

# Autism and Kink Handout

## WHO AM I?

My name is John Pental. Since 2004 I have been a professional BDSM educator teaching workshops worldwide, and now work as an online coach helping kinky and neurodivergent clients 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>

I have blog posts on my website <https://www.johnpental.com/blog.html> and writings on my Fetlife profile @KinkyLifeCoach

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## NEURODIVERGENCE

Here are some examples of neurodivergence. There are wide varieties within each type, so I'll give a typical "lay description" of each:

**ADHD** – may be impulsive, restless, difficult starting tasks/ told off for not listening or keeping still

**Alexithymia** – may have feeling and emotions, but struggle to name them/ told off for not showing love

**Autism** – *"I have eight times the nerve endings for taking in the world, 100 times the nerve endings for overthinking situations and none of the nerve endings for talking when I'm upset"*/ often told off for saying the wrong thing in conversations or being weird

**Dyslexia** – may have difficulty reading or writing, or telling left from right

**Dyspraxia** – difficulties with co-ordination/ told off for being clumsy

**Hyperlexia** – children learn to read early, and may be self-taught/ told off for being precocious

**Tourette's Syndrome** – live with uncontrollable desires to make sounds or movements

**Synesthesia** – where senses overlap, so numbers may have colours or sounds may have smells

**MASKING** – is a form of hiding who you are to fit in, often used by members of any minority group as a means of retreating to safety. If you are autistic masking is often unconscious and comes with a huge energy cost – often leading to shutdown, meltdown or burnout.

## **LANGUAGE**

The golden rule when you're talking with someone is to honour how they describe themselves, whether that's their name, pronoun or identity. If someone tells me they have "high functioning autism" or "Aspergers", that's what I use in our conversations.

However, if you're talking more broadly – maybe in a presentation or website – to anyone who might be Autistic there are some recommended practices to follow which can help mark you as an Ally.

## **IDENTITY FIRST LANGUAGE**

Within the autistic community we tend to prefer IDENTITY FIRST LANGUAGE: *"An autistic person"*.

The medical community tends to prefer PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE: *"A person with autism"*.

We tend to put things that are permanent, benign or part of our identity first: *"I'm a six foot tall, blonde haired, bearded gay man."*

And things which are temporary or unpleasant second: *"I'm a man who has headaches and a bad back"*.

If you say someone is "with" something, there's an implication that they can be without it. *"I'm someone with a bad back"* – means I could be without it one day.

I won't ever be *"without autism"*. It's who I am.

It's also a useful indicator of whether someone is affirming towards the subject matter. I'm more comfortable with people who say *"He's a gay man"* (identity first) than people who say *"he's a person with homosexual tendencies/ same sex attraction"* (person first).

## **A NOTE ON INTERSECTIONALITY**

Racism – Impact is more important than Intent.

Neurodivergence – we have to acknowledge Intent *as well* as Impact.  
Neurodivergent folk have often spent their lives being told they said something wrong, or in the wrong way, because we communicate differently.

Let's be kind and if something comes up that upsets anyone – acknowledge intent as well as impact.

There are posts about **FUNCTIONING LABELS** (“high and low functioning”) and **SPOON THEORY** on my website <https://www.johnpendal.com/blog.html> and Fetlife @ KinkyLifeCoach

## **AUTISTIC VS NEUROTYPICAL COMMUNICATION**

These are general stereotypes, so please don't worry if these don't apply to you:

### **AUTISTIC COMMUNICATION favours**

Info dumps (*it can be low cost for us to continue with a thought, and high cost to have a thought interrupted*)

More direct conversation

People speaking the truth (*there's an expectation that they are, and it's costly to find out that they're not*)

No small talk

Might prefer non-spoken communication such as texts, emails, pictures, memes, emoji, photos, diagrams, pointing, sign language or assisted communication devices.

Autistic folk like being given clear opportunities to join in

We tend to see everyone as equal

Showing empathy by telling a story from our own lives

Asynchronous communication (*you can answer in your own time*)

### **NEUROTYPICAL COMMUNICATION favours**

Spoken words

Eye contact

People taking turns

Social hierarchies

Interruptions are sometimes okay (*but I don't know the rules*)

Small talk and "niceties" are important

Politics/ people not always saying what they mean

## WHY KINK ENVIRONMENTS ARE ATTRACTIVE TO AUTISTIC PEOPLE

I can't tune out distractions in vanilla pubs and clubs. Even the mildest gay pub usually has shouting to get a drink at the bar and a mirror ball. Any place with a dance floor is deafening loud with spinning lights or a laser show. Compare that to your average dungeon: subdued lighting, static white spotlights on equipment, low music to provide atmosphere but not spoil the play.

