop and then not stopping until she cries?

That's dominant, right? Check. You can see it from space, this dominance. It's big, loud, energetic. Unambiguously dominant.

But what about...what about when I just want to lie in bed and look out the window and trail my fingertips over her skin?

Shit. What if she gets bored? How dominant is that, anyway? It's sappy! It's embarrassing.

Sometimes I just get out the flogger anyway, disconnected from my real desire or perplexed by it or wishing it away, or it feels like the simple things are more trouble to get than the big complicated ones.

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I want.

I want her to strip completely naked. I want to put a collar on her and clip a leash to it. And I want to tie the leash to a chair and have her lie at my feet.

I want to sit in the chair and do...nothing. Absolutely nothing — for as long as I want.

I sip a glass of wine and look out the window, the leash looped loosely around the leg of the chair.

“Bringing only one glass is a very nice touch,” she says wryly.

“What you have, you have from me,” I say, handing her the glass for a sip.

“Are you cold?” I ask. She shakes her head no. “You’re the one without any clothes, so tell me if that changes.”

She hands the glass back and I set it on the windowsill. I looked out over Kennedy Plaza, people coming and going from City Hall, the transit station, green trees, red bricks, gray granite, black asphalt, blue sky, white clouds.

I exhale and my shoulders sink, relaxing down and away from my ears.

I cross my legs, one over the other, and read for awhile.

I look down at Holly, who seems perfectly content lying naked on the bedspread on the floor, reading Jane Eyre. I sit, glass in hand, and look down on her, her creamy skin. The chrome links of the dog leash leading to the leather collar around her neck. She stretches lazily and rolls over onto her stomach.

I tell you, before that moment I never really felt like I owned her.

Watching her, I suddenly realize that I don’t have to do anything or be anything or swing a flogger or tie a knot to earn her presence. I don’t have to be menacing or sexy or hot.

I don’t have to do Fuck All.

Because I *own* her. Not only will she lie at my feet for as long as I want — *what I want IS what she wants*.

She belongs. To me.

## A Tale of Two Scenes

Are either of these “bad scenes”? Do I regret either one of them? No, absolutely not. But only one of them is a connected scene. Only one of them really reflects the truth of what was in my heart at that moment. It also showed me that there was more overlap between what I wanted and needed and what Holly truly found fulfilling.

To be fair to both Holly and I, I don't think we could have done the second scene early in our relationship. One of the things that I think these two scenes, separated by two years, shows, is how much our trust in each other has grown. A scene like the second one wouldn't have happened if I still thought that Holly would dump me for being real about how I felt; nor would Holly have felt comfortable lying around naked in broad daylight if she didn't know me well enough to know that I'd never betray her by taking pictures and posting them online.

One of the things that you will find is that as you build your own rules and your own dynamic — what you trust each other to do and not do — will grow and change over time, just as mine has with Holly and as it has with my husband. If you're a D-type, you'll find that your dominance is deeper and richer when you're dominating in a way that's deeply rooted in desires that are really core to you: your heart's desire.

But that journey to your heart's desire can't be completed in a day. You both have to use your judgment and be honest about what parts of your desire both of you are ready for right now, and you also have to be ready to stop and to apologize if things don't work out as you planned or if things get too scary or too deep too fast.

As important as it is for a D-type to commit to bringing their whole self to their dynamic, an s-type's desires are equally important; the idea here is to find the place where those desires overlap.

Sometimes your partner will suggest an activity, a new rule, or a new way of relating to each other that they really want to experience, and your reaction might be, “Huh. Well, okay.” What they're suggesting might not sound thrilling, but on the other hand, the thought of it doesn't drive you crazy, and you're willing to be a good sport.

Sometimes rules or activities that your partner suggests that haven't been part of your fantasy life stay in that “It's not my favorite, but they like it, and I think it's okay” category. But don't be surprised if you discover something much deeper and much more compelling by trying on your partner's kinks for size. You are together for a reason, and part of that reason is an undefinable thing called sexual chemistry. If you have that chemistry, the chances that your partner has a few fantasies and desires will turn out to be really exciting for you. Sexual excitement is sexually transmissible — if you are really turned on by your partner, and they're really turned on by something, you'll probably end up being turned on by it too.

Now, no couple has complete and perfect overlap of their sexual turn ons and desires — and that's actually a good thing. Diversity and variety and difference make the world go 'round — and make the trip a hell of a lot more interesting. While it's possible that some of your partner's turn-ons will become your own new favorites, it's also possible that it will never be your favorite thing.

When seeking that kind of overlap, start first with the low-hanging fruit — the things that work for

both of you. Then, try a few things that are exciting to one partner but that the other partner is relatively neutral about. Do they turn out to be more fun than expected? Great! Keep those as part of your sexual repertoire.

If your partner is really turned off by, or not ready for one of your kinks — respect that. And in turn, if your partner tells you about a consensual kink that turns them on, shaming them is never the right answer. You'll never get anywhere unless you can build the trust you need to have good sexual communication. If your partner thinks that you'll hound them to participate in a particular kink you just don't like, they're not going to want to talk to you about sex very much, which means your adventures are going to be very limited indeed. If your partner thinks you'll flip out or be mean if you reveal something really intimate and personal to you, they won't share those things with you.

The last scene is one in which I was ready to share a genuine desire with someone who submits to me. Does it work in the other direction? Sure. Because of our dynamic, how it works for Holly and I is that encourage her to be open with me about her desires — but it's me who makes the final decision about whether or not we'll act on that desire, how we'll act on it, and when we'll act on it. This saves Holly from feeling like she's in charge, or scripting the experience herself, both of which would be a real buzzkill for her.

Here's a scene in which Holly confesses one of her desires to me. Neither one of us understood how meaningful fulfilling that desire would be for me.

## The Bitch Is Back

A few days ago, Holly wrote me an email, asking if there was anything she could do to improve the D/s aspect of our relationship.

Which, in case you were wondering, is submissive speak for *You Are Not Putting Out With The Dominance Enough*.

So last night, we went out to dinner. I love this restaurant. Even in the brightest daylight, once you go in, it's like entering a cave. Which means it's the kind of place where it's dim enough to get your hand under your date's skirt any time they're open.

“So I'm thrilled, really, that you'd like to go deeper.”

“I suggested it early on, and it didn't really go anywhere.”

“You know, you were the first person I had a relationship with where I was the dominant. I was a newbie dom with you.”

Holly nods. “That's true.”

“It takes time for people to grow into the kind of dominant they're going to be. It's not a microwave dish. We can do things now that we couldn't have done then, that we wouldn't have even tried then.”

“Because we've built up all this trust,” she says. “But you're not interested in that. I mean, I figured, you're interested in having spectacular kinky sex and there's nothing wrong with that. I understand. You're busy — the out-of-the-bedroom stuff is work. To me, the psychology of it is really huge, but maybe to you it's more physical.”

I stare at her in incredulity. (If it hasn't become obvious before now, Holly is not a reader of this blog).

“No.” I shake my head. “No. The psychological dimensions of D/s are the most important part of it to me. It's just not easy to pick things that work in the context of our relationship. Remember the time we tried the posture thing? That was an incredibly dumb thing for me to pick — how was I supposed to monitor it? If you and I lived together, it would be different. If you want to extend our dynamic beyond the bedroom now, we have to pick things that do two things — they have to be actually doable, and — ”

“And you have to really want it.”

“Yes. That's exactly right. I don't think I've always brought my whole self to the table as a dominant — often, the things I've ordered you to do are things that you suggested, but that had no real hook for me. Of course, we can also extend what we do while we're together. Right now, if you're not naked or about to be naked, we pretty much interact as equals. If you want, I could just be more directive when we're out together.”

“Yes.”

“Squeeze,” I say, tapping on the table twice. (The irony of this conversation about not having enough dominance lying around is that we're having it while she has ben-wa balls in, and no, we were doing that way before *That Awful Book*).

She bites her lip.

The waitress comes. This is one of those places where I think it might not be possible to get a job if you do not have significant body art and/or piercings.

“She'll have the macaroni and cheese; I'm going to have the steamed clams, and we'll have a basket of Old Bay fries to share,” I say.

“Anything to drink?” the waitress asks.

“She'll have a pint of the Berkshire IPA and I'll have a glass of the Cotes du Rhone,” I say.

The waitress leaves and I look at Holly again. “Sit up straight.”

Holly does it.

I don't just look at her. I give her *The Look*.

The temperature at the table drops several degrees.

“Like that?” I say. “Is that what you want?”

She sits perfectly still and straight as I pin her to the chair with my gaze. “Yes,” she says.

I sit back, releasing her, and laugh. “I can't believe you want the bossy bitch! Nobody wants her!”

“I just thought you weren't interested in it,” she said.

I'm still laughing. "I'm being polite! I've only been trying to suppress her my whole entire goddamn life. Now fucking sit up, I didn't tell you you could slouch."

///

After dinner I take her back to the hotel and I give her the longest, hardest beating I have ever given her.

When her back is bright red with impressions of the flogger's tails, I stop and grab her by the neck and bite her. Hard. As I sink my teeth into her she screams, but only for a second before I cover her mouth, and then I bite her again. I can tell she's genuinely a little afraid of me now, but she doesn't safeword or tell me to stop when I take my hand away.

"You might live to regret inviting the bitch into your life," I say.

Then I resume beating her. I beat her so long and so hard that today there are huge bruises and welts — *on my hands*.

Things get a little jumbled at this point. Did I fuck her first? Did I make her make me come first?

I've got a fistful of her hair and I'm holding it so tightly that it has to hurt. She's between my thighs and my back is arched and up off the bed.

"Don't. You. Dare. Fucking. Stop," I pant.

It takes me awhile to come down from it. I open my eyes. Yes, there's the ceiling. The room looks like a rock band trashed it, only with way more sex toys. It takes me a minute to tune into what Holly is murmuring in my ear, as she's wrapped around me.

*You're so beautiful*

*I love you*

I laugh weakly. "Nobody wants the butch girl. Nobody wants the bossy bitch." Suddenly I feel like I might cry.

"Who the hell sent you!? Who sent you? Who sent you to me?"

"What are you talking about?" Holly asks.

"You love all the parts of me nobody else wants."

## Leveling Up

I recount this tale mainly because of the wonderfully skillful way that Holly indicates that she's ready to "level up" — to increase the intensity of our dynamic. Sadly, a large number of s-types refrain from initiating these discussions because they confuse giving permission with "topping from the bottom." But there was no point at which I was not in charge in our exchange — Holly was simply letting me know that the area of her consent had expanded, and was inviting me to play there if I wished.

Creating and initiating new rules, and changing or expanding the dynamic isn't something we do only



at the beginning of a relationship; we do it when we're ready to "level up."

## Rules: Don't Do That!

Before we start building new rules, I want to make sure you're not wasting your time or setting yourself up for failure and conflict. So let's cover three issues right up front:

1. Rules Porn. There are a lot of rules that sound hot and sexy that don't work in real life.
2. Thinking Of Rules as a Present. One of the most common ways to screw up when adding rules is adding a bewildering number of them all at once. Seeing rules as a gift you give each other tends to restrain the impulse to overload your relationship.
3. Dominants Get To Have Limits Too. The BDSM community spends a lot of time discussing the limits of s-types, and for good reason. However, rules and discipline are a place where the D-type's consent becomes more complex and nuanced.
4. Don't Use Rules To Solve Relationship Problems.

## Rules Porn: But It Sounded So Hot In That Book!

Let's face it: most of us are into BDSM at least in part, well...because it's hot and it turns us on! And that's great — as long as we remember that our fantasies are about us — but our reality has to be about both of us.

The number one reason that rules don't work is that they're too one-sided: the rule satisfies one partner's fantasy, but it does little or nothing for the other partner except create work for them.

Let's take a look at just a few examples of kinkyfolk who haven't yet made the leap from fantasy to reality:

### *The I Want A Strict Dominant Who Does Exactly What I Want Submissive*

I have recently discovered that I want a dom woman to boss me around, make me beg to touch her while she teases me, and to bring ass play (rimming me and using toys) into my life to reach new sexual heights. I have not been able to find a woman that is willing to follow through with the commitment or they completely flake out.

I want a dominant man who is a leader and who will make all the decisions in our life together and punish me if I don't measure up.

I need a dominant who will take me in hand and make me do the things I need to do. I want her to

tell me when to go to bed, and check to see if I do my homework and whether or not I keep my doctor's appointments.

### *The I Want Live Porn And a Maid Dominant*

I require all submissives to be naked at all times in the house. They will never wear underwear around me, even if we are out.

My submissive won't have a sexual relationship with me — they will manage my entire house for me. He exists to make my life easier. When I come home I want everything spotless and a hot dinner on the table.

I will be able to drop by her house at any time and any hour for sex, because I'm the Master, that's why. When I'm done, I leave. Whether she likes it or not doesn't matter, because she's property.

Now, will some of these people find exactly what they want? Sure. But many of them won't, and those that do find someone will still have to gain an appreciation of that person's unique character, desires, and skills.

### **A Rule Is A Present Your Dominant Gives You**

If you're a submissive who's eager for your dominant to give you lots and lots of new rules, I want to propose a new way of thinking about rules to you.

*Rules are a gift your dominant gives you.*

Now, you don't get presents every day, right? They're a special occasion thing for most of us. It's also a little rude to demand a present, and demanding a lot of presents in a big pile is something most of us left behind as kids.

Thinking of a rule as a gift is a good practice for dominants, too.

If you give your partner carwash mitts when they were hoping for a romantic present, or give them clothing in the wrong size, you're showing them that you don't really know them, and might not care enough to pay the kind of attention that would have helped you pick out a gift they'd love.

If you give your partner a bowling ball when you're the only one interested in bowling, you're showing them that you care more about what you like than what they like.

If you give a tie to a guy who doesn't like dressing up, now he knows that you're willing to use gifts as a way of expressing your disapproval of his habits.

In short, a good gift is an expression of your love and admiration, and a bad gift is a gesture of disrespect, both for the person you're giving it to and for the relationship you share.

What result do we want when we exchange gifts?

If you're the recipient, you want to feel as though the gift demonstrates that the giver knows you, that

they are willing to put in the effort to find something that they know you will like, and maybe even to go the extra mile to wrap it, even if they're not very good at wrapping packages.

If you're the giver, you want to see that expression of anticipation as they unwrap your gift, and you want to see that expression of delight when they see what it is.

If a dominant gave me a rule that I had to buy and dress in ultrafrilly lingerie, I'd know that he cared more about what turned him on than the fact that shopping for and wearing that stuff makes me really uncomfortable, and that it doesn't make me feel sexy at all. Bad gift!

