

FINDING YOUR (KINK) VOICE

by John Pental

WHO AM I?

My coaching website is <https://www.johnpental.com/>

Kink mentoring page is <http://www.leatherlondonguide.com/coach.html>

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WHAT IS THIS WORKSHOP?

In 2019 I was asked to teach a workshop on consent, and I included a section on why people sometimes don't speak up during a kink scene when they want or need to.

I gave a few examples: not wanting to be branded a novice player, one person having fallen in love with a play partner, reliving past trauma, autistic shutdown ... then asked the attendees if they had any others.

Every person in the room gave an example. It didn't matter what their experience level was, if they were a Top or bottom, or if they were neurodivergent - everyone had a story of keeping quiet and regretting it later.

That made me think about how much of our discussion about consent relies on being able to speak up. For example:

- Standing up for yourself in negotiations
- Being able to clearly state your needs, wants, desires and limits
- Agreeing to *AND BEING ABLE TO USE* a safe word during the scene

However, there are occasions when our voices may leave us, and that's what this workshop is about.

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REASONS WHY ANYONE (TOPS AND BOTTOMS) MAY STAY SILENT DURING A KINK SCENE:

- Feel you've invested too much in the scene/ too far gone/ travelled too far/ waited too long/ set up was too complicated
- Other folk have been involved setting this up and you don't want to let them down
- You've weighed up the choices and think it's easier/ will cost you less to push on than to say something
- Concern that speaking up might change the mood
- Too scared to speak up, not wanting to appear weak or be branded a novice player. Didn't want to "lose face"
- Fallen in love with your play partner and would do anything for them
- Feeling inexperienced and deferring to the other person
- Flooded with adrenaline (the "fight, flight or freeze" hormone) and frozen with fear
- On an endorphin high and incapable of speech
- Flooded with an emotion: rage, grief, happiness
- Forgot the safe word you've agreed
- Getting conflicting messages from participants
- Spectators are making you uncomfortable/ one spectator in particular
- Have fainted/ are unconscious
- Are medicated/ recently stopped taking medication
- Never been taught how to advocate for yourself in a productive way/ the examples you saw of people expressing themselves were with aggression
- Poor education on what it means to be a submissive, being told to "*endure, don't speak up and avoid eye contact otherwise you're being disrespectful.*"
- Grown up being a "people pleaser" and your default is suppressing your own needs for other people
- You've never given your own voice or needs any value
- Spoken up in a past relationship and it hasn't gone well/ fear of retribution
- "*Didn't want to cause a fuss*" or upset anyone
- Shy/ struggle socially
- Autistic shutdown or burnout
- Lack interoception (internal signals) or in a state of disconnection from your body
- The Fawn response: when an individual tries to avoid or minimize distress or danger by pleasing and appeasing the threat. Someone responding in this way would do whatever they can to keep the threat, or abuser, happy despite their own needs and wants.
- Been triggered, hitting a 'mental landmine' or re-living an upsetting memory

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I have a selection of tips and strategies to help with this, and I've broken them down into three categories:

Trauma Response

Neurodivergence

People Pleasing

1) TRAUMA RESPONSE

There are several reasons why someone in an SM scene might begin to panic: they might have lost trust in the abilities of the Top, perhaps intensity was increased too quickly or someone went further than they felt able to go, or maybe the scene has triggered the recall of an unhappy memory.

Anyone can be triggered in a scene, top, bottom or bystander. Although we can be Tops and bottoms in a scene – we should all be aftercare switches.

Also people can be triggered at any time. It can happen during negotiation, warm up, the scene itself or afterwards.

Triggering can look like increased breathing (*hyperventilating*), upset (*tears*), absence of response (*freezing/ inability to speak*) or reliving a memory.

If this happens, go straight to aftercare. Talk to the person calmly and confidently. Let them know that nothing bad is happening to them and they are safe.

If reliving a memory: Reassure them of today's date and time – that thing they think is happening is in the past.

Remove blindfolds and anything to do with sensory deprivation. Loosen anything around their neck (even if you think it's already loose).

If possible let them see daylight or the natural world.

Get them to slow their breathing by matching yours or breathing into a paper bag.

Wait to untie hands and feel until you know they won't strike you.

