



# **Clarity and Consent**

## **Negotiating Sex on the Playa**

### **Thank you for coming!**

Hi! I'm *name*. I'm from the Bureau of Erotic Discourse, or B.E.D.

*BED volunteers stand up and introduce themselves.*

*Ask for audience volunteers to describe what they hope to get from the workshop.*

## **Clarity, Consent, and Negotiation**

BED's mission is to help people safely and happily navigate the sexual shoals on the playa, so you can get what you want and avoid what you don't want. We call this workshop "Clarity and Consent" because it is about clearly communicating your desires and boundaries for consensual sexual activity.

At the Bureau of Erotic Discourse we are sex positive, which means that we think that sex is a *very* good thing when it is mutually desired. We value the right for individual choice, which includes the right to choose *not* to have sex. We don't care what gender you appear to be, or what gender you claim to be, or what kinds of partners you prefer. What matters to us is communication and consent.

Our subtitle is "Negotiating Sex on the Playa," so some of our material is about how to get to an agreement about positive sexual activity. But a negotiation is also successful if it helps you to avoid an outcome that you don't want, so we also discuss how to convince somebody to go away.

We are going to cover some basics of sexual negotiation today. Most of our examples are about people who have newly met, but the principles of good communication carry over to *all* relationships.

Sexual communication requires respect for yourself and others. We don't have a lot of good models for healthy sexual communication, so this workshop will provide a few examples.

Good sex needs to be negotiated between people. It doesn't happen magically like you might see on a TV commercial, where two strangers share a hot glance and everything works perfectly without any discussion. In real life the couple races across the meadow only to have one of them sprain an ankle in a gopher hole and the other one have an allergic reaction to the wildflowers. If they had talked about it they might have been happily making out at the movies.

Good sex is not usually what you see in porn. Not only are the physical attributes misleading, but the attitudes, positions and practices can be way outside the comfort zone for many people. If you both know your desires and they include some X-rated moves, then feel free. But don't assume that everyone wants to be a porno star.

**Optional exercise: Ask Before Pictures**

We like to have pictures of ourselves and the audience at these workshops. It helps us to give an idea to people who visit our web site ([www.bureauoferoticdiscourse.org](http://www.bureauoferoticdiscourse.org)) about who we are. But we want to do this the right way, so before we take an audience picture, We'd like to see the hands of anyone who does **not** want their picture taken.

- *If many show their hands, don't take the picture.*
- *If only a few raise their hands, ask them (kindly) to move to the edge so we can take the picture. If they don't move, no picture!*
- *If no hands come up, take the picture.*

Thank you for playing along with our first exercise: Ask Before Pictures!

## **Nonverbal and Verbal Sexual Communication**

### **Let's watch two hot & sexy folks who are initiating sex for the first time!**

**VOLUNTEERS:** *2 hot and sexy folks try to negotiate a sexual interaction nonverbally—it's awkward and looks stupid. Using mime:*

- *A touches B, B shakes head, moves A's hand to a more neutral place*
- *B touches A, A jumps back with look of surprise*
- *B touches A again, A shakes head, moves B's hand somewhere else*
- *A touches B, B jumps back with look of surprise.*
- *It ends with crossed arms, back to back, and disappointed looks!*

**Hmmmm... it doesn't look like it's working. What would happen if they talked about their desires and boundaries with one another?\_**

**VOLUNTEERS:** *2 hot and sexy folks then negotiate a sexual interaction verbally—passionate making out and fondling ensue. Actual actions depend on the volunteers!*

**Example short script for volunteers (improvise!):**

*A: I like this thing we've got going around asking! I'd like you to kiss my neck, maybe with a nibble or two.*

*B: That sounds sweet! [Does the kiss on the neck.] So if you're willing I'd like to be lightly spanked.*

*A: Of course! [Does the spanking]*

Now that looks like they are getting more of what they want! Whoo-hoo!!!