Does this mean that D-types can only give rules that reflect the desires and turn-ons of the s-type? No. Many s-types are really turned on by the idea of giving the D-type what they want. But I'd encourage those of you who are D-types to pick and choose among your turn-ons carefully.

Which of your turn-ons, made into a rule, serves the core purpose that a rule should serve? Way back at the beginning of this book, I laid out two purposes that every rule you hand down should serve: a rule should 1) bring you closer together and 2) build the kind of dynamic that you both want, and 3) adding it to your relationship enhances the well-being of both partners, or at least doesn't detract from it.

Let's go back to the "wear sexy lingerie" rule. While it would be a bad rule for me — I wouldn't feel closer to my dominant, nor would doing it reflect the kind of dynamic I'd be excited about being a part of, that doesn't mean that's true for everyone. What about an s-type who's thrilled by the idea of being a sex slave? Or an s-type who feels really sexy in those kinds of clothes? We could easily see how applying this rule in the right context could bring you closer to your partner and build the kind of relationship you've always dreamed of.

## Dominants Get To Have Limits Too

We're all familiar with the concept of an s-type having the right to have "limits," — activities they won't engage in and things they won't do. Here's one thing we don't hear often enough:

*Dominants get to have limits too.*

Consent is a two-way street. The consent of a dominant is just as important as the consent of a submissive. If you are an s-type, are you asking if what you're doing together is okay with them — or are you just assuming it's okay because you're the one on the ouchy end of the flogger? Is it "safewords for me but not for thee"?

One of the most common ways in which a dominant's limits are ignored or not respected is when a submissive tries to rush a dominant into types of play or establishing D/s rules that the submissive really wants but the dominant isn't ready for or isn't all that interested in. Sadly, some s-types respond to a dominant who does not want to go as fast as they do by shaming them or minimizing their concerns — "You're not a real dominant. You're not the one getting flogged or having hot wax dripped on you, so what's the problem? You scared?"

Nobody has to engage in a particular kind of play, and they don't have to justify or defend their reasons not to. Just because an s-type wants their bottom to hand down a lot of rules, monitor them every minute, and mete out harsh punishments does not mean that the D-type is obligated to do so. There are many forms of play I don't like and don't do as a top, and many rules I would not give to an s-type, even if they really, really wanted me to. There are other forms of play and types of control that I do now that I did not do before, and some of them took me years to grow into.

Every person, s-type and D-type alike, gets to choose what they want to participate in, and gets to go at their own pace.

## Don't Be A Squeegee Man

Squeegee men used to congregate at busy intersections in New York City in the early 90's. They would walk up to your car while you were stopped at a light, start washing the windshield without asking, and then demand payment. If the driver refused, sometimes the squeegee man would just back off — but other times, they'd hurl abuse at the driver, bang on the car, or hurl the muddy water from their wash bucket.

*If you give someone something they didn't ask for or don't want, and then demand payment — you are being a squeegee man.*

Lots of people try to get around the hassle and risk of asking people for what they want and getting

shot down. Many of us may not even realize that's what we're doing. Sometimes this takes the form of giving people gifts or providing service, and then feeling resentful when the other person doesn't reciprocate in the way that they'd hoped. Some take it even further: they don't just hope for a particular kind of reciprocation, they expect it and use guilt to try to pressure the other person into giving them what they want. Yucky, right? None of us want to be that person.

Just because you "give the gift of submission" doesn't mean that anyone is obligated to give you anything in return, unless you've specifically worked that out. Anything more is pure Squeegee Man Dynamics at work.

If you're pulling a Squeegee, you're also not respecting your top's right to choose to consent or not consent. Retire that squeegee and use the bucket as a planter. Start asking for what you want and listening to — and respecting — the answers you hear.

## Don't Get Hustled By Squeegee Man Tactics

Whether you're an s-type or a D-type, if someone is punishing you for not giving them something sexual or kinky that you're not comfortable with — by giving you the silent treatment, by making it really clear that they are Hurt and Disappointed, by trying to use guilt, by trying to shame you by comparing you to people who do like those things, or implying that it's not a big deal and you're being a big baby — *you're being hustled*.

Here's a few things to say:

"Some of the things you want aren't the things I want. Let's talk about that."

"Trying to use guilt to get me to do something sexual with you is not okay."

"Trying to shame me into doing something sexual with you by saying I'm not a 'strong enough to keep you in line' or a 'real dominant' is not okay."

"Saying I'm 'not really submissive' because I won't engage in your kink of choice is not okay."

"If you thought a nice dinner, or help with a problem (or any other gift or service) was payment for me engaging in this kind of play, I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. If you told me that up front. I would have refused."

"I don't pressure or manipulate you into doing things you're not ready for. I don't want to be pressured that way either."

What not to do:

- *Don't shame back.* "I don't want to do it because it's sick and wrong!" is never the right answer when it comes to consensual sexual activity between adults.
- *Don't let it slide.* Many people who use squeegee-man tactics do so because they're desperately afraid of conflict and rejection. If they felt able to bring up the topic directly they would have done it already. Nip it in the bud by just saying: You want me to do this thing, I don't want to or I'm not ready to, and no amount of gifts or services or hints will change my mind or make me ready faster.

- *Stand your ground.* If you let squeegee man tactics work once, it won't be the last time. Your partner will try it again *because they know it works on you.*

## Recovering from Squeegee Man-itis

Did you participate in all sorts of things that your D-type liked that you weren't too thrilled about in the secret hope that it would provide you with bargaining chips to get what you wanted?

If you have? Well, you're only human. But doesn't that seem like a really inefficient and frustrating way of getting what you want? Do you think there might be a better way? Sure there is, and you can do it. *Get in the habit of asking for what you want.* Remember, if you are an s-type, asking for what you want *is not topping from the bottom.* Not telling your dominant what you want and trying to get it anyway *most certainly is*, because you are not allowing them to decide — or even have any input on the decision at all. Putting your desires on the table and letting your dominant decide is a perfectly legitimate way to be faithful to your dynamic.

If the thought of doing it in person is excruciating, email works too. In fact, this might be the perfect excuse to raid your local stationery supplies store for a fancy pen and some special stationery you'll use exclusively for humbly petitioning your master or mistress.

Fancy stuff might be fun, but it isn't a requirement: I have one such note that was written to me by an s-type and though it's written in ball point pen on a piece of looseleaf notebook paper, I treasure it and have kept it in a special place for years.

Did I feel bossed around to get a note that had such explicit detail about a fantasy? Did I feel pressured to recreate the fantasy exactly the way it was written, or that my s-type was topping from the bottom? No. I was *thrilled* to receive that note. To me, it meant that my s-type trusted and loved me enough to share one of their most cherished and private fantasies with me. It was a fantasy that they'd never dared tell anyone else. I felt so special!

If you sit down to write out a proposal for a new rule and you suddenly feel you have writer's block, one way to get started is to fill out a copy of the Rules Worksheet in the Rules Workshop chapter, or just use the questions there as a guide to what you might say or write.

Once you develop the habit of communicating what you want directly to your D-type and then letting them decide, you'll wonder why you ever placed any stock in the "pour on gifts and services and hope they read my mind" method.

It's not easy to develop a new habit. Sometimes it helps to have a rule of thumb to guide your behavior as you develop new relationship habits. Joshua Tenpenny, who identifies as a slave, wrote this in the book "Real Service," which he authored with his master, Raven Kaldera:

*The first rule of service is this: it's not service unless the master wants it.*

Don't trick yourself into thinking that your D-type wants you to perform particular services simply because you think they're hot. And don't use gifts or services as a substitute for asking for what you want or negotiation.

## What If They're Not Going Fast Enough For Me?

Maybe they're not. Maybe you've given up hope that your s-type will never get to the level you've dreamed of, and maybe you're not willing to wait around to see if your D-type is going to be as strict and focused as you want them to be.

If so? You can leave. Or? You can stay and give that person your love and acceptance the way they are, not the way you wish they were.

What you can't do — or at least, you can't do and hang on to your I'm A Good Partner card — is stay and complain, pressure, denigrate, and express contempt and hostility toward your partner. Make the choice: Go in peace, or stay in love.

## Dominance Is Not A Microwave Dish

If you're an s-type, I'd ask you to consider one thing if you're frustrated that your partner isn't "dominant enough," or isn't developing as a dominant as quickly as you wish they would:

**Dominance is not a microwave dish.**

How long did you spend wrapping your mind around your own sexuality? How long did you spend just thinking about it before you ever said a word to another human being about it? Even if your answer is "Fifteen minutes!", your partner may need more time to explore these issues. It takes time for a D-type to develop into the type of dominant they are to become, and both s-types and D-types get to go at their own pace.

There's something very wrong with the culture of our community when we're willing to offer lots of support to the nervous new submissive, but when a fledgling D-type doesn't drag their partner into the bedroom by the hair and give them a sound beating at the first expression of an s-type's interest, armchair BDSMers practically leap to their keyboards to type "that's because they're not dominant."

I mean, it's not as if the U.S. military does something crazy like training up leaders from raw recruits or anything like that...everybody knows that generals are genetically engineered in a top secret facility buried a mile under Fort Knox, right? The idea that people are born fully-fledged dominants ready to swing a flogger isn't just wrong and foolish, it's a recipe for continuing the imbalance between dominants and submissives, and cheats many potential D-types out of a chance to grow and experience something wonderful with an s-type of their very own.

## Don't Use Rules To Solve Relationship Problems



“He could have safeworded,” said Roger [not his real name]. Roger and his partner Billy had begun exploring BDSM, and Roger had handed down his first rule: No interrupting him when he was talking.

But during a heated argument, Billy interrupted him. Roger reminded her that he had agreed not to interrupt him.

Billy told him to get stuffed.

If you’re adding BDSM to an existing relationship, it can be tempting, especially if you’re the D-type, to try to use your newfound power to remove irritants from your relationship. As a couple, Roger and Billy have had problems from the very beginning about the way they argue. They’re not “fair fighters” — they both come away from arguments regretting things they’ve said.

So, BDSM to the rescue, right? No more bad arguments, mean words, or demeaning interruptions!

Wrong.

It’s a bad idea to try to use any aspect of BDSM to solve longstanding relationship problems. In fact, using rules to address relationship problems often has the effect of exacerbating those very problems.

It’s also a bad idea to undertake any rule that has the goal of limiting communication between the partners, even if it seems like doing so would improve the relationship. Using BDSM to silence one partner will never turn out well.

Especially early in your exploration of BDSM, it’s best to refrain from rules or goals that are overly ambitious. Start with simple, shared goals that you know you can achieve.

## Rules Workshop

Let's start building some rules!

First, let's review the two basic things any rule you decide to implement should do:

1. It should bring you closer together.
2. It should build the kind of dynamic that you both want to have — a relationship that feels hot, sexy, secure — whatever it is that you want to feel in your relationship.
3. It should enhance the well-being of both partners (or at a minimum, not detract from either partner's well-being).

As you build a new rule, there are two questions you have to answer:

*What Do You Want To Do?*  
*And*  
*How Do You Want To Feel About It?*

Very often, when we focus on doing wonderful, awful, kinky things with and to each other, we focus on the action — what it is we want to do. What's harder to get at, but ultimately more important, is how we want to feel about it.

As you start sketching out a few rules together, talk through what you want to do, and how you want to feel about it.

**Proposed rule: On Thursday evenings, you will make and serve me my favorite drink — and you will do so naked. After you place the drink in my hand, you will kneel at my feet as I relax and consume it.**

**S-type - When you imagine doing this, how do you imagine yourself feeling?** I imagine really feeling like I am in service to you, which is something I really want. I feel aroused and a little embarrassed by the fact that I'm naked and you're fully dressed. When I imagine doing this I imagine feeling love and contentment when I sit at your feet, like I would happily be there forever.

**D-type - When you imagine doing this, how do you imagine yourself feeling?** I imagine feeling powerful and sexy at having someone at my command. My days are sometimes very long, and I imagine it feeling very good to have you recognize that and serve me in a way that helps me relax and

replenish my energy. It is exciting, and a little funny, to see you serve me a drink naked — but I would never laugh because I'm interested in this nudity becoming a regular thing! When you sit down by my feet I really feel like I own you. I wish I felt that way more often — I often feel like I have to earn your submission by doing things, often things that take a lot of energy. Realizing that you want to belong to me even if I'm not tying you up and flogging you is really moving, and it makes me feel really close to you.

One good reason to talk about rules this way is that you can avoid implementing rules that have a doing/feeling profile like this one:

**Proposed rule: I want to be locked up in a chastity device indefinitely — I don't want to know when or if you're going to let me out.**

**S-type — When you imagine doing this, how do you imagine yourself feeling?** I imagine feeling embarrassed and turned on and completely at your mercy. I imagine you teasing me and humiliating me a little and imagining that really turns me on.

**D-type — When you imagine doing this, how do you imagine yourself feeling?** I imagine feeling a little resentful, because I actually really enjoy having the full use of your body, including your penis. I don't really like the idea of humiliating you and calling you names, and I don't like teasing; part of the appeal of being a dominant is that when I want something, I just take it.

In order for a rule to serve its two main purposes — bringing you closer together and building the kind of dynamic you want — you both have to want it.

Now, no two people have complete overlap in terms of their kinks and sexual interests. It's tempting to propose rules to each other that reflect our biggest turn-ons. But choose the low-hanging fruit first! Choose the things that you both find easy to agree on, even if they're not your absolute favorite kinks. The last thing you want these conversations to lead to is a showdown about a kink you find really hot and your partner doesn't. Those kinds of conversations can shake your faith in each other and your relationship.

Building rules that work takes more than making sure that your desires and your partner's line up, though. Deciding what to do is necessary — but deciding how you'll do it is also crucial. Once you've settled on a rule you're both excited about, you can use the Rules Worksheet in the next chapter to work out exactly how, when, and where you will live out your rule.

## Building Rules That Work

When you settle on a rule that really works for both of you, it can be pretty exciting. But overlap alone won't make your rule work in practice. You still have to figure out how to implement it, monitor it, and keep it running.

The following rules worksheet will help you how to take that new rule and make it into a practical reality in your daily lives. The worksheet will help you figure out the “moving parts” of your rule — when it applies, how you will communicate to one another that it is being carried out, how you will approach discipline if it is not, and also builds in chances for you to check in and talk about it to make sure it’s working the way you both want it to.

## Rules Worksheet

*You can find a downloadable, printable version of this worksheet at the author's website:  
<http://theblackleatherbelt.com/discipline>*

### **Proposed New Rule:**

### **Trial period for new rule (circle one):**

During one scene

One day

A weekend

A week

One month

For the duration of an event (Name of event)

### **Feedback and discussion of the trial period of the rule will occur:**

Date:

Time:

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

How will the s-type notify the D-type that the new order is being carried out in cases where the D-type is not physically present?

