

GUIDE TO NAVIGATING SEX+ SPACES AT BURNS

(How to take care of yourself and others)

Welcome! This guide is here to help you have a fantastic time at Burns, particularly at the sex positive spaces and workshops.

WHY CONSENT?

We make a safe, loving, open and relaxed experience for each other by learning about consent, noticing each other, and looking out for one another with care and without judgement - and **when we feel safe and supported** we can really have the **maximum fun**.

WHEN IS CONSENT RELEVANT?

Consent is super important in sexual activities, but it is also **important in all our interactions** e.g. when asking someone to do a task, spraying someone with water, offering someone food, drinks and substances, taking photos, coming for a hug and wanting touch, borrowing something, moving someone's possessions etc.

To create a 24/7 culture of safety and support try to **get in the habit of noticing people and checking in with them**. One way to do that is to ask them what they need.

If you notice someone looking uncomfortable, **always act**. Intervene **ONLY** if you feel comfortable to do so. If you don't feel comfortable, or are unsure how to intervene, **ask for help**.

RESPECT and INCLUSION, NO JUDGEMENT

Be mindful of each other's **cultures, language, and communication styles**. What is common in one culture, for example greeting someone with a kiss, might be seen as unusual or very intimate in another culture.

Be patient when communicating and take care to **see that you have really been understood** - many people are not speaking their first language, and there are also plenty of neurodivergent people at Burns.

No matter how somebody appears to you, **don't make assumptions** about their gender or how they like to be defined - this may also be

different for them on the playa than how they identify in the default world.

Be mindful of your statements and judgements about others - they are your subjective experience and it is not your place to give yourself the authority to define others. Even if you perceive what you say to be positive it can be disempowering.

In keeping with the core Burn Principles of Radical Inclusion and Radical Self Expression – **bring acceptance to however others choose to dress, express themselves, and what excites them.** Place no judgement on anyone else's (or your own) desires - there is a wonderful variety in how life moves through us. Whether you want to participate or not, there is no problem with the desire or the person who has it.

EXPRESSING DESIRES/REQUESTS

Express your desires and requests whilst keeping them **contained within you.** It's really about keeping the energy of the desire within you, owning it and celebrating it. You can love that desire just for arising. There is no rush to get a quick answer and start doing something - when we give that energy it can feel pushy and put pressure on others.

When we feel dependent in some way on getting a 'yes' - if our sense of **self value** is caught up in it - we are setting ourselves up to feel hurt or angry. We cannot be open to connecting unless we are honestly open to receiving how the other person responds. And if we are not, that other person will probably feel uncomfortable.

Expressing your desires in the first person through a statement rather than a question can be a way to really own and celebrate them whilst creating space for the other person. For example, **saying 'I would like to kiss you' instead of asking 'can I kiss you?'** But however you communicate, the words are only as consensual as the energy behind them.

WATCHING

If you are in a sex+ space it's quite likely you will see other people interacting sexually - it's no problem and encouraged to scan the space to check everyone looks comfortable and not frozen or out of consent.

But if you are watching for longer than a moment because you are taking pleasure from the scene you are now making yourself part of it and you need to ask the consent of everyone involved to do so.

Here's a quick description of Consent. If these five things are present you are in consent.

CONSENT

(the explicit or implicit expression made by a person that they are willing to perform an act at the request of one or more other persons, or to have something done to them by one or more other persons.)

FREELY GIVEN

In order to freely give their consent, the person being asked must -

not be coerced (feel a sense of threat, or force)

not be pressured (either explicitly or implicitly by a power imbalance)

be in a state where they can take in information, ask questions, and make decisions (factors affecting this include alcohol, substances, burnout)

INFORMED

Everyone involved must know what's going to happen in as much detail as is necessary to them

REVERSIBLE

Consent is reversible and can be withdrawn or downgraded any time, for any reason

Consent must be continuously present during the act – it's very common to find the experience of doing something different to how we each imagined it would be when it was discussed

Continuing anything that doesn't feel right is being out of consent

No justification is needed to withdraw or downgrade consent

ENTHUSIASTIC

An active willingness to engage must be present – anything less should be considered a No until there is clarification

A fawn response, silence, passivity or lack of resistance is not consent

SPECIFIC

Consent is given for the act discussed and in that moment - If the act is changing or escalating, check in and get some more consent

There needs to be consent from everyone involved - if you want to join a group interaction first make sure every person gives consent

Let's look at INFORMED and FREELY GIVEN in more detail.

INFORMED

When describing what you would like to do, give clear and positive requests and be open to being asked questions clarifying what you want to do together.

Depending on the activity being suggested, some of the following information could be important to discuss -

Relationships – the relationships either of you are in, or your relating styles, might be relevant to how you place boundaries on the activity and what meaning each of you give to it. Transparency always builds trust, helps everyone to make informed decisions and create more accurate expectations.

Boundaries - clearly communicate your boundaries for that specific interaction e.g. I don't want any genital touch at this point.

Meaning – communicate what meaning you would give the activity. Would it be a special moment of togetherness without any expectation of future interactions? Or by consenting to this activity would it mean the start of some kind of relationship to you? Understanding this can avoid anyone feeling hurt later if their uncommunicated hopes aren't met.