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Go slow – let them sit up slowly, then stand slowly, then walk with you. Don't let them walk too soon or go anywhere alone.

Here are some of the stages where you can reduce the chances of a panic attack occurring:

- **Have you asked the bottom for a full disclosure of their physical and mental health BEFORE the scene begins?**
- **Are you both fit and mentally alert? Had enough sleep and enough to eat?**
- **Acknowledge your mistakes.**
- **Watch out for changes in their behaviour.**
- **Does anyone appear to be in another place or time?**

Watch out for a BDSM player who is **UNCONSCIOUSLY BLOCKING** what's going on – may be a sign of trauma/ abuse/ bereavement that needs counselling.

Tops can hit mental landmines and/ or and use safe words too.

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2) NEURODIVERGENCE

An autistic person may go into shutdown, meltdown or burnout

People who have alexithymia struggle to name their feelings

In cases of sensory overwhelm – get them somewhere dark and quiet to reset

If someone is in a state of dysregulation, a breathing exercise is a good catch-all if what haven't told you specifics of what helps them reset

Where possible encourage asynchronous communication, where someone has processing time before they answer

SHAME

If you need to pause or stop a scene, be ready to deal with someone feeling shame.

It was explained to me that "guilt, when it's working correctly, is your conscience telling you you've done something wrong. Shame is when you think you ARE wrong."

We've been told we ARE wrong all our lives. We don't need to carry that shame any more. There is nothing wrong with being neurodivergent.

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3) PEOPLE PLEASING

One Yes/ One No

If you feel you don't have a voice or not sure who the "real you" is, here's an exercise that may be useful:

Each week try to find one thing to say "yes" to that's just for you, and one thing to say "no" to that you don't want to do.

It doesn't matter how big or small the things are. It might be "yes" to something that reduces your anxiety but you were always told off for doing – or "no" to going somewhere where you'll have to mask to fit in.

It's up to you what they are, but I've seen people grow and find their voice using this technique.

Parts Language

This can be useful for working out what you don't like about a situation – which can be turned into a conversation about accommodations. It can also help relaying that information to other people: "*Part of me wants to, but part of me doesn't*" is easier to say and hear than "*I don't want to go do X*". There are lots of YouTube videos about parts language, for

example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWzB1sYJB-M>

Replace "Selfish" with "Sustainable"

You might see setting boundaries as being selfish. Another way of looking at boundaries is SUSTAINABILITY: "*I'm making myself sustainable today so that I can help you tomorrow.*"

Remind yourself of the consequences of not speaking up: unbalanced scales

Remind yourself of times when you spoke up and it went okay

Pick a mantra that works ("*You got this!*", "*You're a gangster*")

Use the phrase "*I'm going to give myself permission to...*"

If you have to give an answer when you don't know, people pleasers often give the answer they think the other person wants to hear. Try saying "*I don't know, I'll have to get back to you*" instead.

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TIPS FOR EVERYONE TO USE

5 stages of a scene:

1) Negotiation

At all stages: Allow for thinking time when you ask questions – and let people know they can come back to you when they have the answer.

Offer folk more than one way to communicate: can they send answers written as well as verbally? Encourage all forms of communication, not just spoken words

You can submit a journal if there's stuff you've written in advance

Set up a non-verbal safeword and discuss in advance what you will do if anyone can't speak up. Is there a way you can let the other person know?

If you think someone is people pleasing or doesn't know the answer, you can double check: *"Are you saying this for my benefit, or is it something you really want to do?"*

Ask in negotiation: *"what does good aftercare look like for you?"*

2) Warm Up

Some people struggle with "code switching" from one activity to another, and so the warm up is an important stage to let your partner adjust to what's about to happen.

3) The scene itself

If your play partner can't answer internal questions: *"are you thirsty?"* – try an external question: *"when did you last have something to drink?"*

For the Tops: consider co-topping with someone else who can take over if you need a break

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Build in transitions between activities

Wait for a response if an answer is slower than normal.

During a scene if you notice any player has a "*change of state*" – use that as an opportunity to check in. The other person may not have noticed themselves and appreciate the chance to self-reflect.