If the D-type is not physically present when I am carrying out this order, I will notify the D-type as follows (circle one):

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

In response to events (example: I will text my D-type if I feel the urge to masturbate)

I will notify them in the following way:

Verbally, face to face, at \_\_\_\_\_ time

Via email

Via text

Via phone

Via an entry in my journal or logbook

Via \_\_\_\_\_

The D-type will consider this rule broken if the s-type does not report it and will discipline the s-type for not reporting it in the exact same way as if the rule was broken or order not carried out.

Yes No

The D-type will carry out a specific, lighter punishment for not reporting that a rule or order is carried out.

Yes No

### **Discipline and Punishment**

If discipline for an infraction of this rule is required, discipline that is not meted out immediately will be meted out at this time:

Day of week \_\_\_\_\_

Time of day \_\_\_\_\_

The s-type is required to present themselves to the D-type for discipline at this day and time if discipline was not carried out immediately.

Yes No

The s-type will present themselves for discipline at the specified date and time by approaching the D-type, reminding the D-type of the specific infraction, and humbly asking the D-type for their discipline.

Yes No

### **Specific type of discipline:**

(See the Discipline Cookbook and the Discipline Yes/No/Maybe checklist for options).

### **Suspension of the rule**

If this rule is broken more than three times in a week, it is suspended until further notice.

Yes No

This rule is suspended if either the s-type or the D-type are ill enough to require medical attention.

Yes No

The s-type is required to report periods of distress so that the D-type has the opportunity to temporarily suspend a rule.

Yes No

This rule is practiced only in private.

Yes No

If either the D-type or the s-type need to suspend this rule temporarily for reasons not listed here, we will communicate that by:

**As the s-type, what emotional impact are you hoping for as a result of this new rule? How do you want to feel?**

**As the D-type, what specific desire of yours does this speak to? How does it give you something concrete, tangible, and practical that improves your life?**

**But That's Complicated!**

Yes, it is.

But the simple fact is that any rule that is more than simple obedience to an order carried out in person has all the components listed on the Rules Worksheet. You can ignore ingredients on a cake recipe, but it generally doesn't improve the flavor of the cake.

Recognizing that rules do have a lot of moving parts is another argument for keeping the number of rules that you employ in your relationship small. A few rules can go a long way toward structuring your relationship and giving you both the feeling that someone is in charge. Large numbers of rules are unnecessary and often pointless: what works is small numbers of well-designed and sturdy rules.

**Rules That Work When You're Sick, Tired, Broke, or Just Plain Fed Up**

People tend to devise rules that are easy to carry out on their best day. Ask yourself: how will following, monitoring, and meting out discipline for this rule look when one or both of you is sick? Or broke? Or tired? Or on a day when something spectacularly bad has happened? Build failsafes into your rule by talking about when it doesn't apply BEFORE those things happen.



## A Foundation for your Discipline Dynamic: Truthful, Forthcoming, and Obedient

Only you know what your first rule should be — but if you have a minute, I have a suggestion.

*The First Rule:*

*I promise to be truthful, forthcoming, and obedient.*

This is a rule that can be in effect for only as long as a scene between you and a new play partner lasts, or it can be a rule that lasts a lifetime. If you are just beginning to branch out into power exchange, this rule has important elements that will keep both of you and your relationship safe.

**Truthful:** You do not need to tell your dominant that the ass-straps on her strap-on harness aren't especially flattering, or tell your slave that that sweater his mom got him for Christmas has been outlawed by the Geneva conventions. Being honest and being kind don't have to be at war with one another. But we do have to be truthful with each other about the important things.

Outside of roleplay, a D-type needs to know that they can ask an s-type a question and get a completely truthful answer. For example, if a D-type is doing a caning scene and notices that the s-type has gotten all quiet all of a sudden, it's not okay for the s-type to say "I'm just fine, Ma'am!" when the real outcome of the D-type carrying on with the caning will be that the s-type bids her goodnight and stops answering her calls.

**Forthcoming:** It's important for an s-type to commit not only to being truthful but to being forthcoming. An s-type should not only answer a D-type's questions truthfully but also volunteer information to the D-type that the D-type needs to know if the D-type doesn't ask.

Being forthcoming is a big problem for some s-types, because they've fallen prey to the *If I Tell Them What I Want It's No Good* fallacy. Many new s-types are all wound around their axle about telling a D-type what they want and need, because for years they've nurtured a fantasy of surrendering completely to a D-type who does whatever they want with them (and the things that the D-type wants to do just happen to be exactly the things the s-type has always wanted to have someone do to them! Isn't that magical! </sarcasm>). S-types who are laboring under this delusion are less forthcoming than their D-types deserve: they don't give the D-type a fair chance at building the dynamic of both their dreamss. Instead of showing up at the negotiation table, the s-type hides under it.

Some s-types are less than forthcoming because it fits notions that they have about the way BDSM works. But others are less than forthcoming because of their temperament. There are s-types across the whole range of human personality types — some are assertive go-getters, while some are retiring

and shy. Some s-types really aren't very comfortable putting themselves forward and saying what they want out loud; they're more comfortable just "going along" with a more assertive partner.

Shy and retiring s-types must not be let off the hook when it comes to being forthcoming. "That's just not how I am" isn't a good enough reason to shift the burden of finding out what's going on to the less-shy partner in a relationship. In fact, this is a prime example of how BDSM can be an opportunity for personal growth. The s-type who isn't particularly assertive can learn to develop an important life skill in a safe and supportive environment.

### **But isn't that topping from the bottom?**

No, it isn't. If you are an s-type, I encourage you to consider thinking about being forthcoming about your likes and dislikes, your desires and fantasies, in a new way. Try this on for size:

*I am voluntarily turning over the contents of my mind to my dominant as their property. I am voluntarily surrendering a degree of mental and emotional privacy to them in service to our mutual pleasure and enjoyment.*

If you think of allowing your dominant access to your thoughts, fantasies, desires, likes and dislikes in this way, you're not topping from the bottom. Your fantasies and likes might be adding new items to the menu, but it's still the dominant that's choosing what to order.

**Obedient:** An s-type who's new to a relationship might feel quite comfortable being truthful and forthcoming, but they might rightly feel very wary of promising to be obedient, even for the duration of a single scene. What if the D-type demands oral sex in a scene that was arranged as a spanking session with no sexual contact?

As you design your dynamic — even if that dynamic lasts for only a single scene, you get to draw a circle around yourself. That circle can be small — you'll only transfer authority over a small number of activities — or it could be quite broad. If it's outside that circle? Don't do it.

### **The Limits of Obedience: Consent and Well-Being**

An s-type who promises to be obedient, whether it's for the duration of a scene or in the context of a long-term relationship, is not required to give up the right to consent or the right to safeword.

There are couples whose dynamic has grown organically over time to the point where the D-type can give a startlingly wide variety of orders and expect obedience from the s-type even if they haven't discussed them in advance and negotiated their way to consent. Yet, while it's unpopular to say so, even in the most committed "no limits" D/s relationships, no human being ever truly loses the right to say no or to leave a relationship.

If an order or new rule given to you transgresses something that's a hard limit, or if the carrying out the order will prove detrimental to your well being, you have the right to say no — and many D-types will thank you for it.

[Mollena Williams](#), BDSM educator and co-author of [Playing Well With Others](#) calls this principle The Prime Directive: “It is the primary duty of the slave to protect the master’s property at all times, up to and including from the master themselves.”

In the end, the limits of an s-type’s obedience is always going to be constrained by their consent and by their own conception of their well-being — and that’s a good thing, not a bad thing. An s-type who knows what their limits and needs are and is ready and willing to say them out loud with actual words is a treasure to a dominant because that s-type keeps the dominant safe. No D-type wants to walk away from an encounter feeling terrible about themselves because they know they’ve harmed someone.

## Up And Running: Getting (and Keeping) Your Rules Working

### Introducing A New Rule

*Today we'll have our first commands — our house rules. My husband doesn't feel that I know what I'm doing when it comes to being a dominant, but I plan on taking control and showing him that I do. Sure, he was the one who brought the idea to mind — but that doesn't mean that I don't want it too. I've got a list of ten to start —*

Whoa there, lass! Slow down!

The situation above is more common than you might think: in this case, the husband in a couple had been holding back talking about his kinky desires. Like many people who held back mentioning their interests to a partner, he then wanted to do everything all at once. His wife, who loves him very much and is excited at the prospect of some new erotic adventures, also feels like she has something to prove — that she can take on this new challenge and be a “real dom.”

I did this, too. I wondered whether my sunny, even-tempered mate really “had it in him” to be a dominant. I cringe when I think about what I believed back then — that only aggressive, pushy, and bossy people could be dominants. The things I believed disqualified him as a dominant — his even temperament, his impeccable manners, and his patience — *are precisely the things that make him a good dominant*. But at the beginning, I didn't believe, and that was an extra hurdle for Bryce to get over, along with learning many new things.

Like many couples in that situation, we went a little nuts in the beginning, adding about a zillion rules that had little to do with each other, were hard to monitor or keep up with, and did little to reinforce our dynamic or bring us closer together. Worse, when the rules failed, our confidence in each other and our ability to build the kind of relationship we wanted often failed with it.

My suggestion? **Only implement one new rule at a time.** Wait until you both feel solid about the place of that rule in your lives before adding any new rules.

### If A Submissive Kneels In The Forest And No One Is There To See It, Is It Still Kinky? Reporting and Monitoring

There are few things more dispiriting to an s-type than thinking that their dominant doesn't care whether they follow the rules or not. Make no mistake: *apart from choosing good rules to implement in the first place, monitoring and reporting are the single most difficult part of creating*

*and maintaining a discipline dynamic.*

If you can't figure out a way to ascertain whether the rules are being followed or not without turning monitoring into a part-time job, you won't be able to make rules and discipline work as part of your dynamic.

This is the reason why I advise against adding too many rules at once is: it's hard to keep track of them all. Before you put a new rule in place, ask yourself: how are you going to monitor this? Some rules have a high "overhead" — monitoring whether or not they are carried out is more trouble than it's worth.

### *Consider Making Rules Self-Reporting*

I've had a lot of success with the technique of making rules "self-reporting." That is, the s-type is responsible for reporting that they've carried out a specific rule (or if they failed to). That way, an s-type is never disappointed by feeling that their D-type doesn't know or care if they didn't do it. In fact, in our household, I do not get credit for doing something unless I report it, whether I did it or not.

If I did not carry out the order, it is my job to inform Bryce and submit myself to his discipline. I have to say that submitting myself for discipline when I haven't carried out an order I agreed to has a big psychological impact on me (and is kind of hot!). I think reporting my own actions, rather than waiting for Bryce to "catch" me doing something wrong, actually makes the orders themselves have a deeper impact, and is also closer to the kind of dynamic I want. Neither one of us really finds the "gotcha" dynamic where a D-type is waiting for the s-type to do something wrong appealing.

### *A Few Different Reporting Methods*

So, exactly how are you going to communicate about whether or not rules are being followed or not, in the case of rules that apply when you two are not physically together?

#### *The Logbook*

An s-type can keep a logbook of their activities, noting what they've done and didn't do, and present it to their D-type on a regular schedule, or when they feel there's something the D-type needs to know between scheduled viewings.

#### *Text messages*

You can arrange to have your s-type text you when they've done something you asked.

#### *Regular reporting sessions*

You can set up a weekly session where the s-type discusses any problems or infractions.

You have two basic options when it comes to the timing of reporting — you can either choose to have the s-type report infractions as they happen, or at a regular, recurring time (each evening; each Saturday). I suggest that you don't mix the two — don't try to combine as-it-happens reporting with scheduled reporting. Pick one reporting strategy and stick with it as you add new rules.

Troubleshooting: What should I do when a rule isn't working?

That depends on why the rule isn't working. If the rule makes either the s-type or the D-type less capable of carrying out the activities of their daily lives, it should be stopped immediately, of course.

If neither of you can seem to remember to carry out the rule or enforce it, drop it: you've inadvertently picked a rule that sounded hot but that neither of you really care about.

Raven Kaldera, in his book [Real Service](#), has a great rule of thumb for rules that he calls "the annoyance factor." He encourages D-types to notice which rules, when not followed, cause the D-type immediate annoyance or inconvenience.

I think this is a wonderful rule of thumb for a couple of reasons. One, rules are a common venue where "topping from the bottom" occurs. A lot of s-types have cherished fantasies about a strict dominant who hands them lots of rules. Unfortunately, this often leads to threads on Fetlife where s-types wonder if their D-type is really "dominant enough" because they don't seem to really care whether the rules are carried out or not.

As hot as it is to contemplate certain rules, I'm sure that most of us would prefer a D-type who's really engaged and *cares* whether or not we carry out a certain rule or not. That can only happen if the rules are actually related to things the D-type wants or cares about. I've found that a lot of my best moments as a D-type come from tapping into the things I really care about; doing that is the only thing that allows me to dominate from a deep, central place in myself. I assure you I'm a lot more convincing when I do.

## They Said Yes, But Nothing Happens...Or, We Did It A Few Times, And Then It Petered Out

I admit it: I've been that Bad Dom. You know, the one who doesn't follow through. The one who makes a rule and...doesn't ever mention it again.

How did that happen?

Well, my s-type, Holly, proposed something to me — she wanted to improve her posture, and she enjoyed the idea of having my...ahem...encouragement.

I said yes without thinking it through — and that was a mistake.

1. **Complexity.** This was a request for assistance in behavior modification. Behavior modification is the most complex and high-stakes thing that a couple can agree to in the context of a rules and discipline dynamic. For one thing, knowing you want to eliminate an old habit or

require a new one doesn't necessarily mean that you know exactly what specific rule to implement to make that a reality. I did not spend enough — or really, any — time translating the desired outcome — better posture — into specific actions Holly could take that would achieve that outcome, or rules about when and how to take those actions.

2. **Timeline.** There was no trial period and no end-date — a perfect recipe for the D/s equivalent of a land-war-in-Asia quagmire.
3. **Monitoring.** There was no effective way for me to monitor Holly. Holly and I do not live together; how was I to know when she was slouching? Neither of us found the idea of installing a webcam appealing, and even if we did, my own life would not have allowed me to spend hours observing her from afar.
4. **Investment.** I had little emotional investment in the outcome of this rule. To be perfectly honest, I would be completely delighted to rest my eyes on Holly while she was standing on her head. This particular form of control did not hold an erotic charge for me, which meant that I wasn't tremendously motivated to overcome the challenges inherent in what initially looked like a really simple rule but really wasn't.