### **So why do so many people fear Verbal Sexual Communication?**

1. Verbal sexual communication is awkward—you are exposing something about yourself that is vulnerable.
2. Verbal sexual communication is hard. Our society gives very little education about how to talk about sex. We have all been conditioned by thousands of fucked up, unrealistic images about sex, so it is hard to envision a better alternative.
3. Verbal sexual communication risks rejection! Shit! Who wants that? No one wants to be sexually rejected!

**Let's just acknowledge, then, that verbal sexual communication can be awkward, difficult, and emotionally risky.**

## **Why not just rely on Nonverbal Sexual Communication?**

Can't everyone just tell when their prospective partner wants to have sex with them from their nonverbal behavior? Unfortunately, no.

First, there is the problem of misinterpretation of nonverbal cues. You can't be sure that flirting or making out with you means someone wants to have sex with you. It may mean they are just very friendly! Even engaging in sexual petting does not mean that a person wants to engage in penetration with you. It may mean that the person just likes heavy petting, and may not want to go further.

Many people choose to engage in petting instead of penetration in order to avoid the increased risk of STDs and pregnancy that penetration poses. So petting and fondling alone cannot mean consent to sex. You need verbal sexual communication to be sure!

Second, there is the problem of assuming that passivity means your partner is going along with what you want. One common reaction to sexual trauma is the "deer in the headlights" effect. Like other mammals, we may freeze when we feel threatened or under attack. Another response to sexual trauma is what's called "dissociation," where a person becomes deeply passive and becomes detached, mentally leaving their body to escape.

So just because your prospective partner is not resisting does not mean they consent to what you want sexually. Passivity and silence may mean they are experiencing your actions as trauma. So, although nonverbal communication might not be reliable to indicate a willingness to have sex, you really have to pay attention when the nonverbal message is to back off!

***Silence is not Consent!***

## **So what is consent?**

Sexual consent is an agreement that requires people who are of legal age, are properly informed, are not under coercion, and are not incapacitated. The consent model holds that one person proposes an action and the other gives permission for it. Consent is the bare minimum required for legal and ethical sexual activity.

There are a lot of things that do not imply consent. Sexy costumes are not consent, nudity is not consent, being drunk is not consent, being underage is not consent, being asleep is not consent, and being too scared to resist is not consent.

Consent may be withdrawn at any time. If you have agreed to start something and find that it feels wrong to you, you have the right to stop it, and your partner has the obligation to honor your change of heart. Losing the ability to say "No" through intoxication also withdraws consent.

Consent requires honesty. If one person agrees to something then the other person has to be honest or the deal is void. You would not want to buy defective goods, so don't sleep with them, either.

BED emphasizes that consent is required, but we want more than mere consent. We believe in mutual enthusiasm! The best way to get to that enthusiasm is for the involved parties to talk about what all they really desire, and what they want to avoid. That requires open and honest communication and negotiation.

There are a lot of levels between consent and enthusiasm left to talk about. We could explore these issues for days, but it's much more important for you to explore them with your partners.

## **What should you verbally communicate about?**

### ***Desires and boundaries!***

#### **What is a sexual desire?**

*VOLUNTEERS take the stage and loudly express sexual desires. Examples are “I want to be caressed. I want to lick your breasts. I want to be kissed slowly and gently. I want to be spanked. I want to massage your feet. I want to make love. I want to watch you touch yourself. I want to have that very attractive long vegetable up my butt.”*

This may not be exactly how you’d say it in an intimate moment, but we want you all to practice stating desires and boundaries loudly and confidently.

*Then the **audience** practices loudly stating their sexual desires.*

Now turn to someone beside you, use confident eye contact, and express a sexual desire.

#### **What is a sexual boundary?**

*VOLUNTEERS take the stage and loudly express sexual boundaries. Examples are “I don’t want to be spanked. I don’t want touching below the waist. I don’t want to be stared at. I don’t want to have genital contact. I don’t want to swap fluids. I don’t like pain. I don’t want anything up my butt, especially not that vegetable!”*

*Then the **audience** practices loudly stating their sexual boundaries.*

Now turn to someone beside you, use confident eye contact, and express a sexual boundary.