And if you need things really quiet I thoroughly recommend rope dojos/ Shibari practice clubs. The silence while people concentrate is delicious.

People are regularly wondering how I didn't pick up on social cues in everyday life. Kink has lots of visual aids that can help. Bag full of rope? *Probably a rigger.* Covered in bruises? *Most likely a submissive.* Red hanky back left pocket? *Fisting top.* Collar around their neck? *Look out for their owner.* Hood with a snout and mits? *My guess is they're into puppy play.* I once managed to pull at the Hoist just by standing still with my head bowed and my hands behind my back, because the other guy was wearing a Muir cap.

I'm not a fan of mess. I know some kink can be REALLY mucky, but let's face it if you want to wipe down surfaces with mild bleach before you have sex a kinky player isn't going to mind. They'll probably respect you for thinking ahead. Looking at scenes I've been drawn to: stun guns, medical scenes, fire play, escaping from bondage - all activities I could wipe everything down before and after.

I love intense sensations that I've asked for - they seem to drop my thoughts into my body and turn my brain off, calming me down. (*Mind you a tiny sensation I haven't asked for, like a dripping tap, will drive me nuts.*) Talking to other autistic people many of us seem to like sensations that take us out of our heads, like sleeping under a weighted blanket. I look back on my favourite kinks (trampling, stun guns, impact play, interrogation) and now I think **"WAS I JUST LOOKING FOR A WEIGHTED BLANKET?!!"**

Many kink folk find it restores themselves to be given PROPRIOCEPTIVE FEEDBACK – being told where our body is in space. That might come from deep tissue massage, weighted blankets, or lifting weights in the vanilla world – or tight bondage and impact play in kink.

Some autistic people use the intense sensations of a scene to drown out sensory input they don't want.

Trying to chat people up for vanilla sex completely mystifies me. There are no rules. You're meant to have a natural, unstructured conversation that puts you both at ease? Not happening for me.

Compare that to kink style negotiation. Someone in charge. **CONVERSATIONS HAVE A POINT.** *If you're lucky there's a questionnaire.* If you're shy you can respectfully submit a journal. Topics to cover, questions that need to be asked (needs/ wants/ desires/ limits/ past experience/ relevant history). So much easier and more direct. It's almost as if kink was created with autistic people in mind.

It doesn't matter how clueless you are compared to other people: **YOU CAN TAKE CLASSES IN KINK.** I repeat: *there are workshops!*

Some autistic folk can relax when being Dominated, because at last they know what the rules are – they're not having to figure stuff out and then be told they got it wrong.

Other autistic folk can relax when they are being Dominant, because they can set their own routines

**Some extra reasons given by [www.instagram.com/neuro\\_divers/](https://www.instagram.com/neuro_divers/):**

In one study (Wignall et al. 2023) roughly one half of participants who engaged in pup play had autistic traits

BDSM activity tends to be detail orientated, with a sense of structure and control.

It can help us learn about our body's limits, and processing pain.

Blindfolds and restraints can help someone regulate and remain present

Helps you get in touch with your likes and dislikes

Kinky and Neurodivergent folk are both less likely to adhere to societal norms

Kink allows you to find ways to be safe during a verbal shutdown

Roleplaying allows you to be someone else for a bit

There's no pressure to participate if you don't want

If you are gagged no talking is needed

Primal and pet play take away the pressure of speaking

Fulfills sensory needs

Gives you a checklist

There's no pressure to conform

It takes "no" seriously

Helps me feel part of the rest of society when I don't normally fit in

Some ADHD insight- it 100% adds the variety that ADHD people tend to love, and can add some needed stimulation if the ADHD person has trouble staying engaged. Plus- ADHD people can be indecisive and have trouble deciding what to do in any given scenario, so narrowing the scope of possible things they can do makes it easier to be decisive and hot.

Each autistic person is going to have their own reasons.

## **What is an AUTISTIC FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT?**

- Remove sensory input which may cause distress or overload
- Allow time for processing and transitions between activities
- Encourage all forms of communication, not just spoken words
- Give explicit instructions about how an activity is to be completed
- Where possible build in structure and routine
- Include activities that allow an autistic person to regulate their senses
- Education is provided according to the autistic person's learning style: *Do they learn by watching or doing? Are they a visual learner? Can they see the end result?*

### **CHALLENGE**

Write down a list of three or four things that you could do to make your home, professional space or play area a more autistic friendly environment.



## 5 STAGES OF A BDSM SCENE

I tend to think of BDSM scenes in five parts:

### STAGE 1 - NEGOTIATION

This is the exchange of any information relevant to the scene. I might ask for medical history, but for me it's more important to know how much BDSM experience you've had as this will influence how I interpret your answers. I'll treat someone new to the scene who says they have *"no limits"* very differently to someone I've seen play hard and heavy and says the same thing.