So, did I wake up the next day and think, “You know, I really need to call Holly up and talk to her about putting this on hold until we can figure out whether or not it's do-able”?

*Sigh.* No! I wish I had!

Instead, I began texting her a few times a day with reminders to adjust her posture. Doing that routinely was difficult for me — I have what can very generously be called a full life, and I do a great deal of business travel. So? I made it worse: I used a tool to automate the sending of the text messages.

Needless to say, getting automated text messages from a dominant who doesn't check in is not exactly inspiring leadership.

I let the automated reminders go on for weeks — long after it was apparent that it wasn't working.

Bad dom. *Bad, bad dom!*

What did I learn from this?

The most important thing I learned was that agreeing to a rule that doesn't work for both of us can have a lasting impact on my confidence in myself as a dominant, Holly's confidence in my commitment to her, and both our confidence in our ability to build a lasting dynamic. Did it cause us to break up or cause Holly irreparable harm? No — but it is precisely this kind of emotional erosion that can make a dynamic crumble over time.

I also learned a few other things:

1. **Choose something meaningful to both of us.** It's important to choose a rule that is meaningful to both of us. It's not always easy to be honest about the areas where our erotic imaginations and our goals for ourselves don't overlap. Holly and I don't have identical inner worlds; some

of the things that really rock her world don't do much for me, and vice-versa. While I'm game to go the extra mile for Holly if there's something she really, really wants, I also have to be realistic about whether the extra mile is a mile — or a marathon.

2. **Goals.** Don't get into behavior modification without a clearly defined goal and an endpoint that's measured in weeks, not months or years.
3. **Breaking it down.** Goals must be translated into specific actions before they can be made into rules — and it's not always immediately obvious what the actions should be. That's particularly true in the area of behavior modification. Humans are complex creatures, and modifying their behavior through simple rules and actions is an art form. My attempt to “wing it” fell flat.
4. **Have a trial period.** The worst thing I did here was let it go on for weeks after it was clear it wasn't working. I was sending Holly a clear message that I didn't care enough to pay attention or to make it work. Had I asked for a trial period — “let's do this for a week and see if it works” — all of this would have been avoided.

If you're an s-type, and you're feeling like your dominant isn't paying attention to rules you agreed to implement, ask for a time to talk about your how that rule works in the context of your dynamic.

## Obedience and its Discontents: Should I follow a rule I don't like?

Well, that depends. First off, don't carry out any order that you believe will cause you harm, or puts you in danger. But let's say that your D-type has given you an order that doesn't put you in danger, but that you just plain don't like. Should you still carry it out?

Maybe. If you've been in a relationship with your D-type for awhile, and the two of you have successfully implemented rules before in your relationship, then you've built up your knowledge of each other and your trust in each other. You may find that there are some benefits to carrying out an order that you don't like. It may bring you closer to your partner. It may show you things about yourself that are worth knowing. It will also show your partner that you are willing to make sacrifices for them. Obedience isn't tested by following rules we don't mind following — it's tested by following rules that are ones that are difficult to follow.

In my own experience, the times when I place my D-type's wishes before my own mark a dividing line in our relationship — on one side, it's comfortable and relatively egalitarian. I won't say that what happens on the other side of that line is “more real,” because I loathe the kind of One True Wayism that shuts down so much thought. But it is over that line where I find our dynamic begins to gather a kind of depth and richness I find no where else.

Obedience can be a wonderful arena for personal growth, and if you are an s-type and feel drawn to it, I encourage you to explore it. However, if you do, I cannot encourage you strongly enough to commit to being as transparent as you are obedient: if you struggle, if you start to believe that the path you've chosen together is causing you or your relationship harm, don't sit on it! Say something about it! Personally, I cherish my s-type's well-being and the health of our relationship far more than virtually any rule I could hand down. Sometimes, trusting your D-type to know how far you should



go might be even harder than trusting them with your obedience, but it's been my experience that it's really worth it.

## Excuses, Excuses

The fact is, some s-types will find reasons not to obey a rule that they don't like. But sometimes, s-types don't follow an order because of their priorities — if following an order takes time and energy that they believe they should be spending elsewhere.

If an s-type is not following an order because it's low on their priority list, it offers both of you an opportunity to talk about what those priorities are. Do the things that are higher on the s-type's to-do list really deserve that spot?

One day a few years ago, I gave Holly an order that was to be carried out between our visits. Holly lives in a nearby city that's far enough away that “just dropping by” isn't practical. So it's very common for us to use texts to communicate. Holly didn't actually say no to the order, or say she didn't like it. She just didn't mention it. When I brought it up, she mentioned that she hadn't done what I'd asked.

I was really perplexed by this. Who objects to having an orgasm once a day?

The reason why she chose not to do it, and the exchange we had while we were discussing it was remarkable enough that I wrote a journal entry about it at the time it happened.

Here's how Holly responded — via text message — when I checked in to see if she'd done as I asked:

*I have to do the dishes and go to bed.*

I have to say, when Holly attempted to flout my order to have one orgasm a day by prioritizing the dishes over pleasure, I had to laugh: it's just so HER.

Of course, I wasn't about to put up with any of that shit. I told her to do it. And she did it.

The next day, she wrote me an email confessing that she hadn't done it again, but this time because she had insufficient privacy and she didn't feel well. She felt like a failure.

*See? I'm being forthcoming.*

I sighed and thought, oh, shit, top #FAIL. Now I've made having an orgasm into something she can fail at. That's no good! Okay, let's fix this.

I didn't feel I could encapsulate my response in a text message, so I responded via email. Here's what I said to her:

Good job on the forthcoming bit, by the way; that actually is important. I can't see you when we're not together, and even when we are together I cannot see inside your head. I'm really crap at mindreading so I try to keep it to a minimum in my relationships!

I wanted to expand on this a little here to give you a sense of why I'm asking you to do what I'm asking you to do.

When I watch you, and when I listen to you talk about your life, I get the distinct impression that you think pleasure (including, and perhaps especially, sexual pleasure) is like frosting — you only get it after you've done everything else and been a very good girl, and even then, you feel guilty when you're eating it.

You know what I think? You don't have to do *anything* to deserve pleasure. You deserve it because you are human and because you are alive. Pleasure is the birthright of all living things; there is no living thing that does not deserve some pleasure and happiness.

It would please me to see pleasure stop riding at the back of the bus in your life, only attended to once every other matter, large and small, is dealt with. Perhaps pleasure isn't as important as doing the dishes, or something more crucial like registering for classes, but I am sincere when I say that I think pleasure is at least AS important as those things — it shouldn't be a second-class citizen in your life.

Now, I am not intending to train you into complete hedonism. You're far too dutiful at your core to ever have any real risk of ending up there, and in any case, it's not what I wish for you. There's no danger of the rest of your life running off the rails just because pleasure rises a few points in your estimation.

I do realize that it's also a trust exercise. Doing it means trusting me to rearrange your day a little bit, trusting me to change your priorities a little bit. That doesn't sound like much on the face of it, but I don't think you trust many people — perhaps anyone — enough to believe that if you let them run your life, even in small ways, that they would love you enough and pay good enough attention to make your life better and not worse. You don't trust others' judgment. I am asking you to trust mine so that you can grow into that a little bit and become less isolated and wary. Right now I don't think you can trust that way; and I don't always think you should. But I want you to be able to choose to trust when you wish to and when it is the right time.

Doing it also means risking failure and worrying about “disappointing” me. I take that risk seriously, too: it's no fun to fail, or to worry about disappointing someone.

Now, by saying this:

*That means doing the dishes isn't a good excuse, but physical illness is. I also don't want to interfere in your relationship at home. It's a process, sweetie. One day does not a disappointment make.*

I have handed you a *huge* loophole. You could use this to take back all the control I am asking you to willingly offer me. It would be very easy to let yourself off the hook, and I would never be any the wiser.

It's up to you to decide what you want out of this. If you really do want to retain control — you can! If

you don't, you can choose to submit to me.

I try to make submitting to me worth doing. I don't order you around simply because it's fun for me to order you around (though I confess: it is fun. Really, really, really fun). The things I ask you to do may seem silly, or trivial, or even aggravating at times. But I don't ask you to do things, even small things, frivolously — I ask you to do them because I genuinely believe that doing them has a chance of improving your life, of bringing you greater happiness and security and joy.

Now, did my attempt to persuade Holly to prioritize pleasure actually work? No, not really. It's unlikely that we will be able to change a person's values or core beliefs. Partners do influence each other over time — but a diligent, dutiful person is unlikely to be transformed into a hedonist without a thought for tomorrow (or the dishes) overnight.

Yet I don't regret this experience, because it gave us an opportunity to learn something new about each other and show each other how much we care about each other.

## Complaint Dep't: How And When To Complain About A Rule

### *Can I complain about a rule?*

Yes! Just not once you've undertaken it. Nobody likes an s-type who grouses and grumbles their way through everything. I also think it's a good idea to schedule a regular time to talk as equals so that both of you can discuss whether or not you think an order works for both of you. You shouldn't hide how an order makes you feel — but you should find the right time and place to express that to your D-type.

There is one exception here: there are certainly times when you agree to carry out an order only to find out that it's dangerous or difficult in ways neither one of you anticipated. If so? Say something!

In my own relationship with my D-type, Bryce, I've had rules that I was ambivalent about. At one time, Bryce asked me to keep a "gratitude journal" — a book in which I was supposed to write one thing each day that I felt grateful for.

Sounds simple, right?

Well, not for me. While Bryce generally appreciates my vibrant personality, there are times when my expressiveness is not as welcome — in particular, when I'm angry, it's not as fun. Bryce chose the gratitude journal after hearing that the practice helped people overcome past trauma and manage anger.

However, the exercise made me feel suspicious — was Bryce was doing it for my benefit, or for his own? I had been through difficult things, and it was upsetting to think that what others in my life wanted was for me not to be quiet and not bother them with it. Now, was that Bryce's aim? Probably not. The thing is, no matter how good his intentions might have been, the rule simply didn't fit for us.

At the time, I wrote:

*I'm not sure I want to let go of my anger, if it is even possible to do so, and not some new-age self-help nonexistent bullshit. To me, anger and despair are the high-energy and low-energy states of the same emotion, and I'd rather feel angry than sad. If you take away the anger, all that's left is despair, and I don't want to live there.*

*I also worry that if I wasn't able to/wasn't allowed to be angry, I wouldn't be able to protect myself. Why would I want to lose my ability to protect myself?*

*Would my life actually be better if Bryce could tell me how to feel about it? I don't know. I try to have faith that what he wants is, in fact, what I need, whether I know it or not. But this two are particularly challenging (which may also make them worth doing. I do like a challenge and I get bored without one).*

Ultimately, this particular standing order didn't pass the Three Core Rules test — it certainly didn't make me feel closer to Bryce, and ultimately, I didn't want to be part of a dynamic where I was discouraged from expressing my emotions — whatever those emotions were.

## Retiring A Rule

### *How long is a rule in effect?*

Some rules can be in effect perpetually, or at least as long as your relationship lasts. I do recommend “tryout periods” for new rules. Think about not making a new rule perpetual — agree that you’ll both abide by it and find some way to monitor and report it for four weeks, and then talk about whether it works for you.

I think it’s particularly important to have time limits with rules around behavior modification. Be sure that you are both picking a goal that can be reached. If it’s a big goal, ask yourself: what kind of progress is reasonable to expect in a month, and what kind of order would I need to give to reach that one-month goal?

I tend to shy away from long-term behavior modification projects, simply because I think they’re a little bit like a land war in Asia — they tend to turn into a quagmire. My idea of a good rule is one where Holly and I can reach a goal together in four to six weeks, and then we can do a victory lap, followed by me tying her up and drinking champagne out of her navel.

### *Don’t Let Rules Just Fade Away*

It’s a mistake to just let a rule fade away if it’s not working. If the D-type stops enforcing a rule, or an s-type stops following it and there’s no followup, it’s impossible not to get the messages that the rules are optional, and that neither one of you take them seriously enough to make having them worthwhile. If a rule isn’t working, it should be retired, not just ignored.

# Discipline

# Is Discipline Necessary?

No.

Let me say that again: Discipline is not necessary. It is *optional*. You do not need to have any form of punishment whatsoever in your dynamic, and many couples don't.

John Warren, author of *The Loving Dominant*, says, “ I don't punish. I find it both counterproductive and an indication that something is wrong with the relationship. If a submissive or slave wants to serve me, then no punishment other than a gentle reproof is necessary. If that does not work, then I wonder if she really wants to serve.”

You do not need to have discipline or punishment to have rules. You can have one without the other! It is perfectly okay to have rules and not engage in punishment, or even punishment roleplay.

Now, some folk will scoff at this, and say that rules aren't “real” unless there's a threat of punishment. But your rules are as real as you make them. If you stick to them, if you follow them even when it's difficult, if as a D-type you recognize and appreciate it when your s-type is following them — then they're real.

In fact, I'd say that a rule that's broken often enough to require frequent discipline is a lot less “real” than a rule that is routinely followed and routinely appreciated and requires no discipline whatsoever.

There's another thorny issue to tackle here, though.

## **Discipline doesn't work.**

Yes, you heard me correctly. Punishment. Does. Not. Work. There's nearly half a century of studies of people of all ages and walks of life that show that punishment doesn't change behavior. In fact, it may not even curb the behavior temporarily, and other studies show that punishment may actually increase rule-breaking, not decrease it.

Even if you think that it works for you, it's likely that there's a whole other constellation of factors that make you willing and able to comply with a rule your D-type gives you — and that if those factors disappeared, no sane amount of disciplinary action would generate renewed obedience.

If you want to have a discipline dynamic, you both have to recognize that the reason you have punishment isn't to change the behavior — because it won't. You're doing it because both of you find it hot and sexy, and there's something about the intense attention and focus of the exchange that brings you closer together rather than pushing you apart.

This presents a real challenge to those of you who do opt to have a discipline dynamic. The last thing you want to do is to create a vicious cycle of rulebreaking-punishment-rulebreaking. If you have rules that are broken again and again, you don't have a discipline dynamic: you have a failure

dynamic.

There are two ways to avoid (or get out of) a failure dynamic:

1. Retire the rule that keeps getting broken. In fact, I have several rules that are automatically suspended if they are broken more than three times in a row. If I want to keep the rule, I have to be faithful to it.
2. Add something besides negative consequences that makes it more possible to follow the rule.

What does work?

One thing we know does work is positive reinforcement. There are just as many, if not more studies showing that positive reinforcement DOES work than those that show punishment doesn't.

