



Lifestyle / Sex and Love

The Beginner's Guide to BDSM

If the release of *Fifty Shades Darker* has you feeling inspired...

By Krissy Brady | Feb 10, 2017

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With Valentine's Day right around the corner and the latest installment in the *Fifty Shades* movies series, *Fifty Shades Darker*, hitting theaters today, chances are you could have some sexy thoughts on the brain—so maybe you're looking to kink things up a bit. Fantasies and experimentation are what keep sex exciting, so if you want to tear a page out of Anastasia's steamy sex logs but aren't sure where to start, we got you. (And if you're interested in spicing

up your *solo* sex life, we've got you covered there too: [12 Steps to Better Masturbation.](#))

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BDSM 101

BDSM is often referred to as power play or dominant/submissive play, and can involve bondage and discipline (B&D), and sado-masochism (S/M), in which partners explore sensations, including pain, while testing the power dynamics of their relationship, explains certified sex therapist [Kat Van Kirk, Ph.D.](#) "Because it's considered a 'power exchange,' this means that play should be consensual, safe, and sane," she says.

No type of power play is considered "abnormal" so long as those involved in the action are willing participants and it doesn't interfere with other aspects of life. You can make the experience whatever you want—some people may dabble in a specific behavior or two, while others prefer to act out entire scenes. (BTW, apparently [kinky sex can make you more mindful](#), so that's another bonus.)

"A little power playing can be just what the doctor ordered for a stagnating sexual relationship because it can shift the dynamic, create a healthy sense of sexual drama, and improve emotional intimacy," says Van Kirk.

Ready to get down to business? Here's everything you need to know about adding a little spice (and spank) to your sex life:

1. Ditch the shame—and do your homework.

"BDSM is about intense sensations, role play, and physical challenges endured for the sake of pleasure," says sexologist [Gloria Brame, Ph.D.](#), author of *Different Loving Too*. "Whatever BDSM games may look like on the outside to frightened prudes, the inside reality is that it's insanely exciting, unbelievably intimate, and so fun that you lose all track of time." However, rushing into BDSM before you've accepted and embraced your needs and given yourself permission to ask for what you really want is, in short, a bad idea. "The number-one mistake women make is expecting their partner to give them permission to enjoy their own fantasies," she says. So, read a lot, surf a lot, and make sure you feel empowered to go after what you want, instead of just dumping fantasies in your partner's lap and expecting someone to act on them.

2. Make a list of what you want to experience in the

boudoir.

"Before you deep dive into your fantasies and go naughty before nice, it's actually useful to make a list of what you want and check it twice—once by yourself, and once with your partner," says Los Angeles-based sexologist [Christine Milrod, Ph.D.](#) Planning in advance helps you gauge what each other's boundaries are—breath play might be kosher, but blood play not so much—while building anticipation for the big event. (And if you're not sure what your fantasies even are, the [National Coalition for Sexual Freedoms](#) provides a thorough list of practices that fall under the BDSM category.)

3. Approach your partner with a BDSM-positive attitude.

Approaching this particular sex talk in an upbeat, frisky way will make your partner more curious and willing to explore your fantasies. "We're all wired to be curious about sexual variety," says Brame. "We all instinctively want to try things that could make us more turned on too." Need a super-easy way to broach the subject? Read him your favorite passage from a sexy book—you know, the one you read when it's just you and your vibrator. "If nothing else, it's a great place to start the conversation and let him know what turns you on," says Brame.

4. Try each activity one at a time.

"Many people are vastly unprepared and end up going overboard, with less than optimal results," says Milrod. If you want to explore spanking, for example, focus on that activity specifically, thinking about the location of your session (think: bed, or kitchen), laying out the props (hair brush, paddle, riding crop) and then engaging with each other in a way that feels comfortable for both of you, she says. Savor each move, and the effect, whether you're the giver or the receiver.

5. Respect each other's boundaries.

"Creating and adhering to the safe word is paramount," says Milrod. "Activities can always be up for negotiation, but not usually while you're engaged in play. This is why it's so important to write the prescription beforehand—nasty surprises aren't always what you bargained for." Always remember that the *second* it stops being pleasurable to you, it means your relationship has gone to an unhealthy place. "Use safe words, negotiate boundaries, keep it safe, and *expect* pleasure," says Brame.

6. Don't be afraid to switch things up.

If you're just starting your journey, don't limit yourself with labels or assume you'll always play only one role. You may find that you enjoy switching roles or that your own definition of yourself needs to be stretched in new ways. "Let your turn-ons guide you to explore new

fantasies and roles, and don't feel like you *must* pick one and stick with it," says Brame. (Next up: [How to Have a One-Night Stand with Your Partner](#).)

7. Check in with each other afterward.

Processing the experience after-the-fact is just as important as planning for it. "Practicing BDSM requires communication—so don't walk away with assumptions in mind," says Milrod. Being honest and asking questions won't just help you create future mind-blowing experiences, but will boost your intimacy and closeness in a big way. (P.S. Here are the [conversations to have with your partner for a better O.](#)) "Remember, this is your (and your partner's) very own world," adds Milrod. Treat it with respect.

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