

Dungeon Etiquette: A Primer By Elaine Miller

The public BDSM scene provides us all with a surprising new freedom, wherein we are permitted and encouraged to enjoy ourselves and our partners in sexy, kinky, intense and unusual ways, and wherein we are encouraged to present ourselves as we wish. Because we have invented a whole new set of social mores, it can be confusing to sort out what is actually expected of us; what it takes to be considered polite company. I hope this document may help.

Read the party rules when you get to the event.

This is the easiest item of etiquette, and also the most useful. These rules are generally in place for three reasons:

- To uphold each partygoer's right to physical safety, reasonable privacy, timely use of equipment, room to swing a cat, freedom from being interrupted during a good time, and to some small degree, emotional safety.
- To cover the venue-renting / safety-loving / legal-issue / insurance-related butts of the party throwers so they can continue to give parties.
- To make rule-givers feel powerful and in control. (Just kidding on this last one)

Safety and Consent:

- Take no for an answer; take stop for an order. Everything we do should be done with consent -- even play that appears non-consensual to the outsider's eye.
- The party safeword varies, but "SAFWORD" will always work.
- Know how equipment works, and check to make sure everything's in order before you start to play, and again as you leave the station.
- Don't attempt anything far outside your skill level without getting a bit of advice or help or mentoring or experience or education.

Privacy

- Every person who enters the dungeon should feel safe to enjoy themselves, including feeling that one is safe from being outed on a social networking site to all one's co-workers. Please don't bring or use cameras, cel phones, or any recording devices. Be aware that even showing these items in many dungeons will get you tossed.
- The expectation of privacy includes gossip (both inside and outside of dungeons). When, later, you're recounting the tale of a fantastic scene you witnessed, don't talk about people in a way that could identify them.
- If the dungeon event is invitation-only, keep the event, the location, the time, and the guest list to yourself.

Care for the Dungeon, the Venue and the Party Throwers

Be a good guest so event organizers find it worthwhile to continue their efforts. Here's how:

- Please contain your body fluids! Use a blanket, dropcloth, tarp, plastic sheet or towel. Be careful with drinks/food, etc, too. Wipe furniture down with cleaning solution after touching it with skin. The volunteers who tear down the equipment are going to feel mighty unfortunate if they put their hands in something sticky. So do clean up after your scene. And use the trash cans/recycle bins.
- Keep the space rentable for future dungeon events: don't damage the venue, such as by

- tying ropes to pipes or adding your own hooks.
- Whether coming to or leaving the venue, or standing outside smoking, please keep your public behaviour, speech and clothing as discreet as the neighbourhood calls for. Don't scare the neighbours into calling the cops or complaining about the event to the venue owners, or the event organizers are going to spend another month looking for a new place to throw a party.
- Are you doing fireplay? Is fireplay allowed? Are you sure? Really sure? Jeepers, where's your fire extinguisher?

Dungeon Monitors (DMs) are dying to be helpful.

- If you have problems or questions or need anything, ask a DM.
- If you're worried about something you see, ask a DM.
- Need help with equipment, or need to know if you can move it? DM.
- Is your scene complicated, crazy, scary to others, or messy? Get the DM on your side. Let them know in advance.
- If a DM asks you to do something, do it. If you need to appeal, do it later, politely, after you've complied with the DM's request.

This point of etiquette is for the DMs of the world:

- Be aware that it's easy for a DM to look like a cop or a creep to a player who's in the middle of a good time. Both are a buzzkill. Take care to minimize your social impact. Yeah, I'm talking to you, big hairy man in a high-vis Dungeon Monitor vest standing 3 feet from those women who are fucking.

How Do You Meet Someone?

Most folks are happy to talk to polite strangers. It's a party, and kinky folks are generally a friendly bunch. Whether you're dying to ask someone where they got their corset, or about the finer points of a skill they just displayed, or to compliment them on a scene, or to just get to know them, these few guidelines might help ease your way.

Looking to play? I won't cover Dating 101 here, but all the usual guidelines of respect and politeness apply...

- Make no assumptions about role, or about anything at all -- not gender, not orientation, not willingness to play.
- Socially, we are all equals, until we negotiate and agree upon a power dynamic. Thus: Her bottom is not everyone's universal bottom, and his top does not require honorifics from everyone in the room. Treat everyone politely, but don't feel like you have to be in scene space with everyone based on their preferred place in the sexual power dynamic.
- We are all equals, but be aware of folks who are in bottomspace for some reason. It's considered dastardly rude to interfere with someone in this frame of mind.
- Exact social mores vary from city to city, from sub-set to sub-set, and from party to party, and vary over time. Some events may tend towards high-protocol dominance/submission, others are dance parties with a dungeon area on the side. You can often, in a social quandary, ask someone dungeon-experienced how to behave. "Say, would it be appropriate to go over there and smack her ass, then introduce myself? No? Alright then."

What about if the person I want to talk to is in scene/actively playing?

- If you want to initiate a conversation (verbal or non-verbal) with someone currently in

scene, don't. Ever.