One of the primary forms of positive reinforcement is simply paying attention. You don't have to hand out treats (though you could!) every time — you can recognize and acknowledge when your s-type is following a rule.

If a rule isn't working, it's your responsibility to help unpack why. Let's say a D-type hands down a rule to an s-type that they have to get to the gym three times a week. Week after week, it just doesn't quite get done.

You could have a big old scolding session and tell the s-type they're not taking the relationship or their commitment or their submission seriously enough, but all that's likely to result from that is an argument.

If the s-type isn't making it to the gym, why? Is it because they can never find their sneakers and give up in frustration? Is the gym too far away? Did they have an unfortunate run-in with a creeper, and it just feels weird to go there now? Do they have body image issues and all the mirrors drive them nuts? Does something hurt? Are they bored with the same gym routine, and it's sapped their motivation?

Unpack a broken rule and figure out WHY it's broken. And give positive reinforcement when it isn't. And if it doesn't work — retire it!

What About Maintenance?

You may have heard the phrase “maintenance spanking.” What is it? Well, some couples choose to have regular discipline sessions that may not be connected to any particular infraction at all. They do it to feel connected, or to reinforce the sense that one partner is in charge.

I'm a fan, personally — I think it's great for couples who enjoy discipline for its own sake. Many kinky folk, me included, just plain enjoy spanking, flogging, caning, and other forms of physical



discipline. I'd hate it if those disappeared from my life except for cases where I'd done something wrong.

## What About Punishment Roleplay?

If you engage with the BDSM community online or in person, you'll find plenty of people who are down on roleplay. Some folks are really hung up on the idea that what they're doing is Really Real.

If you enjoy roleplay — that's great! Do it, and enjoy it. Is it the same as punishment for real infractions, even if those infractions are minor? No. Psychologically, the difference is huge, and if you've done punishment roleplay and are now building a discipline dynamic, you should be prepared for dramatically different reactions from the exact same kind of activities.

Roleplay, in fact, can be an incredibly useful tool for you and your partner to figure out whether or not a specific new activity is going to work for you, without threatening the foundations of your relationship. The great thing about roleplay is that it has a beginning, middle, and end: you can try something out, and if it doesn't work, once the scene is over, you can generally go back to the way your relationship was at the beginning.

### *In Praise of Roleplay*

Ah, roleplay: you are silly, pathetic, the province of delusionaries, creeps and losers, and worst of all, you are inauthentic in precisely the area where authenticity is the single most important quality: the bed.

You might even lead to...*Renaissance Faires*.

For me, you were also the Way to the Real Thing.

Yes, roleplay was the most important tool in my toolbox as I unearthed my sexuality, the sturdy spade of my erotic archeological dig.

Somewhere along the way, I acquired the following idea. I suspect it was a stowaway:

*Everything you do in bed says something REAL and IMPORTANT about who you REALLY ARE.*

In otherwords, *in nookie veritas*.

Well, you can see how this would be a recipe for sexual conservatism — trying anything new could trigger a full-on identity crisis.

Wait. Bondage? Is that who I REALLY AM? Oh, shit, what does that mean? Do I need therapy? Do I need to pack up, leave my marriage, and head off to the bondage commune if I'm going to be true to myself? (Wait, do you know where the bondage commune is?)

The great thing about roleplay (and indeed, pretty much any pre-negotiated scene) is that it allows you to dispense with all those identity questions until you're good and ready for them.

Curious about an authority dynamic but uncertain about whether it would make or break your

relationship? With a scene, you can try it on, safe in the knowledge that you can resume the relationship you already had.

In scenes that I initially thought completely silly I discovered things that were utterly electrifying, things that were clearly core to my sexuality. In roleplay I also discovered what didn't work, for me or my partner.

Like a lethargic kid who perks up at the mention of the playground, this kind of play enlivened me — I'd come to it stressed and tired and leave it smiling and full of all the energy being a serious grown-up had rendered inaccessible.

Did I mention it was fun?

Without play, you might never take the risks and do the exploration to find the things you really love. Remember: your sex life is far too important to take seriously.

Now get out there and play!

## When Rules Are Broken: How To Approach Discipline And Punishment

Punishment is the third rail of D/s relationships. To many of us, it is hot, sexy, and dangerous. The danger that makes it such an alluring fantasy for many of us is not an illusion: punishment is dangerous. Punishment can harm your relationship, reduce the amount of trust between you, and cause psychological damage to s-type and D-type both.

If I had only two words to say about punishment, it would be: BE CAREFUL. A few years ago, I would have told you that I wouldn't have submitted to any punishment — it was too frightening and raw for me, and it would have left me trusting Bryce less. We use it very selectively. A few tips:

*Don't punish in response to anger.* Just don't. There's a line between BDSM and abuse, and punishing in anger is one way that makes it all too easy to cross it.

When I say don't punish in response to anger, I mean don't punish in response to anyone's anger — not the D-type's anger, and not the s-type's anger.

Sometimes an s-type will be so angry at themselves that they want to be punished. Let's imagine that you are a D-type, and your s-type comes to you, furious, guilty, unhappy with themselves and the world — and they ask you for a punishment.

*At that moment, who is in charge? You? Or your s-type's self-loathing?*

Let me tell you: your s-type's self hatred makes a really, really crappy dominant. You wouldn't lend out your s-type to an unhinged jerk with anger management issues, would you? This is no different.

This doesn't mean that you can't dole out a spanking or a beating. Many of us find that such discipline has therapeutic, even calming effects, even when we really don't enjoy them at the time.

My advice: Wait. Giving yourself even half an hour to allow your s-type to cool down a little will also give you time to decide whether or not doling out discipline right now is actually in line with your goals for your s-type and your goals for your life together.

Very early in our journey into BDSM, I asked Bryce to punish me on an occasion where I was deeply ashamed of my own behavior:

### *Little Devil*

For fuck's sake, will you just come in here and beat it out of me already? Please?

I had retreated to our room which was quiet, dim, and cool, and I sat there looking at the text message I'd composed. I didn't hit send. I put the phone down on the bookcase next to my wedding rings and rested my forehead against the wall.

And waited. Waited to be ready to send it.

You know what I hate?

I hate Christmas, my birthday, family vacations, and being given awards. I hate them because I'm supposed to enjoy them, but I don't. And I hate them more because I know that even though I don't enjoy them I know I have to pretend that I do.

I keep trying. I mean, I have kids and they need to have Christmas and memories of going to the circus and I wouldn't dare deprive them of it, or spoil it for them.

Except.

Sometimes I do.

And I hate that the most.

Last weekend I was supposed to be enjoying an enjoyable ferry ride to an enjoyably scenic island with an enjoyably decrepit fort.

All I could think about was: Will you get away from that railing!! No, don't step on that man's bag! Sit down! Will you please sit down!

And then my eldest, all of seven years old, spilled the orange soda.

The bench we were sitting on was metal. The deck was metal. I took the flat of my hand and quickly swiped it across the seat, again and again, forcing the orange soda onto the deck. When I finished, there were still little bubbles of orange soda sitting here and there because, well because my hands aren't made of Brawny paper towels, I guess. I sat there with my hands on my hips scowling at it. I went to sit down and then...

Shit.

I shouted at my seven year old.

Ohhhhh. Oh no. I did NOT just do that! How could I have done that?

Tears welled up in his eyes.

Shit, shit, shit. Shit!

I made a joke about it using a complex and patented blend of bathroom humor whose power over seven year old boys is absolute. I gave him a hug and we wiped up the spilled soda and got a new one.

He forgave me, of course. And he forgot it, of course.

But that did little for me, as I did not forgive myself or forget it. And so I can't say my behavior showed remarkable improvement once we got to the island.

Shame is perhaps my most powerful emotion. It governs me in a way that nothing else can, but it is not a wise ruler. It makes me imperious, hasty, angry.

All afternoon, I could not settle into it, the job of enjoyment. I toted my evil, thorny mood back onto the boat with me, back into the house, back into our room where I waited it out.

Now, I want to say right up front that I don't believe in it.

I'm not even sure I agree with it.

It freaks me out, yanno?

But I woke up the next morning after nine hours of blissful, dreamless sleep and I thought, for Christ's sake, don't tell anyone I said so, but getting worked over until you're a tearful little ball of contrition?

Is some pretty heavy voodoo.

### ***What worked?***

I wrote this piece only a few hours after the events I describe, which took place almost five years ago. Reading the words now still makes me cringe at my own behavior. Parenting is challenging, but being short-tempered with a child is never good. Children should not feel scared of the adults in their lives, and I am very glad that my children aren't afraid of me, even if I have been known to use Bad Grownup Language when I drop a box of fragile Christmas ornaments while we're decorating the tree or when someone cuts me off in traffic while they're in the car.

What I didn't write about is that in the days and weeks that followed Bryce and I pulled back — from each other and from our dynamic — after this event. If the purpose of a rule or a punishment is to bring a D-type and an s-type closer together, and help them build the kind of dynamic they want to have together...then this incident was a complete failure.

Bryce did not want to be the kind of dominant who was ruled by MY anger. I didn't want us to be ruled by my anger, either — in fact, that was the whole problem.

So if that was not only ineffective but destructive, what did we find that did work?

For us, what worked was structure.

It's not a big surprise that structure and discipline work well together. Discipline that's doled out

randomly is ineffective and isn't likely to increase an s-type's respect for or trust in their dominant partner.

Over time, Bryce and I had long discussions about what we wanted our family life and the rest of our lives together to be like. Any punishment is not random; it only happens at a specific time, and then only if he decides to give it.

The beauty of this is that the discipline became forward-looking. Instead of looking back at bad behavior and facing the punishment for it, we could both look forward and understand the consequences of our behavior. Guess what? It worked.

## The Psychological Dimensions of Discipline: How We Feel About Rules & Punishment

Just as we did when we designed our rules, when we design the discipline we want to practice together, and the punishments we are ready to give and accept, we face the same questions:

What do we want to do...and how do we want to feel about it?

As s-types, we might have a variety of different feelings as we agree to follow a rule — and we might not always feel how we expected to feel.

Following rules may make us feel

- A steely sense of detachment and reserve.
- Safe and cared for.
- Aggravation as we struggle with a rule that's difficult to follow or that we don't understand or like
- Like we have a secret — something between us and our D-type that the rest of the world doesn't know about.
- Resentment, if we feel a rule is capricious, doesn't take into account our unique value or difficulties, or if we feel that we're being put to difficulty and our D-type doesn't really care
- Relaxation and clarity that come from reducing the often bewildering number of choices modern life offers us.
- Awareness that having the participation of our D-types in tackling challenging tasks makes them noticeably easier.

The mental and emotional aspects of punishment may be different, too:

- Shame at one's own behavior
- Embarrassment at being treated like a child or a subordinate
- Outrage or anger if you feel that the punishment is undeserved (or simply if the experience triggers unexpected emotions)
- Anxious as we anticipate confessing a transgression or anticipating punishment
- Sad
- Relieved

- Bored
- Cared for/secure
- Aroused or turned on
- Contempt for self/self hatred
- Hate or disrespect for partner or partner's authority

Now, it's pretty obvious that some of these are emotional states that are desirable — and some of them are not only undesirable but unhealthy. Rules and discipline don't have to make everyone feel happy 100% of the time. But when you implement a new rule, you still have to keep the questions of whether or not it brings you and your partner closer and helps you build the dynamic you want front and center. Some rules that seemed great when you were busily filling out the Rules Worksheet just plain feel different than you expected when you actually start doing them.

It's impossible to predict with 100% certainty how we're going to feel as we begin to bring rules and discipline into our lives and our relationships, even if the rules and discipline are things we've thought about and fantasized about for many years. If the emotions that a new rule or a type of discipline bring up are unhealthy for you as an individual or if they are unhealthy for your relationship, don't try to "tough it out." It's okay to ditch a rule that doesn't work in practice.

Of course, the s-type isn't the only one in the discipline dynamic; the D-type is an essential part of it too. Not enough is said, in my opinion, of the psychological dimensions of discipline from the D-type's point of view. But let's consider a few emotional responses a D-type might have to instituting a rule and having it carried out by their s-type:

- Pride — feeling proud of how capable and splendid their s-type is. Proud of having built up their bond to the point where the s-type is willing to serve or obey an order they give.
- Nervous — feeling nervous that a rule might backfire and reduce the s-type's respect or affection for them.
- Worried — Worried that their interest in instituting rules is weird or unhealthy; worried that rules may become a "slippery slope" leading to a situation where they are responsible for more of the s-type's life and behavior than they want to have or feel is good for the s-type
- Relieved or relaxed — having an s-type carry out an order or perform a service might actually be an act of self-care on the part of a D-type who is stressed or tired.
- Aggravated or resentful — especially if the d-type feels they are being pushed into establishing and enforcing rules they don't want or aren't ready for.
- Bored — if a D-type agrees to establish and enforce a rule they're not particularly interested in, doesn't have a direct benefit for them, or is something that they want but might simply be tedious to administrate.
- Loved — A D-type might experience an s-type's willingness to be obedient as love and affection.

- Aroused/turned on — even if the rule isn't explicitly sexual, a D-type might be turned on by the idea of control.

For the D-type, punishment is always much more than a passive activity. Whether or not to engage in punishment at all can be a high-stakes judgment call for a D-type. The intensity of the interactions in a discipline dynamic can bring up similarly intense emotions:

- Mixed emotions about meting out discipline, in particular corporal punishment. Many of us learned growing that hitting an intimate partner was a very bad thing — and without consent, that's absolutely true. Even in cases where a couple agrees to engage in a discipline dynamic, checking in and making sure that it is still okay with both partners to engage in activities that produce intense, even painful sensations is something that they both want.
- Stress — Whenever an s-type breaks a rule, a D-type is on the spot: if the D-type opts not to punish, the s-type may feel resentful — that the discipline dynamic is “fake” or that the D-type is not truly committed to it. On the other hand, if the D-type does mete out discipline, there's always the chance that the s-type will react negatively, even if it's something that they previously agreed to. Many D-types avoid or opt out of discipline dynamics because they fear or have experience that being in one puts them in a no-win situation.
- Feelings of power and authority — very few things bring home the feeling of really being in charge like having an s-type drape themselves submissively over your lap for a spanking.
- Aroused/turned on — many kinksters have plenty of experience mixing sensation play — things like flogging, caning, and spanking — with sexy roleplay and with sex. Extending those activities to cover real-world transgressions instead of made up ones may not reduce or eliminate the erotic charge the D-type and the s-type associate with them.