4)Aftercare – applies to everyone and may not be what you think

5)Checking in later

If there have been occasions when you lost your words note down what happened, and discuss away from the scene what's going on (*maybe check in with a professional*)

Are there other times (apart from kink) when you also struggle to speak up?

Don't make assumptions based on what people look like: "*they seemed to be full of confidence, so I expected them to be able to speak up*"

You can hurt someone in a good way (positive BDSM) or hurt them in a bad way (abuse)

You can also have someone surrender in a healthy way, or they could be squashing their own needs and invalidating themselves through masking/ people pleasing/ fear

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Track everyone's self-esteem over time. If you play with someone over a period of time and it's healthy – your self-esteem should be growing. That's one of the big differences because BDSM and abuse. If we do a punching scene that's fun and everyone's well-being is looked after – we should feel better about ourselves afterwards. If someone doesn't: if there are feelings of fear, shame, violation or your self-esteem is reducing – stop what you're doing and seek help.

That's not to say self-esteem will rise after every scene. If you are playing with someone who always feels great even what they caused an injury – that's a warning sign to look out for.

If someone has no concept of "self esteem" – they could look at how connected they are as an alternative. When we feel smaller or more ashamed we withdraw and have less desire for connection. If you are losing contact with friends or family that can also be a sign that something might need investigating.

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT INFORMED CONSENT – THAT HAS TO APPLY INTERNALLY AS WELL AS EXTERNALLY.

We're not just being informed and consenting to the specifics of the BDSM scene happening to us – we're also being informed and consenting to what's going on inside of us. That may mean doing some detective work to find out who you really are, especially if you have grown up putting on a front for other people.

One way to help is to ask yourself some questions:

Am I doing this because I like it?

What does my body want?

(If I don't want to do it) What is it about this that I don't like?

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Being Brave

www.cmonmama.com and it says it much better than I could:

As my daughter watched her big brother hold an alligator, she declined the opportunity. The alligator's keeper pushed her to try holding it. She declined again. Then he remarked that usually the girls are even braver than the boys (*to which my son gave side eye, ha*) & that she must not be feeling brave that day.

He couldn't have been more wrong.

I took my daughter aside, looked right into her eyes & told her how brave she actually *was* being in that exact moment. I pointed out the bravery it takes to stand up for what you do or don't want to do, *especially* when you feel pressured.

I don't need my daughter to be brave enough to hold an alligator. I need her to be brave enough to stand her ground. Brave enough to trust the boundaries of what she does & doesn't feel comfortable with. Brave enough not to bend because the world says she should.

THAT'S the kind of brave I want her to be.

I think she's well on her way.

(More from CMONMAMA at
to www.instagram.com/cmon.mama/ and www.cmonmama.com/links/)

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Resources:

For info on kink I like the pocket book *"The toybag guide to Dungeon Emergencies and Supplies"* by Jay Wiseman

For info on autism the book *"Unmasking Autism"* by Dr Devon Price

ONYX is an organisation that centres on the needs and desires of gay and bisexual Men of Color (<https://www.onyxmen.com/faq/>)

Fetlife also has many groups for People of Color (<https://fetlife.com/search/groups?q=POC>)

Hashtags: #AutisticWhileBlack #BlackAutisticPride and #BlackAutisticLivesMatter

Websites such as <https://neuroclastic.com>

On social media following the hashtag #actuallyautistic

Neurodivergent Practitioners Directory – a searchable database of Neurodivergent therapists, coaches and assessment services (<https://neurodivergentpractitioners.org>)

Kink and Polyamory Aware Professionals Directory (KAP) – directory of psychotherapeutic, medical, legal and other professionals who have stated that they are knowledgeable about and sensitive to diverse expressions of sexuality. (<https://www.kaprofessionals.org>)

Pink Therapy - directory of qualified LGBTQIA+ friendly therapists and counsellors (<https://pinktherapy.com/>)

I am also available for one-to-one kink mentoring and helping neurodivergent folk work out what that means for them:

My coaching website is <https://www.johnpental.com/>

And my kink mentoring page is <http://www.leatherlondonguide.com/coach.html>

Email: johnpental.coach@gmail.com

I teach monthly workshops online. There's a list of upcoming events and ticket links at <http://www.leatherlondonguide.com/contact-me.html>