#### **Desires vs. boundaries**

Sexual desires and boundaries can sometimes conflict, even when they are from the same person! It’s important to recognize the conflict and resolve it so that a temporary desire does not overpower a genuine boundary. When in doubt, honor the boundary.

## **Starting the Negotiations**

### **1. To assess and express your desires and boundaries**

This is hugely erotic and fun! Prospective bed buddies may actually “melt into your arms” when you make your sexual desires clear. It takes the guessing out of sexual play and it is so honest and open and sexy!

### **2. To ask about and honor your bed buddy’s desires and boundaries.**

In a sexual interaction, it is not about anyone “giving in” to another person’s desires. Getting one’s sexual desires met is not as high a priority as knowing and respecting your bed buddy’s boundaries.

## ***Communication is the Best Lubrication!***

Good communication makes it more likely that you will get lucky and it also **greatly** enhances the experience of sex itself.

### **So now we’re going to engage in a Sex Game**

*[Procedure]* Pair up with someone you don’t know. Various gender pairs are likely to happen, so relax, we’re not asking for a lasting commitment here! Think up a sexual desire and a sexual boundary. They don’t have to be yours, they can be imaginary if you prefer. These can be outrageous, wild, fun, silly, or even serious. It doesn’t matter. Think of sexual desires and boundaries that seem like fun to talk about.

*[Imaginary Setup]* You and this very hot person you met yesterday have just returned to your tent from a great dance party at a cool camp. You had a really good time and you are very attracted to your new friend.

*[Goal]* Imagine that you are in that scenario and communicate both your desires and boundaries to your friend in as lovely a way as possible and ask about their desires and boundaries. Be as realistic as possible. Try to let your personality guide you and speak in your own words!

***VOLUNTEERS*** may model the game first by doing one round of saying “My desire is to ..., and my boundary is not to ...”

*Optional volunteer approach: just go into the audience and pair up with people, especially those who look a bit lost. Then start the conversation.*



## **When boundaries are not respected**

There are people out there who don't care about hearing your boundaries. These folks are sexually callous and more likely to commit sexual assault or rape. Even when they may not want to listen, it is frequently effective to loudly tell them off.

We are now going to practice saying "NO!" to someone who violates our sexual boundaries.

Please stand up and get a bit loose. Now, at the count of 3, shout "No!" 1-2-3: **NO!** Let's try that again: 1-2-3: **NO!**

Let's try that one more time, all together, but this time we'll shout "No! Back off!" OK, 1-2-3: **No! Back off!**

OK, that's really good! Now let's shift gears and imagine someone we love or lust for asks us if we would like to engage in our favorite sexual act. Let's all say, "Yes, that sounds like fun!" 1-2-3: **Yes! That sounds like fun!** What a difference!

Some people who don't care about sexual boundaries are obvious. Someone who ignores your explicit boundaries clearly does not care. Others aren't so obvious because they wait to violate your boundaries until you are alone. How can you identify them? You can look for the warning signs. Here are some Red Flags for identifying people who do not care about sexual boundaries:

1. Puts you down or degrades you (or others) in front of people
2. Tries to control your time, location, friends, etc.
3. Makes sexually offensive comments, uses hostile language to describe sex
4. Verbally manipulative to try to get you to have sex

***VOLUNTEERS:*** Act out each one of these briefly and with emotion. Start with the following or improvise:

1. *Not much of a girlfriend, she's the only one I got!*
2. *I'm not going to have you hang out dancing all night!*
3. *I'm going to get me some good ass tonight!*
4. *Come on, sugar, don't be cold. I'm going to make you feel just fine!*

## **More verbal self-defense**

If you face someone who is manipulative and does not respect your boundaries there are a number of verbal self-defense techniques you can employ. You have a right to choose your boundaries. You do not have to explain yourself, or make excuses for yourself, or apologize.