## Sidebar: Childhood Abuse, PTSD and BDSM

If you hang around online forums or real-world events for BDSM practitioners, sooner or later you will hear someone opine that adults who were the victims of childhood abuse shouldn't engage in BDSM or aren't able to do it safely. You hear similar opinions about the victims of other traumatic events such as sexual assault or people who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Groups of people who have been marginalized and victimized are often the target of people who want to help them, protect them, and speak for them. In activist communities that spring from groups of marginalized and victimized people, there's a saying that's become a rule of thumb: *nothing about us without us*. The experts on whether or not someone is capable of engaging in a particular form of BDSM in a way that is fun, hot, and enhances connection and well-being are not bystanders with opinions: it's the individuals themselves.

When you exclude the victims of childhood abuse, sexual assault, and PTSD from groups without talking to them or getting their perspective, or buy into stereotypes about their ability to form relationships, be a good parent, or be solid citizens, you may not realize it, but you're collaborating with the people who victimized them and perpetuating the impact of that abuse.



Many D-types simply want to avoid harming someone who has been the victim of abuse, assault, or suffers PTSD as a result of trauma. That's great! But the way to do that is not to discard or sideline people who had bad things happen to them through no fault of their own. The way to have hot, happy, safe play with a survivor is to talk, ask questions — and listen. They and no one else are the experts on their experience.

## Manner of Discipline

The manner of discipline is just as important as the discipline itself. Having a D-type spontaneously haul you over his lap, yank down your panties, and spank you right after an infraction might sound really hot...but for others, spontaneous punishment might feel scary, aggravating, or cause resentment. A D-type might like it, or might feel aggravated by it.

Another common way to do it is to have a regular time when discipline is meted out. Some couples have a set weekly time where any infractions in the previous week are discussed and any necessary discipline happens.

Again, for some people, that might sound hot and might serve a real purpose — bringing both halves of the couple together to focus on their dynamic. But some s-types might be sent into a paroxysm of anxiety as they await the Hour Of Punishment and not be able to focus on their daily lives.

Here are a few different ways that discipline can be delivered. Which one works for you?

- Spontaneous punishment. The s-type may be punished at any time. If the D-type observes an infraction, the D-type might punish the s-type right on the spot.
- Punishment by advance arrangement. You don't have a regular time for punishment, but an infraction has happened, and the D-type says, "We're going to have a little talk. Be in the bedroom at 8PM."
- Regularly scheduled discipline. The D-type chooses a regular time to discuss any infractions since the last discipline session and mete out any required discipline.

There are two other aspects of the manner of discipline that are worth talking about — punishment with a side of sex, and public punishment.

## **Punishment With A Side Of Sex**

Let's face it: a lot of us find discipline hot and sexy. I do! But you do need to talk about and agree upon what you think the right relationship is between punishment and sex. One s-type might find the idea of sexual contact during or immediately after punishment a huge turnoff. Some are okay with punishment roleplay being mixed with sex, but when it's discipline for a real-life infraction rather than an imaginary one, it feels different and it doesn't feel okay anymore. Other s-types may love it.

The D-type's input is vital here too: punishment isn't foreplay for everybody. If punishment doesn't put the D-type in a sexy mood, their wishes and desires around that ought to be respected.

But wait! That's mixing pleasure with punishment! How could that possibly be right?!

It's right because it's right for the two of you. Let's remember: punishment doesn't actually work to curb behavior — what's going to work is choosing the right rules, acknowledgement and attention, and positive reinforcement. If that's the case, and you want to sex up your discipline session — go for it!

## **Public Punishment**

So you've got your rules up and running and you both agree that the D-type can punish anytime they want in any way they want. Okay, how about in the mall food court?

No? I didn't think so.

For one thing, it is most certainly Not Okay to involve others in your scene without their permission — and that includes the right of members of the public to not witness your scene. If you punish in public, it had better be so diabolically discreet that nobody but you could ever tell that anything at all was happening.

There are some public environments where punishment would be okay — as, for example, at a play party or dungeon. But just because it's okay to punish in that environment doesn't mean that it's okay for the two of you. Punishment might just feel too intimate and personal to share, and that's okay.

## **Discipline Pro Tips: Funishment, Sassy Subs, and The Element of Surprise**

*Don't punish an s-type who's much more effective at punishing themselves than you would be.*

Holly falls into this category. While she and I have rules, we don't use punishment at all. She already feels so bad when she feels she hasn't performed up to her own standards that there's nothing that I could or would do to make her feel any worse.

*Funishment might actually work.* I have a complicated mix of emotions about submitting myself to Bryce's discipline, but I'd be lying if I told you one of those emotions wasn't "this is actually kind of fun and hot," especially when the infraction is minor and doesn't hurt anyone, like, say, forgetting to take my daily multivitamin (yes, really. What can I say? The guy wants me to live forever, and who am I to object? He is, after all, the boss around here). However, I do find that the discipline still actually works as discipline: it does help me refocus myself on what I need to do.

*Funishment won't work if an s-type is deliberately disobeying.* Some s-types will sass or deliberately disobey to see if the D-type is paying attention, or because they think it's a good way to get play out of the D-type. It most certainly falls under the category of topping from the bottom, and if the D-type isn't into sass, they should feel free to tell the s-type to knock it off. If it persists, one good

option is punishments that are really, really boring.

*Surprise punishment is likely to be a really bad idea.* Unless, that is, you want your s-type to see you as the kind of person who flies off the handle.

Adding rules and discipline to your relationship can enhance your dynamic and bring you closer together. Enjoy the process, and enjoy each other!

## Protocols for Punishment: Safety, Check-Ins, and Disaster Recovery

My s-type and I have rules that she obeys and I monitor — but we do not have a discipline dynamic.

While I do have a discipline dynamic with my D-type, Bryce, I don't use punishment with my s-type, Holly, and there's a reason why: on the two occasions where we wandered into that space, it was a disaster. It didn't bring us closer together, or build the kind of dynamic or relationship she wanted. Holly was really emotionally upset by it in a way that did nothing to enhance our relationship or build our bond.

I remember how we found out that punishment wasn't going to work for us. I'd been teasing Holly all through dinner about a minor infraction, playfully threatening her with a spanking. After dinner, when we were alone, I ordered her to bend over the bed for her spanking.

Now, spanking, and impact play generally with toys like floggers and straps is something Holly and I both really, really enjoy. But when I flipped Holly over, her face was red and wet with tears. Spanking her for something real — as opposed to spanking just because it feels good or as part of a roleplay with imaginary naughty behavior — was not fun and not productive for Holly. It was destructive, to her and to us.

If you're a D-type, it can be difficult to know what to do in the moment when things go wrong.

When I flipped Holly over, I was confused, and shocked. We'd done spanking play so many times before, and it had always been fun. What was wrong? What had I done? Seeing her face, I felt terrible, like I'd slapped a puppy. My attempts at discipline had clearly been completely inappropriate and over the top.

What you do at that moment can be critical to your relationship. As a D-type, what you do at that moment can determine whether your relationship is irreparably broken. Screw up, and you may live with the regret for the rest of your life.

- First, stop everything you're doing, immediately.
- Do anything you can to reduce the intensity of the environment. If it's dark, turn up the lights. If it's blindingly bright, turn them down.

- Don't yell.
- Get down at their eye level. Talk softly.
- Act like the s-type is hurt, because they are. Ask the same questions you'd ask a cyclist who just took a fall off their bike, including questions like, "Is it okay if I touch you? Do you want a blanket?"
- Leave your own questions for later. Don't try to interrogate them on what you did right now.
- Don't be defensive or try to be "right."
- Stay with them for as long as they need you, but be prepared to give them space. If they ask you to leave, try to call a friend to be with them (by the way, an aftercare buddy for each of you is an excellent thing to set up in advance).

Check in after a rough scene or if a disciplinary session goes wrong, the day after and several days after.

Jay Wiseman, author of [SM 101](#), suggests an excellent guideline he calls The 72 Hour Rule:

*I think it can be reasonably said that one of the major things we want from our play is a good outcome. After mulling it over a bit, I came up with the idea of the "minimally acceptable outcome" -- the outcome that is our bottom line, our floor. If our outcome is not at least this good, then we're not going to "sign off" on the playdate.*

*I decided that a good minimally acceptable outcome was this: 72 hours after the playdate is over, everybody "with an interest" in the playdate feels basically OK about it. People with an "interest" in the playdate would include the players themselves, the people who have significant relationships with the players such as their spouses, the owner of the playspace where the play took place (if applicable), and so forth.*

*I picked 72 hours because it's not uncommon for someone to feel a bit (or more than a bit) physically and/or emotionally ragged the day after a playdate, but by the third day things have settled down for them to an acceptable degree.*

### ***What about aftercare for D-types?***

One of the things I often want after an intense scene, even one that goes well, is reassurance that my partner doesn't hate me or think I'm a monster. That's especially true after a scene that does go wrong. However, it's important to get the s-type's needs seen to first before asking for that kind of reassurance.

That kind of interaction with my partner can transcend aftercare: I suspect one of the most emotionally satisfying things for me about topping is the fact that my partner loves me even when I'm doing some fairly extreme things to them. Even though I have their explicit, words-out-loud enthusiastic consent for doing wonderful, evil, awful things to them, I find that I still want reassurance afterward that they really meant it and that they still like me and trust me.

It's possible to recover from a scene that goes wrong if both partners want to work on it, and if you're in a BDSM relationship, you probably will have a scene go wrong, a rule go awry, or a discipline session go haywire at one point or another. You can come back from it stronger than ever, and if you do, you'll absolutely learn a lot from those experiences.

I learned something very important about my partner Holly from one such failed encounter. A few weeks after it happened, I wrote about it and what I'd learned from it:

### **Known Unknowns, and Unknown Unknowns: When S&M Scenes Go Wrong**

*I've often thought that BDSMers should talk more about our "failed encounters". Sometimes the best way to learn is through "failure", or by looking at others' "failures". But when a BDSM scene "goes wrong", it's often highly personal for everyone concerned. So it's really hard to talk about and really hard to write about — both for the dominant and submissive partners. This is just like any relationship, really. After all, people rarely talk about their most embarrassing or awkward or otherwise difficult "mistakes made" during vanilla sex, right?*

Clarisse Thorn, "[Theory of an S&M Encounter Gone Wrong](#)."

I get a lot out of reading Ms. Thorn's thoughtful blog on BDSM and sexuality, and I was persuaded by this post to talk about one of my own "BDSM encounters gone wrong."

The most memorable one involved a role-play scene with Holly. As a top, I spend a lot of time devising and enacting "scenes." Like battle plans, which rarely survive contact with the enemy, my plans for scenes shift in reaction to Holly, and sometimes they're thrown out entirely in response to the unique moment between us. Despite that fact, I almost always have some idea going in about what I want to do, and where I want to bring her, psychologically speaking. Is it a rough, dark scene? A gentle, nurturing one? Is it about service? Or dominance?

This was a scene I'd spent a lot of time preparing for. Holly has a pronounced naughty-schoolgirl streak, so I thought I'd bring a little Stern Headmistress to the party for a discipline-roleplay scene.

I got to the hotel early and set up my equipment — a cane and a strap and some cuffs. I even rearranged the furniture. Helpfully, the room had both a desk and a formal chair for me to sit behind, along with a simple straight-backed chair I could put across the desk from me. However, when I sat down in the formal chair, I realized that compared to the surface of the desk, the seat was really low, making me look like a pipsqueak dwarfed by my desk. I added cushions from the couch to make me look a little more authoritative, and got into my Stern Headmistress gear.

I picked Holly up at her apartment and I was very pleased by her attire — I hadn't told her about the scene, but her outfit — a short tweed skirt and sweater — were pitch-perfect for what I'd planned.

When we arrived at the suite, I asked her to go into the bedroom for a minute so that I could make last minute preparations. I moved a few items, and then sat down at my "Headmistress's Desk."

"Ms. Holly, you may enter."

Holly came in and sat down in the straightback chair. I went into my Stern Headmistress patter, but I barely got out a sentence before I noticed that Holly's eyes were full of tears.

I stopped and came around the desk. Before I could say anything, she blurted, “I’ll never be enough for you!”

Ms. Thorn points out “Much of the problem, I think, is that people have such a hard time communicating *after* serious miscommunications and mistakes.”

What I remember? I remember it being really hard to “switch gears” out of scene space and into aftercare. I felt really confused — I genuinely had no idea what was so upsetting to Holly about this scene. Had she had bad experiences with teachers? Was the idea of being disciplined for an infraction — as opposed to just being bent over and roughly spanked — too sensitive?

I had her sit on the couch next to me. I didn’t really understand what she was saying for awhile, but when she calmed down a little, she said, “You want all these things. I’ll never be able to be all those things.”

We were able to recover from it enough to go to dinner, and later that night we did have sex. I had difficulty feeling really connected to the event; I didn’t have an orgasm or initiate any activity that would have led to one. I wanted reassurance I didn’t feel ready to ask for — I wanted to know that she still liked me, that she didn’t think I was an unfeeling jerk. When I got it, I didn’t believe it. It took awhile — a few weeks — for me to feel really confident topping her again.

I learned a number of important and really revealing things from this scene-gone-wrong. One, I believed that Holly liked roleplay. She liked Daddy/girl play, right? What I figured out was really fascinating: to Holly, that’s not a role. It’s a part of who she is that she carries around all the time, not something she puts on for a scene and takes off at the end of it. In fact, she really hates roleplay; she doesn’t want to have sex as anyone but herself, including aspects of herself that don’t get out to play very often.

One of the things the scene taught me was how deep and enduring Holly’s inner “girl” was. It wasn’t a role; it was *her*.

Secondly, other things she said made me realize that she believed that if I couldn’t get all my needs met as a top with her, I’d find someone else. As a result, she was pressuring herself to go along with scenes she didn’t want because she thought that was the price of being in a relationship with me.

That was a really heartbreaking thought, because it was completely untrue. I do believe that sexual compatibility plays an important role in the sustainability of a relationship, I don’t need a partner to go along with every little scene I come up with. In fact, I really loathe the idea of a partner “going along” with sex they don’t enjoy to please me. It’s really important to me that my partner want me back. My sexuality and Holly’s sexuality *do* overlap over areas that are really important to me — all the other stuff was just extras.

In fact, many of the scenes I’d done I thought up because I believed *she* would like them, not because I was really driven by some longstanding sexual fantasy around this or that scene. So our misunderstanding had a big element of “Gift of the Magi” to it — we were both sacrificing for something neither of us wanted because we loved each other. I was thinking up scenes that I erroneously believed she wanted, and she was going along with scenes she didn’t want because she believed I wanted them enough for them to be a dealbreaker.