Communication – if verbal communication might not be possible (because of restraint or sound systems) agree another clear method of communication for the activity such as double tapping to indicate 'stop'

Sexual Health – discuss your boundaries around mixing your bodily fluids together!

- Ask when each person last had a sexual health check and what their risk profile might be (remember some issues take time before they can be tested)
- Discuss what protection you would like to use in the activity

Physical Health – are there any parts of your body that require extra care? e.g. 'My shoulder is recovering from build, please don't put pressure just here'

Time – how long will the activity last?

Trauma Responses – be mindful of your own triggers and responses. Communicate them, and what you need when they arise, before the activity.

For example...

'I occasionally go into a freeze response, I'll feel safe and enthusiastic about this activity if you are able to be observant, check-in, and notice if I am not responding. If I can't say that I am ok or nod my head then please pause and stay with me until I can.'

Remember we are all still figuring ourselves out and something unexpected might surface. Be prepared to welcome and respond to whatever comes up by supporting and holding space for each other without judgement.

BDSM – explore what additional measures you each need in place so that the interaction feels safe and contained.

Witnesses – if others will see a sexual act check if the space you are in is appropriate and if those around consent to witness/watch

Aftercare – ask what you each would need to feel held and supported after the discussed activity. That could be directly afterwards such as being held, or something the next day like a chat and check-in on how you're each feeling.

FREELY GIVEN

For consent to be present, a person must not be coerced (feel a sense of threat, or force) or pressured (either explicitly or implicitly by a power imbalance)

Imbalances of power, of varying degrees, are present in all our interactions...

POWER IMBALANCES

To ensure that consent is Freely Given we all need to be mindful of how we see others and how others may see us. This is present in all interactions - when asking for consent for a sexual activity, asking others to do something, in whose guidance we tend to follow, and whose voice and opinions are given the most value in a decision making process.

Be particularly careful in sexual interactions because an appease or fawn response can appear like enthusiasm.

By bringing awareness to this, we can help mitigate the effects of the biases created by real and perceived power imbalances.

Here are some examples of characteristics:

Authority e.g. Barrio Leads, facilitators, anyone who holds a position of power, **Social Standing**, **Experience** e.g. how long someone has been in a barrio, been going to burns etc., **Personality traits** e.g. outgoing and confident people, **Size and Physical Strength** - does it appear that you might easily physically overpower the other person, **Age**, **Disability**, **Neurodivergence**, **Gender**, **Colour**, **Country of Birth**, **Location**, **Occupation**, **Wealth**, **Family background**

GIVING and RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Giving practical feedback in the moment is essential to keep everyone safe and in consent e.g. 'slow down', 'my hair is caught under your arm and it's uncomfortable'. Remember that the people you are interacting with cannot read your mind and need you to communicate clearly when something isn't right. Don't overthink it - if you feel uncomfortable, something isn't right. If your feedback isn't understood or acted upon, ask to pause or stop the interaction.

On receiving practical feedback adjust your behaviour and thank them for taking care of themselves. Getting feedback is an opportunity to make everyone's experience more safe and wonderful. It is not a criticism or condemnation of you or your behaviour, but instead shows a commitment to the interaction.

When your feedback is more of a **reflection**, ask permission from the intended recipient before sharing it. Check in with yourself who the feedback is really about and what your purpose is in offering it. If the recipient is open to hearing it, speak in the first person about **your experience and your needs** e.g. 'I noticed I felt uncomfortable when exposed to a certain behaviour and realise what would help me feel safer in the future...'

WHEN WE MAKE MISTAKES

We're human, we make mistakes. Being human is a learning process. The most important part is how we respond when we notice, or someone brings our attention to, something we are doing/did that caused someone to feel uncomfortable.

- **Stop immediately**
- **Thank them** for bringing it to your attention
- **Listen** to the other person's experience and ask them what they need
- **Don't react defensively** or **trivialise the harm** that was caused
- **Notice what is happening in your body** as you receive the information - if you feel dysregulated communicate that and ask for time out if you need it
- **Offer an apology** either directly, or indirectly through the person who brought it to your attention, and ask for what you can do to help them feel better
- **Ask them if you can explain** what happened from your point of view
- If they don't want to listen at that point offer them time and **say you're available** for any mediation they'd like in the future
- **Acknowledge how what happened happened** and explore what you could do differently in the future
- **Get support**

REJECTION

Sometimes what we have to offer doesn't meet someone else's desires in that moment. This can be for many reasons, both simple and complex. On receiving a 'no' try to thank them for taking care of themselves, inwardly appreciate yourself for your vulnerability in asking for what you want, and move on.

The **experience of rejection** arises when we interpret that 'no', however it is given, to mean something intrinsic about us - that there is something 'wrong with us' or 'unlovable'. If we **give this meaning** to the situation it can feel really painful, there can be a sense of fear, hopelessness or anger. Those feelings can arise quickly and be very intense.

If you notice yourself feeling this way, take yourself to a safe place and either give yourself care or get support from others. Breathe, feel into your body and honour your feelings – they are a natural and beautiful expression of your humanity. Offer yourself love, reassurance and grounding. The experience you are having is not about the other person. Notice the power you are giving away in allowing your sense of self worth to be dependent on a momentary interaction. And forgive yourself for doing that.

THANK YOU FOR READING - your feedback and contribution would be really valued – send a message to Anna at anna@nobodies.team