We are going to practice one of the most effective verbal techniques, called the “Broken Record.” Here, you simply state your boundary in the same way over and over again. You simply and calmly say “you cannot talk me into having sex with you, I don’t want it,” until the jerk gives up. Be firm, calm, repetitive, and excruciatingly boring.

**VOLUNTEERS** demonstrate the strategy:

*Jerk character starts by pleading (come on, you’ll like it)*

*Jerk moves to guilt trip (you’ve been leading me on all night)*

*Jerk ends with anger (you’re nothing but a fucking tease)*

*Defender just repeats “No, I don’t want it!”*

### **The “broken record” technique is our next sex game.**

*[Procedure]* Get in pairs with someone you haven’t worked with.

*[Imaginary Setup]* You’ve just been to your first actual burn! It blew your mind—the energy of the crowd, the sights and sounds of it all. You and a sexy friend you just met a few hours ago decide to wander off into the desert together to find some privacy and watch the stars turn.

*[Goal]* Decide who is going to be the jerk and who is going to stick to their boundaries. The jerk will say anything to get the defender to have sex. The jerk does not respect the spoken boundaries. The defender will employ a broken record response to stop the advance. Be as realistic as possible, but without touching or threatening to touch anyone in any way during this game! Do it once and then switch roles with your partner.

## **About sexual assault and rape**

In most U.S. states, rape requires nonconsensual sexual penetration, and sexual assault is nonconsensual sexual contact. Here we try to not make a huge distinction, because both categories are likely to be experienced as traumatic and invasive. Regardless of what you call it, unwanted sexual contact is simply unacceptable, on or off the playa.

There are many myths in this culture about what rape really looks like. One myth is the stranger with a knife leaping out from behind a dumpster to grab an innocent woman and drag her into an alleyway. This kind of rape does happen, but not so often as people think.

Most rapes happen between people who know each other, in someone's home or tent. Most rapes involve no weapons. Most rapes happen quietly when one person is passive and crying and the other doesn't care about their partner's sexual boundaries. With better sexual communication and sensitivity, many rapes are preventable! Note that partner rape, even spousal rape, is illegal in all 50 states.

According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), in the U.S., 1 in 6 women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetimes; 73% of rape victims know their assailants; but only 1 in 16 rapists will ever spend time in prison.

Either men or women can commit rape, and either men or women can be raped. Rape is all about a lack of consent, not about the biological details.

To avoid committing sexual assault you need to communicate before you initiate sex. *Assess* and *express* your desires and boundaries! *Ask about* and *honor* your bed buddy's desires and boundaries! Either person can stop at any time.

You can also improve your sexual communication skills by practicing alone or with a safe friend. Start with non-threatening subjects, move to more explicit ones.

In sexual interactions in the real world you need to also be on the lookout for people who do not respect sexual boundaries. And you need to be careful about not assuming consent.

Alcohol and drugs impair judgment. They may decrease sexual inhibitions, which can be fun, but they also decrease one's ability to say "no" or resist a sexual advance. Sex with someone who is too inebriated or stoned to consent is legally rape in all 50 states. If you'd like to have a buzz on when you are being sexual, then get your agreements made while you are both sober. A good rule of thumb to use is that if you can't drive, you probably can't give consent.

## **Community!**

On the playa we help each other put up tents, construct art, eat well, and play safe. So look out for your friends and neighbors. Help them protect themselves. Feel free to ask questions and help out if someone is being preyed upon.

Here's a sample intervention. A ranger was walking by a tent and heard some sounds that could be interpreted as distress. He approached and asked "Do you both know your safe words?" He was answered "Yes" from the tent. "Carry on!" he said and kept walking. The point is that a gentle question, preferably humorous, will be answered without resentment. And that question could help someone out of a sticky situation if it's not fully consensual.

Rapists are typically cowards, preying on the uncertain, the intoxicated, the silent, and the isolated. Community response is critical to suppressing sexual assault! If you see something suspicious, then check it out. If you don't feel brave enough, then just remarking about it may help someone else to check it out. If you don't want to say anything, you can still get a Ranger to help.

