



When to Stop Play

Recently I was asked “how do you know when to stop a scene or to push the submissive’s limits when a safe word has NOT been used”? I am posting my thoughts on the subject below with my usual disclaimer. Which is that this is my opinion only and does not say, or imply, that it is the only way, right way, etc. to approach this subject or to play.

Also, in this post Top and Dominant are all inclusive, as are bottom and submissive.

Lady Beth and I believe an understanding of two phrases are the keys to making the “stop or continue to play” decision. One is "understand the submissive mind set" and the other is "read the sub". Both of these can be discussed and debated endlessly, but this is what we believe to be the “basics”.

Regarding the “submissive mindset” they want to please/serve the Top, never disappoint them, so they will try very hard to not use safe words, some to the point of being hurt badly both physically and mentally. They also hear about "their limits being pushed" in various discussions in the lifestyle (much of it on-line, with some of this from people who do not have any real life experience), so they think this is the way it is supposed to be. Additionally some Dominants discourage "communication" from the bottom in play, or do not allow it at all, because they are playing entirely for themselves, or they feel they know what is best regardless. All this adds to the bottom's determination to not use safe words.

And then you have the total "newbie" who does not know the answers to hardly any of the negotiation questions we use, so they do not have any idea what to expect or how to react. These are obviously the most difficult to play with and the ones with the most opportunity for a bad experience physically and emotionally.

On a positive side, when the bottom gets into some forms of sub space they either can not form the words fast enough to use the safe words in a timely manner or will not because they are enjoying the "place" they are in so much, physically and mentally, that they do not want to leave there to talk to you. I also think part of this is because a Tops "senses" seem to become sharper and quicker in intense play while the bottom's seem to actually become slower.

This is where "read the sub" comes into the play. For us, the ultimate goal is to know when the bottom is at their limit before they do, or can form the words to tell us. This is especially important with "newbies". To accomplish this, the Top must focus totally on the bottom. They must shut out everything else and everyone else around them and continually read every detail of the bottoms body language and any sounds they are making. Things like the way they may make the "OH!" versus "ooooohhh" sounds, if their muscles are bunching up in their back or shoulders, their body is stiff, they are locking their knees, or they are becoming unstable on their feet. It is always better to err on the side of caution and stop play or try and communicate with them softly and massage them to try and get them back "in place". If they can not communicate with you in a rational manner or connect with you physically, take them down and do good aftercare, unless you are absolutely sure you know where they are "at" and have negotiated in advance to go a bit further. Note: What I mean by "connect with you physically" is if they respond to your touch and voice in a loving, happy, manner versus being in obvious pain or recoiling from your touch.

I have had bottoms tell me in aftercare, or follow up after the scene, that they wanted to go further and they always seem surprised when I tell them why I stopped where I did. The next time I have played with these people I was able to take them further and it was always a pleasant experience because they learned more about themselves and how to go further (and I learned more about them). Lady Beth has also had these experiences.

A good analogy of our "play" philosophy is the old saying, "the carrot versus the stick". We believe strongly that it is better to HELP the bottom learn and grow, and the Top learn and grow with them, than to FORCE (push) the bottom to grow. Based on our experience the outcome is usually much better, short and long term. This is because there are two different ways to get to subspace, and each of the subspaces is different (Lady Beth has experienced both to the extreme).

One is very pleasant with good after affects due to the proper mix of natural body chemicals I describe in my writing, “Top Space”. The other is from the body shutting down its senses due to the heavy endorphin rush it produces to escape the unpleasant pain. We believe this one happens more when the limits are "pushed". There are many bottoms who have only experienced this form of subspace and ask for/want it. We do not usually play with bottoms of this mind set, or make it clear we will not play that way. When we do play with bottoms of this mindset we can usually get them to some form of subspace in a lengthy, intense scene. However, every now and then I play with someone that can not get where she wants to be with my style of play. Interestingly enough these are usually very good learning experiences for me. Lady Beth does better with these bottoms than me because she is more sadistic than me.

We believe “understanding the submissive mindset” and “reading the sub” in play are abilities that naturally come (and continually grow), with experience, to a Top who has a mindset and desires that are open to this thought process.

Sir James