Three more tips:

- 1) Some struggle coming up with answers on the spot. Give thinking time. E.g. This could be using voice notes rather than phone calls.
- 2) Provide alternatives to spoken communication
- 3) Check in, is the other person being a people pleaser? *"Are you doing this for my benefit, or is it something you really want to do?"*

You can also ask *"what aftercare have you benefitted from in the past?"* - as a clue towards what you might need to provide this time.

If someone is struggling to answer a questions that's too broad, try adding the word "recent", e.g. "a recent example..."

If they can't answer "what's the favourite thing you'd like to do?" (a HUGE question) try "are there things you know you like?" .... If they still can't answer that try "what do you know you don't like to do." It's all data.

If they can't answer future questions: "would you like to be flogged?" flip it to the past tense: "have you every enjoyed being flogged?"

### STAGE 2 - WARM UP

Having a moment of warm up is really beneficial to ND people, who may struggle starting a new activating - or with switching from one activity to another.

### STAGE 3 - INCREASING INTENSITY

Sudden changes or sensory overload may trigger an autistic shutdown or

meltdown. (Shutdown – energy goes inwards/ Meltdown – energy goes outwards.)

Watch out for autistic overstim and also people being non-responsive. If overwhelmed an autistic person may not be able to give a verbal or physical safeword.

Let folk take breaks if needed.

## **STAGE 4 - IMMEDIATE AFTERCARE**

If a play partner has an autistic meltdown or shutdown, has been triggered, is upset, or reliving a traumatic memory go to stage 4 scene immediately.

Also be prepared to deal with guilt or shame afterwards and tell them they have nothing to feel shame about.

## **STAGE 5 - AFTERCARE PART 2: CHECKING IN LATER**

There are lots of reasons why someone may rethink a scene at a later date, for example:

- They may leave you without bruises, but bruises and other injuries can appear later and be more than the person consented to.
- They may leave you happy with what happened - but have the experienced reframed by vanilla friends or a religious environment giving them guilt and shame
- They may have left you thinking that a slip-up was a one-off accident, but then heard from others that that's a mistake which has happened before and now it looks like a pattern of behaviour
- Even a "positive" outcome (e.g. successfully confronting a phobia) can lead to them questioning other areas of their lives later and needing to talk the experience through.

I've been around some talented Tops who have reputations for "*not doing aftercare*" and they are confused about it as they do look after immediate needs ... but they don't do "*checking in later*" and I think that's where the bad reputation comes from.

**Be aware: if you're playing with someone who has Alexithymia (can't name their feelings) or poor interoception (no internal signals) – asking them how they are doing may not get you any answers. Instead try asking external questions, so**

instead of asking "are you thirsty?" ask "when did you last have a drink?" – or instead of "how are you doing?" try "how has your week been?"

You can also replace the word "feeling" with "thinking" – instead of "how are you feeling?" ask "what are you thinking?"

A third option is to instead of asking about emotions, ask "what's going on in your body?"

## **SELF ESTEEM**

It can be difficult for Neurodivergent folk to know if they are in a relationship which isn't healthy.

One way that can help is to track everyone's self-esteem over time. It should rise on average. 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 an impact play 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 assistance.

That's not to say self-esteem will rise after every scene. If there's been a mistake or an accidental injury – a person will often feel guilty about that and their self-esteem will dip temporarily. If you are playing with someone who always feels great after every scene, even when they caused an injury – that's also a warning sign to look out for.

*(People who are considered sociopaths or narcissists will think that everything they do is great, even when it's not.)*

If you are unable to track self-esteem, can you follow your desire to connect with other people? When we feel worse about ourselves we tend to withdraw and isolate – if we feel good we might want to be with other people.

If you find yourself having less contact with friends and family, that could be an indicator to check what's happening to you.

If your brain can't answer these questions, try asking "*what is your body telling you?*". Before I knew I was autistic I never listened to my body, and just went along with everyone else. Now I get to ask.

## **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>)

<https://www.facebook.com/AutisticTyping/posts/455214035079000>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/blackautistics/>

<https://thepunkrockautistic.com/the-punk-rock-autistic-resources/>

Hashtags: #AutisticWhileBlack #BlackAutisticPride and #BlackAutisticLivesMatter

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

On social media following the hashtag #actuallyautistic

IG account @neuro\_divers

**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.johnpendal.com/>

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

Email: [johnpendal.coach@gmail.com](mailto:johnpendal.coach@gmail.com)

My Neurokinky tshirt is available from <https://rainbow-dragon.co.uk/1476-neurokinky>

Please ask if you have any questions.

Thanks, John

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