We all can help by calling out attitudes that foster sexual assault. Staying silent just helps the abusers. If someone you know is running down someone else for being a slut, or easy, or gay, or some other negative stereotype, then say something.

***VOLUNTEERS enact helping out someone who is being preyed upon. Person A is trying to coerce person B (who is intoxicated) into going into A's tent. Person C verbally breaks in to say, "Hey, that's not cool, leave them alone." Person A gives up while B leads C away.***

## **If you are assaulted**

If your precautions are not enough, and you are sexually assaulted, then there are steps you need to take if you are going to report it. It remains your choice, although we note that reporting an assault may save someone else from being raped by the same person. Most rapes are committed by serial rapists.

Find someone who can get you help and get you to Emergency Services. This could be a friend, a BED member, a Black Rock Ranger, or one of the LEOs (Law Enforcement Officers) at the event.

To help preserve legal evidence, you should make every effort to save anything that might contain the perpetrator's DNA. You should not bathe, use the restroom, change your clothes, or change anything in the area where the assault happened.

If you do go to Emergency Services, they are obliged to report the incident, but pressing charges remains up to you.

Remember, it's *never* your fault if someone sexually assaults you. It's the fault of the miserable bottom-feeding louse-infested cowardly fucker who did you wrong.

## **Conclusion**

If you want some kind of sexual contact, then the Bureau of Erotic Discourse suggests you take the following easy steps:

1. Assess your own desires and boundaries. What kind of sexual interaction do you want to engage in? What kind of sexual interaction would violate your boundaries? Be clear with yourself on both counts. What do you want to do around safer sex? Do you want oral sex or just a snuggle bunny? A make-out partner? A hot and heavy interlude with a ton o' lube? In terms of your boundaries, do you not want to engage in penetration? Do you want to play with bondage but avoid orgasm? Be clear with yourself before you even search for a partner.
2. Select someone interesting and coherent. You don't want to have sex with someone who is so loaded that they can't express what they do and do not want. It's illegal, unethical, and flat out repulsive.
3. Approach your new friend and talk to them. Comment on how sexy and awesome they are. Ask questions. Flirt shamelessly. If the vibe is good, get up your nerve and tell your new friend what you want to do with them. Say it in a sexy, direct fashion. Promise them attention, affection, and communication.
4. If your new friend refuses your offer—either in a gentle or rude way—say you appreciate that they considered your offer anyway. Continue flirting with them if that seems fun, or wish them a great burn and walk away with your head held high. That was a success! You told someone your desires, you were rejected, and the world didn't melt! Now go get a cool drink, lick your paws, reassess the situation, and start from the beginning with someone else.
5. If, however, your prospective bed buddy seems interested, ask about their desires and listen with rapt attention. Ask if they would like to participate in an erotic game where you each express your desires and boundaries to one another. If they agree, listen attentively and speak clearly. Discuss safer sex and birth control, if applicable. Then decide what fun and naughty things might work for both of you and propose them. If your partner agrees, then get busy, you hound dogs! And take as much satisfaction from respecting your mutual boundaries as you do from satisfying your mutual desires.

## **Questions and Answers**

*Try to keep each Q and each A brief to allow as many as possible. If time is short, move Q&A to the end to allow people to leave.*

## **The B.E.D. Camp Challenge**

We have started to issue the B.E.D. Camp Challenge. This challenge is very simple: a camp that wants to support the B.E.D. principles of clarity and consent agrees to hold a camp meeting to discuss them, and to give assistance to anyone in need, especially to help them to find a ranger or emergency services. Camps that accept the challenge get to post our lovely B.E.D. Challenge Poster.

## **Remember, our web site is:**

<http://www.BureauOfEroticDiscourse.org>

**Thanks for coming to the workshop! Have fun and be safe!**

**Please take some buttons and BED Challenge posters!**

*Optional but desirable:*

**Stick around and have a chat with the BED volunteers!**

