



BDSM vs. Abuse

The following Principles and Guidelines are intended to help law enforcement and social services professionals understand the difference between abusive relationships vs. consensual sadomasochism (BDSM). BDSM includes a broad and complex group of behaviors between consenting adults involving the consensual exchange of power, and the giving and receiving of intense erotic sensation and/or mental discipline.

BDSM includes: "intimate activities within the scope of informed consent that is freely given."

Abuse is: "Physical, sexual or emotional acts inflicted on a person without their informed and freely given consent."

Principles

The BDSM-Leather-Fetish communities recognize the phrase "Safe, Sane, Consensual" as the best brief summary of principles guiding BDSM practices:

Safe is being knowledgeable about the techniques and safety concerns involved in what you are doing, and acting in accordance with that knowledge.

Sane is knowing the difference between fantasy and reality, and acting in accordance with that knowledge.

Consensual is respecting the limits imposed by each participant at all times. One of the recognized ways to maintain limits is through a "safeword" which ensures that each participant can end his/her participation with a word or gesture.

Guidelines

Informed consent must be judged by balancing the following criteria for each encounter at the time the acts occurred:

Was informed consent expressly denied or withdrawn?

Were there factors that negated the informed consent?

What is the relationship of the participants?

What was the nature of the activity?

What was the intent of the accused abuser?

Whether an individual's role is top/dominant or bottom/submissive, they could be suffering abuse if they answer no to any of the following questions:

Are your needs and limits respected?

Is your relationship built on honesty, trust, and respect?

Are you able to express feelings of guilt or jealousy or unhappiness?

Can you function in everyday life?

Can you refuse to do illegal activities?

Can you insist on safe sex practices?

Can you choose to interact freely with others outside of your relationship?

Can you leave the situation without fearing that you will be harmed, or fearing the other participant(s) will harm themselves?

Can you choose to exercise self-determination with money, employment, and life decisions?

Do you feel free to discuss your practices and feelings with anyone you choose?