This scene did change how I approach scenes. First, I don't "surprise" Holly with scenes. (Well, okay, sometimes I say "There's going to be a surprise!" but that's a form of warning, and I also give major hints). And I check in early in the day before a scene, asking about Holly's energy level and emotional temperature. I won't do an intense sensation play scene if she's had a tough week, or do a scene that requires a big outpouring of energy from her if she's beat.

I've also had scenes in which I was bottoming go wrong. I remember one early scene that Bryce and I did after we started exploring kinky sex. I was tied to a chair, and he slapped me across the face. I hollered, and not in that "Oh, god, more!" kind of way. Instant, red light scene over meltdown. I'm sure Bryce was stunned, since we'd certainly done far more intense impact play than a little slap across the face. But to me, the emotional impact of being slapped across the face was far greater than even a very rough spanking. In fact, "Don't slap me across the face" was so obvious — TO ME — that we hadn't even discussed it in our go/no go discussions. It had never even crossed my mind to tell him not to do that.

Donald Rumsfeld once said:

*There are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – there are things we do not know we don't know.*

Both these scenes gone wrong involved "unknown unknowns." There was something important that I didn't even know I didn't know. I didn't know that Holly's interest in Daddy/girl dynamics didn't translate to a more general interest in roleplay. Bryce didn't know that a light face slap was completely off limits.

So what's the lesson here? Well, for me it's certainly not responding with a shrug and saying, "Well, how could I have known?" I think it's important to talk through the known unknowns with a partner — but I also think it's vital to stay committed to reducing the area of unknown unknowns — to shine a light on areas that are darkened by our assumptions and misunderstandings of each others' spirit and sexuality.

# Rules Cookbook: Rules For Your Relationship

## Protocols and Rituals

### ***Collaring***

Collaring holds a lot of meaning to many people who engage in BDSM. While some collaring rituals denote a commitment that the participants hope is permanent, like a wedding or handfasting ritual, many people use the act of collaring as a way to mark the dividing line between ordinary time and the extraordinary time they spend together within their dynamic.

#### *Recipe variation: Kneeling*

Have the s-type kneel and present the collar to their D-type, and incline their head to allow the D-type to put it on.

### ***Greeting Ritual***

Greeting rituals can be a great way to reconnect and shed the stresses of the day to focus on each other.

#### *Recipe variation: Private greeting*

If you and your partner don't live alone, find a private place to carry out your greeting ritual. It can be as simple as focusing on each other to say hello, or the ritual can take on a more D/s flavor if you choose to use it to reinforce your dynamic; one way to do this is to have the s-type kneeling or simply with bowed head.

#### *Recipe variation: Waiting For You*

If you and your partner have privacy, what could be more fun than being greeted by a naked, kneeling s-type who's waiting for you when you arrive?

### ***Presenting For Inspection***

Rituals can be a powerful way to shift into "scene headspace" and can act as a part of foreplay. One common way to do this is to have the s-type "present for inspection" before a scene.



### *Recipe variation: Naked Except The Collar*

Having an s-type naked, particularly when the D-type is clothed can help both partners get into the “headspace” associated with their roles. And what more dramatic demonstration can there be that a D-type considers an s-type’s body a precious possession than an all-over inspection?

### ***Coffee Service***

Do you know how your D-type takes their coffee?

Are you sure? Do you know the precise shade of brown it is when you add exactly the right amount of cream? Can you adjust the amount of sugar based on how dark the roast is? What’s their favorite mug? Is it clean? Well, is it?!

### *Recipe Variation: Bring Everything*

Some D-types simply prefer to do things themselves. But an s-type can still be involved, by bringing the coffee, the sugar, and the cream so that the D-type can make their cup exactly the way they like it.

### ***Valet Service***

Downton Abbey fan? Me too! By asking your s-type to act as your valet, you can get a quicker start on your day by beginning with fresh, crisp clothes already laid out. You may also enjoy the intimacy of being dressed by your partner — something that might give you good reason to work efficiently and hurry back home to get those clothes off again.

### ***Powers of Speech***

Speech is a powerful tool to create and reinforce roles, and many people in D/s relationships use it for that purpose.

### *Recipe variation: Titles, Please*

If you’ve settled on an honorific you want to use — Sir, Ma’am, or gender-neutral terms like Boss or Master, have your s-type get used to using it. You may want to come up with a variation for public use that won’t raise eyebrows among vanilla folk.

### *Recipe variation: Silence Really Is Golden*

Are you a wordy sort? Me too! But having a period of silence, where one or both partners don’t speak, can be a way to focus both of you on nonverbal forms of communication.

# Standing Orders

## **Orgasm Control**

Many couples dabble in the area of orgasm control — it can be fun and hot for both halves of a couple for one of them to turn over control of an important aspect of their sexuality for a few hours or for longer.

*Recipe variation: More Please*

Not all orgasm control is about having fewer orgasms — some D-types choose to “tune up” an s-type’s libido by actually requiring regular orgasms. Choose a particular number of orgasms for the s-type to have over a period of days and have them report in on their...ahem...progress.

*Recipe variation: Orgasm Monitor*

One form of orgasm control isn’t about having more or less, but simply acknowledging that those orgasms belong to the D-type. “I don’t prohibit your orgasms — but I could, which is why you text me to thank me after each one.”

*Recipe variation: Not Without My Permission/Not Without Me*

With this variation, an s-type may not have an orgasm without permission, or may not have an orgasm outside of the D-type’s presence. If you haven’t tried this one before, be sure to take a look at the Rules Worksheet in the Rules Workshop chapter to figure out whether you need a trial period or other fail-safes for this one.

There are, of course, forms of orgasm control that involve long-term chastity and “tease and denial” play. That’s a little beyond the scope of our book. Just be aware that preventing orgasm over any period that’s more than a few days will affect different people in different ways: for many people, libido is a “use it or lose it” system, so eliminating orgasm and masturbation may cause some folks’ libido to decline.

## **Keeping A Journal**

Some s-types struggle with being forthcoming about what they want or how they really feel about the state of their D/s dynamic with their partner. One great way to short-circuit a pattern of holding back is to have an s-type keep a journal and put it somewhere where the D-type can read and review it at their leisure.

## **Domestic Servitude**

The power of a clean environment, a made bed, and a well-run household to improve our mood and well-being can never be underestimated. While many couples have a dynamic where it’s okay for the

D-type to issue a one-time command like “wash the dishes,” some couples opt to expand these into regular routines. S-types that enjoy connecting with a D-type through service may find these kinds of standing orders particularly satisfying. The kind of standing orders that a D-type could select in the area of domestic servitude are nearly endless; we present only a few examples here.

*Recipe Variation: Happiness is a Made Bed*

This recipe variation can work for partners who live together and those who don't. For those who do, an s-type might commit to making the bed each day and changing the sheets weekly. For those that don't, an s-type could show their devotion and respect for their D-type by snapping a picture of their freshly made bed with their cameraphone and texting it to their D-type.

*Recipe Variation: Care And Feeding of Electronic Pets*

We have more devices than ever these days. Phones, laptops, and tablets are expensive...and hard to use when the battery is dead. S-type to the rescue! Have your s-type be sure your phone and other devices are on their chargers each night before bed.

*Recipe variation: Wait, That's Not Part of the Keyboard*

Ever look down at your keyboard and think...ugh! Have your s-type wipe down your keyboard with a paper towel that's been very lightly dampened with glass cleaner on a weekly basis, and double up by having them clean the screen. If they're really good? Get them a can of compressed air as a treat.

*Recipe variation: Back It Up*

Have your s-type research methods and tools for backing up important information on your devices and present you with a plan for regular backups.

## **Personal Assistant**

“I mean, he wanted me to pick up his dry cleaning and buy a gift for his mom. Can you believe that?” Well...some of us want to believe it! For some s-types, nothing makes us more cheerful than running an errand for our D-type. Sitting in the Registry of Motor Vehicles to renew our own license might be a drag, but filling out forms to get a fresh set of vanity plates for a D-type feels completely different to those of us who truly enjoy being of service even when that service isn't sexual in nature. There are a million different ways an s-type can make a D-type easier; we present only a few options here.

*Recipe Variation: Calendar Service*

Have your s-type set up and maintain your social calendar. Add the birthdays of important people, holidays, and other important dates (reminders to have a car service, teeth cleaned, etc). If you both feel comfortable and it's appropriate, this is a service that might extend to your work.

### *Recipe Variation: Errand boy/girl*

Have your s-type run routine errands — pick up prescriptions, fetch a Sunday paper on actual paper as a treat, or any other recurring errand that you select.

### *Recipe Variation: Research Assistant*

Do you need to find someone new to fix your bike or cut your hair? Need to find out which forms need to be filled out for a particular task? Put your s-type to work gathering information on your behalf!

## **Care & Maintenance of The S-type**

Not all standing orders benefit the D-type directly; many D-types create standing orders that are intended to keep the s-type in proper working condition for their mutual pleasure and enjoyment.

### *Recipe variation: Sleep Schedule*

An overtired s-type isn't in the proper condition to provide service to their D-type. If burning the midnight oil has become a bad habit for an S-type, a D-type can establish a sleep schedule, either by requiring a particular bedtime or specifying a certain number of hours of sleep per night.

### *Recipe variation: To-Do List*

Many D-types who gravitate toward standing orders do so because they have a natural talent for organization. A D-type can bestow some of that wisdom on an s-type by requiring the s-type to do things that will help them shape up their life. A simple but powerful example is requiring an s-type to create and update a daily to-do list.

## **Behavior Modification**

### **Stress Reduction**

A stressed-out s-type may come to a relationship with few skills in the area of self-soothing and stress reduction. Both s-type and D-type are well served when an s-type reaches a minimum standard of proficiency in chilling the fuck out.

Begin by reading a short description of the relaxation response, a relaxation technique that is an evidence-backed, scientifically valid method for learning the basics of physiological and psychological relaxation. Developed by physician Herbert Benson and Miriam Klipper, the relaxation response technique is simple to learn and can be practiced nearly anywhere.

Start by reading a summary of the steps here:

[http://www.massgeneral.org/bhi/basics/eliciting\\_rr.aspx](http://www.massgeneral.org/bhi/basics/eliciting_rr.aspx)

Require daily repetition for two weeks, and then check in to discuss the results.

*Recipe variation: Do it together*

It's hard to find a relationship that wouldn't benefit from a few quiet moments spent together. You can spend five minutes together engaging in a relaxation technique in person, or via Skype.

*Recipe variation: Text confirmation*

Let your s-type know you care whether they carry out their daily relaxation exercise practice or not by requiring them to send you a text that they've completed it each day.

## **Physical Fitness**

If an s-type would like to begin to engage in a regular fitness routine, a D-type can play a role in encouraging healthy behavior. Stay away from weight loss goals and focus on developing habits that allow a person to be as healthy as they can be at any size or level of ability.

Begin by having your s-type visit their doctor to discuss safe limits for any exercise plan. Then, have your s-type research various fitness approaches and plans that are appropriate for their current level of ability.

Your s-type should also present a plan for logging their workouts and providing you with the data. Online services like Runkeeper and Fitocracy are free and many have mobile applications; these services will let your s-type share their workout records with you online. For those of you who prefer a less high-tech approach, a simple looseleaf notebook can become a workout journal. Be sure to keep records of workouts in one place, so both the s-type and the D-type can see progress over time, and correlate any slowdowns or stops in a workout routine with other things that are going on in the s-type's life.

*Recipe variation: Choose Their Workout*

Netflix, Amazon, and even Youtube are full of videos of workouts that can be completed in the home (or on the road in a hotel room for s-types whose jobs involve business travel). Choose a particular workout for your s-type to provide them with variety and keep them from getting bored or uninspired with their workout routine.

*Recipe variation: Naked workout*

For the exhibitionist s-type, a workout minus the workout clothes in a private setting for their dominant's edification and entertainment might be, well, thrilling.

## **Eliminate Negative Self-Talk**

Do you have an s-type who calls themselves names that you'd deck a stranger for calling them? Are you an s-type who can't take a compliment? Negative self-talk is a habit like any other, and it can be broken. Establish a rule that negative self-talk will not be allowed, and that the only appropriate response to a compliment is "Thank you."

### *Recipe variation: Self-talk journal*

Have the s-type keep a small notebook and pen on them at all times, and record instances of negative self talk and whether or not they were able to present the appropriate response to a compliment, no matter who gave the compliment. Choose a regular time for the s-type to present the self-talk journal to the D-type.

# Discipline Cookbook

## Ouch! Corporal Punishment

### Spanking

#### *Recipe variation: Over The Knee Spanking*

Spanking can be carried out bent over a bed, or a couch, or even simply bent over with hands braced against the wall. But with this recipe, we want to bring up all the associations that this particular form of discipline has — the naughty s-type, the stern D-type, and a wonderfully embarrassing and about-to-be reddened bare bottom.

Start by having the D-type sit on a sturdy chair or a sofa and direct the s-type to drape themselves face down over the D-type's lap. D-type: you'll want to make sure your s-type is facing toward your non-dominant hand. So if you're right handed, have her head closer to your left hand. Once you're both settled, spank away!

#### *Recipe variation: Bare Bottom*

Bare bottom: Some s-types may find it more embarrassing to lower their own undergarments, while some D-types may prefer to yank them down themselves.

#### *Recipe variation: A Little Lecture*

Deliver a little lecture on the s-type's misbehavior before beginning the spanking. Having the s-type listen to their misdeeds can be a powerful way to get inside the s-type's head — causing blushing in the upper cheeks, not just the lower ones.

#### *Recipe variation: Count Off or Count Down*

Have the s-type count off spansks, either throughout the total number of spansks delivered or to round out the punishment (like counting down the last ten spansks).

### Caning

The cane is a fearsome instrument of discipline. It hurts! It's also an instrument that's known for leaving marks. If you both like the idea of a punishment that will leave a reminder the next day, caning is the way to go.

#### *Recipe variation: Standing Caning*

Have the s-type stand and put their hands behind their head. Reminding them not to move adds real

intensity — because a cane strike will make you want to run away.

### *Recipe variation: Hands and Knees Caning*

Caning allows for a variety of s-type positions. Have the s-type get on their hands and knees on a low table or a sofa.

### *Recipe variation: Count Off*

Since caning is so intense, the number of cane strokes in a session is typically fairly limited. With the right cane, as little as five strokes can be a serious punishment. Have the s-type count off a number of strokes that's related to the rule infraction.

## **Flogging**

Flogging seems so delightfully old-school, with its associations of harsh military punishments. Yet the instrument itself can be sensual, even hypnotic, both in use and effect.

### *Recipe variation: Hands Over Head*

Bind the s-type's hands with rope or with leather cuffs. Use a rope to attach the cuffs to a ceiling mounted or wall-mounted hook.