- After folks have been playing, wait until after they've done aftercare. Wait until you see them start to resume normal social behaviour. As a bottom may be still feeling a bit raw, talk to the top first, and ask if you can speak to them.
- Like this: "May I ask you a question about the scene I saw you do?" "Is now an okay time to say hi and introduce myself?" "May I tell your bottom how much I admire his bravery/ boot-licking technique / jockstrap?"

Their Scene: How to Behave

- Do watch scenes, and enjoy the sight of people having a good (hot)(intense)(cathartic) (scary) time.
- Respect others' scenes by giving them space to unfold.
- Don't play backswing dodgeball -- give 'em physical room.
- Give 'em room in an auditory way. Keep quiet-ish around a scene in progress. Don't intrude, offer advice, offer yourself or make loud comments
- Give 'em personal emotional space, too. Don't make eye contact --especially with the bottom-- and don't loom over a scene.
- Don't touch anyone's toys, equipment, collar, bottom or top without permission.
- Don't mock anyone's outfit, style, kink, or scene--unless you've been invited to do public humiliation with the players.
- If someone else's scene bothers you, feel free to turn 180 degrees and acquire a whole new view of the dungeon.

Your Scene: How to Behave

- Play at your own level. This is not the BDSM Olympics, and you are not going to be judged for liking bondage but not suspension, spanking but not bullwhipping, or D/s but not pain play. Conversely, if you want and can organize an extreme scene where you're fisted by 89 people in an evening, do that, and glory in it. The scale is calibrated by how much you and your playpartners are enjoying yourselves, not by how the onlookers feel about the show.
- Bring a water bottle or two. Everything's a little easier to take when well-hydrated, and it's a thoughtful touch to offer to your bottom or your top.
- Expect to participate in aftercare after a scene. Some folks don't need/want it, and if so will generally say so up front.
- In most dungeons, safer sex (barriers, condoms, gloves) is the polite way to go. Some dungeons don't allow sex. Most don't agree on the definition of sex. Better check with the DM.
- Some dungeons don't allow highly emotionally charged scenes -- Nazi role play, rape play, face-punching, guns and weapons play, and so forth. Even if allowed, be aware of the potential impact these scenes may have on others.
- Stinky, messy scenes may be allowed. If they are, do your level best to minimize the splash zone.
- Don't include common allergens such as pepper spray, etc, in your public scene. Your good time should not be someone else's cue to call an ambulance.
- A scene already ongoing has a certain primacy. If you can avoid setting up your rambunctious multi-player puppy wrestling scene right beside the couple halfway

- through their emotional public collaring ceremony, well, that'd be thoughtful.
- Dungeons vary on noise customs. Check in before setting up for loud laughing / loud screaming / brass instrument playing.
 - Tops, please remain responsible for any bottoms you have put in a blissed-out state, such as wandering around with needles sticking out. (Naked points. So rude in a crowd, yes?)
 - If the dungeon is busy, or you're on a popular piece of equipment and know there's others waiting, please keep your scene compact in length (an hour or so). There's wiggle room here, and the DM is your friend in trying to figure out what's reasonable.

Think Before You Idiot.

- You share the space with other folks of various shapes, ages, class, abilities, genders, colours, cultures, orientations, and lived experience. It is NOT their job to teach you about themselves or educate you in how to share space respectfully. It's your job to do your own homework.

General Care of the Social Aspects

Or, things I didn't have a perfectly-fitting heading for:

- In almost every dungeon in the known universe: No hard drugs, no drunkenness. These spoil the enjoyment of some play, impair judgment, and up the level of social-gaffes-per-hour in a staggering way.
- Most places, solo play ain't permitted or respected. Solo play is a euphemism for jerking off, as one might do at a peep show.
- Just like in the schoolyard, boasting and stunting attract attention but not of the friendly kind. Solo whipcracking looks just like jerking off, seen in a certain light. Best not to.
- If you're a peripheral member of the BDSM community, and a friend wants to be taken on a field trip to gawk at the freaks, think twice before bringing them. Even exhibitionists generally dislike feeling like animals at the zoo.
- Casual sitting on equipment--even if it's not in use--is discouraged. Leave the equipment for folks who'll want to play on it.
- What someone's wearing has no bearing on their experience or skill level or the seriousness of their kink. Clothing means nothing except that the wearer wishes to present themselves a certain way, or is trying to comply with a dress code, if there is one.
- Do your emotional homework before entering the BDSM community. Unresolved issues are so damn messy.
- Online experience does not translate well to real life, nor does online protocol apply in a real life dungeon.
- Negotiation takes many forms, from a barely verbal quick flirtation to detailed spreadsheets and months of consultation that finally coalesce into a scene. Don't assume that everything has to be negotiated with a team of lawyers, but also understand that sparse negotiation can lead to misunderstandings.
- Try to be automatically courteous, kind, and give the benefit of the doubt in all situations. Most folks are just trying to get along and enjoy themselves. Just like you.