### *Recipe variation: Prone Flogging*

Have the s-type lie facedown across a bed. This position is good for extended sessions and makes it very easy for the D-type to aim.

Other forms of corporal punishment:

- Clips/clamps — these pinchy toys can be a sharp reminder for an s-type. Remember: they can't stay on too long!
- Whipping — if you've got the room and the skill, this can be a distinctive — and ouchy — form of punishment. It's possible to break the skin this way: be prepared!
- Belt — Some folks are excited just by the sound of their partner's belt slipping out of the beltloops. In practice, it's a more intense version of spanking, with many of the same associations and positions.
- Face slapping — This is an emotionally edgy form of play for many people, your author included, and it's also highly technical. There are a lot of sensitive structures on a person's face! Be sure you know what you're doing.
- Paddling — another variation on spanking, this time with more thud.
- Ruler to palm/rap on knuckles — not just ouchy, but also a real reminder of who's in charge and who's been naughty. The hands are delicate — be careful with implements.
- Kneeling on bamboo or rice. It doesn't seem like much...until you try it for more than a minute or two.



- Bastinado — the soles of the feet have a lot of nerve endings. Bastinado is the practice of striking the bottoms of the feet, usually with an implements. It's very intense, it hurts, and it's technically challenging. The feet, like the hands, have delicate small bones & many nerve endings. Be careful.

## Pout: Corner Time and Other Embarrassing Predicaments

### **Corner Time**

S-types are often their own worst enemies when it comes to guilt, anxiety, and worry. Corner time takes what is normally a bug and turns it into a feature by doing something really evil: giving them time to think.

*Recipe variation: Naked Corner Time*

Having to spend corner time naked will increase the sense of vulnerability for many s-types, as they are literally laid bare to their D-type.

*Recipe variation: Bare-Bottom Corner Time*

Bare-bottom corner time — Isn't there something about being partially undressed that seems even more scandalous than being completely naked? A D-type can take advantage of this fact by having an s-type expose their bottom during corner time. A perfect variation for the s-type who's a blusher.

### **Furniture Restriction**

Reminding an s-type who's boss can seem like a full time job at times. Furniture restriction is a perfect punishment for the busy D-type, since it's one that allows them to continue going about their day, while their s-type is constantly reminded that privileges — like being able to sit on something other than the floor — can be taken away.

*Recipe variation: By Permission Only*

There are some s-types who hate nothing more than having to ask for something of anyone, particularly their D-type. Be sure to tell them they're required to ask at least three times during the time period of the discipline — some s-types are so opposed to asking for something that they'll go all day without ever using furniture just to avoid asking.

Other forms of embarrassment-based punishment:

- Loss of right to wear clothes
- Loss of right to eat at table with D-type
- Loss of right to sleep in D-type's bed — perhaps spending a night on the floor at the foot of the bed.
- Make an admission of behavior and contrition on the s-type's blog or Fetlife

## If You Can't Beat 'Em, Bore 'Em

Boredom-based punishments are great for those s-types who thrive on the erotic embarrassment of naked corner time and adore a good beating. If you want to make sure you get your point across, boring them to death is a surefire winner.

### Writing Lines

I had a teacher who had an interesting variation on this classic of schoolroom discipline: instead of having us write "I will never write inappropriate things in my spelling workbook" one hundred times, she'd give us a sheet of graph paper and make us write our initials in every square.

Oh, the tedium!

For this recipe, setting is important. A quiet time and place, along with paper and a writing instrument, is important. Have your s-type write a one-line description of their misbehavior, and that they won't be doing it again — and write it again, and again, and again.

*Recipe variation: Observed discipline*

Everything's more awkward when someone watches you do it, isn't it? Sit across the room from your s-type while they write their lines and just \*look\* at them. Add a beverage of your choice and a housecat to stroke meditatively for that extra evil supervillain touch.

*Recipe variation: Do it naked*

It's just like that dream everyone has about showing up late to school for an important test and suddenly realizing you forgot to get dressed!

*Recipe variation: Put it on the fridge*

Remember when your parents put your drawings on the fridge? Have your s-type bring their own fridge magnets and hang their finished work on the refrigerator as a daily reminder of the fact that they're not going to get away with it.

### Clean It Up

Even Hercules had to slog through his famous Seven Labors. While for some s-types, domestic service is a kink, for others, it's boring as hell. Assigning a boring, repetitive, or less-than-pleasant cleaning task not only makes your point but...gets your kitchen clean to boot.

*Recipe variation: With a toothbrush*

It's a classic. Be sure you don't bore yourself, or deprive yourself of your s-type's company, by assigning a very large area to be cleaned.

*Recipe Variation: Magical Cleaning Elves*

Have your s-type clean a room while you're away — and tell them to impress you with the results. This is a fun variation because reconciliation is built in: when you get home, you can show your s-type how pleased you are with their work and tell them all is forgiven.

## Work It

Prisoners throughout history have been assigned hard physical labor as a way to atone for their misdeeds. Whether it's breaking rocks or cleaning up roadside litter in an orange jumpsuit, work-based punishments get the job done.

### **Hitting the Gym**

Is your s-type a regular at their gym? Allow them to wash away their misdeeds in sweat by asking them to do a workout that's a little more intense than normal, and dedicating the time and effort to you. Be sure to emphasize that it's more about you retaking possession of their body than about punishment per se — you don't want to discourage your s-type from taking care of their body.

*Recipe variation: Take a picture!*

Do you enjoy your s-type's physical form — and enjoy it all the more when it's dripping with sweat? Have them take a photo of themselves immediately after their workout and send it to you. Or, if that's not possible, have them take a photo of the display of a treadmill or elliptical machine they've been using to pay their tribute to you, showing how far and how fast they went on your behalf. As always, be sure to leave people who haven't consented to your dynamic well out of it — take the picture entirely out of view of other people, and respect sensitive areas like the locker room, where the presence of cameras may make others uncomfortable (and may not even be legal).

*Recipe variation: Tie A Yellow Ribbon*

Have your s-type tie a ribbon or piece of string — any color of their choosing — around their wrist before they go to the gym, to have a constant reminder of you and why they're there.

### **Yard Work**

Lawn looking shaggy? Or, no lawn, but the front steps and sidewalk haven't seen a broom in recent memory? Have your s-type put in the work to make them pristine.

*Recipe variation: That's Fun To Look At*

If your s-type is male, have them do the work with their shirt off.

*Recipe variation: Cool Hand Luke*

Think of yourself as the merciless prison warden and your s-type as the recalcitrant prisoner as you observe them do the work. Offer plenty of orders — and bark them.

## Loss of Privileges

You can't punish a pain slut with a caning, or a spanko with a spanking. What's a D-type to do to find a punishment that's actually unpleasant? Loss of privileges really comes through for you at times like these.

### **Limiting or Eliminating Screen Time**

Screens. They're everywhere! Televisions, tablets, laptops, even smartphones. If your s-type was glued to those screens instead of going to the gym like they'd been ordered to, limiting their non-work screentime is an excellent way to get their attention.

### **Revoking Those Orgasm Privileges**

Oh, you thought those orgasms belonged to you, did they? Think again, s-type! Now, for some s-types, orgasm control or denial is their kink, so you'll have to decide whether you want to apply this one or not. Just a note: libido is a use-it-or-lose-it system — the more you have, the more you have, and the less you have, the less you have. Orgasm denial for more than a few days is likely to suppress your s-type's libido, so if you don't want that, keep this one short.

# Discipline Yes/No/Maybe Checklist

Are you worried that your partner will discipline you in ways that are detrimental to your wellbeing or to the health of your relationship? As a D-type, are there some types of punishment you're not interested in meting out because of how they make you feel about yourself, your s-type, or your relationship?

The Yes/No/Maybe checklist is a popular tool in BDSM and in broader sexuality circles to help couples figure out their shared interests and avoid the kind of trouble that comes with assuming that a partner is okay with something when they're not.

Checking the box beside a punishment means that you are either willing to give (D-type) or receive (s-type) a particular form of punishment. I have left blank lines on the checklist for you to fill in additional forms of discipline that you practice (or want to be sure your partner knows you don't do).

Pay special attention to the final segment of the checklist, entitled "Manner of Discipline." Even if both S-type and D-type might be okay with spanking, that doesn't mean that either one of them is willing to sign off on, for instance, public punishment or "surprise" spankings. How discipline is meted out is as important, even perhaps more important, than the specific type of discipline being administered.

Remember! This checklist is neither a substitute for talking and negotiation, nor is it a to-do list. It's also not competition to see who can be meaner or more hardcore! A checklist is, likewise, not a contract: checking a box now does not let anyone off the hook for checking in with a partner when discipline comes into play.

Tables don't always render well on some e-readers, so for an easy-to-use, free printable version of this checklist, visit <http://theblackleatherbelt.com/discipline> for this and other resources.

## Discipline Yes/No/Maybe Checklist

Type of Discipline	D-type	S-type
<b>Corporal Punishment</b>		
Spanking		
Caning		
Clips/Clamps		
Flogging		
Whipping		
Belt		
Face slapping		
Paddling		

Ruler to palm		
Rap on knuckles		
Kneeling on bamboo or rice		
Bastinado		
<b>Boredom-based punishments</b>		
Corner time		
Writing lines		
Early bedtime		
Repetitive tasks		
<b>Work-based punishments</b>		
Housecleaning		
Wash car		
Difficult/physical labor		
Hard exercise		
<b>Humiliation-based punishments</b>		
Wear sign/dunce cap		
Make public admission of behavior and contrition		
Having words describing behavior written on skin with marker		
<b>Reflective punishments</b>		
Time to reflect on behavior		
Apologize in own words		
Write essay explaining why action was wrong		
Beg forgiveness		
<b>Removal of privileges</b>		
Loss of right to wear clothes		
Loss of time to engage in leisure activities		
Loss of access to computer/internet/video games		

Loss of sexual privileges (loss of right to masturbate, loss of sexual access to D-type, loss of right to orgasm)		
Loss of access to luxuries (candy/sweets, etc)		
Loss of right to use furniture (must sit/sleep on the floor)		
Loss of right to speak		
Loss of right to sleep in D-type's bed		
Loss of right to eat at table with D-type		
Loss of right to attend social events		
<b>Manner of punishment</b>		
Spontaneous punishment (being hauled over D-type's knee immediately for sassing, etc.)		
Punishment scheduled in advance		
Having a regular time where any required discipline is meted out		
Public Punishment		
Sexualized punishment (punishment designed or acknowledged to be arousing)		
Sex after or during punishment		

## Ask Me Anything

I hope you've gotten plenty of ideas that you're excited about putting into practice by reading this book. BDSM has enriched my life and my relationships in ways that I am deeply grateful for, and I hope both you and your partner have the opportunity to have wonderfully rich, moving, and fun experiences with each other.

Do you have questions? I would love to hear from you. You can get in touch with me in the following ways:

Email:

[message.to.lily@gmail.com](mailto:message.to.lily@gmail.com)

Fetlife:

<https://fetlife.com/users/93045>

Twitter:

[@MsLilyLloyd](https://twitter.com/MsLilyLloyd)

I post regularly to my blog, The Black Leather Belt (<http://theblackleatherbelt.com>), where I write about kink, sexual politics, and nonmonogamy. I try to answer every comment! You can subscribe via email or RSS to get the weekly humor feature, *The Monday Note*.



# Resources

## ***Books***

In our post Fifty Shades era, there are a great many books about BDSM — but only a few of them are ones that I would hand to a friend who was interested in exploring their sexuality. These are those books.

[\*Screw The Roses, Send Me The Thorns\*](#), Philip Miller and Molly Devon

[\*Real Service\*](#), Raven Kaldera & Josh Tenpenny

[\*The New Topping Book\*](#), Janet Hardy & Dossie Easton

[\*The New Bottoming Book\*](#), Janet Hardy & Dossie Easton

[\*The Loving Dominant\*](#), John and Libby Warren

[\*The Ultimate Guide To Kink\*](#), Edited by Tristan Taormino

[\*Two Knotty Boys Showing You The Ropes\*](#), Two Knotty Boys

[\*Wild Side Sex\*](#), Midori

[\*Playing Well With Others\*](#), Mollena Williams and Lee Harrington

[\*SM 101\*](#), Jay Wiseman

[\*The S&M Feminist\*](#), Clarisse Thorn

If I had to recommend one and only one book about human sexuality to a friend it would be Jack Morin's [\*The Erotic Mind\*](#), which is about unlocking the keys to your sexuality found in your sexual fantasies.

All of these books are in print and available via online retailers.

## ***Blogs & Bloggers***

The advent of blogging has brought a wonderful panoply of distinctive individual voices into the public sphere. I value them because they provide me with insights into everyday experience and emotional texture that's hard to find in many books about BDSM. These are people who are living out their sexuality every day, or delving deeply into sex as a deep and powerful subject of great intellectual interest, and they write the the sex blogs I read on a regular basis.

Bryce Land (<http://blog.brycelloyd.org>)

The Perverted Negress (<http://www.mollena.com>)

Exploring Surrender (<http://exploringsurrender.blogspot.com>)

Kitty The Submissive Wife (<http://thesubmissivewife.blogspot.com>)

Kink In Exile (<http://kinkinexile.wordpress.com>)

Denying Thumper (<http://denyingthumper.com>)

Dumb Domme (<http://dumbdomme.com>)

Clarisse Thorn (<http://clarissethorn.com>)

Dirk Hooper (<http://www.dirkhooper.com/fetish/blog/>)

Absinthe Passion ([absinthepassion.wordpress.com](http://absinthepassion.wordpress.com))

Not Just Bitchy (<http://notjustbitchy.com>)

Joan Defers (<http://joandefers.com>)

Charlie Glickman (<http://charlieglickman.com>)

The Pervocracy (<http://pervocracy.blogspot.com/>)

Post-Whore America (<http://postwhoreamerica.com/>)

The Dirty Normal (<http://www.thedirtynormal.com/>)

Better Than I Ever Expected (<http://betterthanieverexpected.blogspot.com/>)

Sex Geek (<http://sexgeek.wordpress.com/>)

### ***Resources About Non-monogamy***

#### *Books:*

[\*Opening Up\*](#), Tristan Taormino

[\*Power Circuits: Polyamory in a BDSM Dynamic\*](#), Raven Kaldera

#### *Blogs, Articles & Podcasts*

Polyamory Weekly (<http://polyweekly.com>)

Solo Poly (<http://solopoly.net>)

“Non-monogamy for Men: The Big Picture,”

(<http://freaksexual.wordpress.com/2009/11/05/nonmonogamy-for-men-the-big-picture/>)

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