



PREVENT. RESIST. SUPPORT.

Episode 12: BDSM & Consent

with Charity Smith



University
of Windsor

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention,
Resistance, and Support

Prevent Resist Support Podcast

Season 2 Episode 12: BDSM & Consent with Charity Smith

Anne Rudzinski: Hi everyone, I'm Anne and this is Prevent Resist Support.

Music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support.

Anne: Hi, everyone, I'm so excited to announce a really exciting episode on BDSM and consent with Charity Smith. Charity is a counselor in Berlin, Germany, and is a friend of a friend which is how I got connected with her for this podcast episode. She specializes in work around couples and relationships, non monogamy and polyamory, kink, and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks. Charity has worked with addiction treatment and recovery, supporting victims of human trafficking and at risk youth. They are such an amazing human. And one of the ways they describe their mission is around working to improve mental health care and support services for 2SLGBTQIA folks, and especially for anyone who has felt underrepresented or unseen in traditional mental health services, which I absolutely love. So before we move into our discussion with Charity, I just want to remind you that we'll provide all the links that we chat about in our description, so you don't have to worry about writing them down. Let's hop right into that interview.

All right, so welcome, Charity. We're so excited to have you here today.

Charity Smith: Hi, I'm excited to be here.

Anne: Can you tell us a little bit about your current job and how you got into this work?

Charity: Yeah, so I'm a registered clinical social worker. And I have my own private practice. It's called Charity Smith Counselling. And I provide counseling to folks who might identify as kinky, queer, non monogamous, anybody who has kind of felt unseen by traditional kind of therapy, mental health, and really working to kind of fulfill some of those gaps so that when people come looking for counseling and support that they can actually bring their whole self to a safer space where they might not be going into a counseling session be like, oh, no, I can't talk about my polyamory or oh, no, I can't talk about my kink for fear of what the counselor might say or react. So that is primarily what I do.

Anne: I love that. And what made you get into that line of counselling?

Charity: So when I was living in Canada, I worked in the addictions field, and really got a really big sense of what kind of supports are there. And then living in Berlin, studying master's in social work and human rights and doing different things, and just really starting to identify how there's so many gaps in kind of like accessing mental health and counselling and support. So I was like, well, I have those skills and I'm from these communities, so why not help my communities?

Anne: I love that I hope some of our listeners are thinking maybe like if you're a student, and you have a specific interest or you're a member of a specific community, maybe, maybe that's something to think about. If you're in counselling, maybe you are going to open some kind of really cool counselling practice here in Canada.

Charity: Yeah.

Anne: That would be awesome. All right. So today, we're chatting about BDSM, which is really exciting. Can you tell us what is BDSM just for like our beginner listeners.

Charity: So the acronym itself is bondage, domination, sadism masochism, big words, but basically, it's kind of like kink. So anything that's outside the normal of what people would relate to sex, so it could be tying each other up, it could be, you know, really enjoying hurting other people, or really enjoy being hurt consensually and negotiating different plays to fulfill different fantasies and different interests and different kinks.

Anne: So how does consent work when you're engaging in BDSM? And how do folks navigate active consent when they're engaging in something maybe that is new to them?

Charity: Well consent is basic line. Consent is agreeing and allowing someone to do things to you, or with you. So like, we can even think of consent in a very non sexual way. Like, I could say, hey, can I borrow your pen? But can I use your pen? And you might say, yes, Charity, you can use my pen. Well, you have just consented to me using your pen. So another way could be like, can I give you a hug? Yes or no? Right? That's, that's consent. So consent is kind of just the very basic of how we engage with people, what we allow people to do to our bodies or our things. So consent, in BDSM, or any kink activity is absolutely crucial. And then understanding what are your boundaries are super important because that informs what you will consent to do. Or when you're negotiating a play, openly negotiating like this is coming up close to what I don't know if I'm okay with this or not so negotiating like how do we approach a boundary? And maybe go over it? And how do we consent to that and talk to you about all the risks and different elements that are involved in whatever play?

Anne: I love that. And then I think another piece that relates to that is power exchange, which we're going to talk about in just a moment. But how does power exchange impact the practice of consent?

Charity: So a lot of people engaging in kink, BDSM, big umbrella term, will use power dynamics. So domination and submission, the S and the D. So, dominance or being dominant is when you are doing things to people and being submissive is when you're having things done. And that does naturally create a power imbalance because one person has more control than the other. To even out that power imbalance is negotiating

and discussing like, what is the submissive prepared and interested in doing? What is the dominant prepared to do because sometimes the submissive might want to go further than what the dominant's boundaries are, and vice versa. So some people say that the submissive can have more control because they're the ones that saying, you can do this to me, we can do this together, because usually, they're the one receiving maybe the pain or the bondage, or whatever kind of play it is. But I think that it can work both ways. And I think we often forget that submissives can also ask dominants to go further than what they would feel comfortable.

Anne: I think our next question was about that power exchange? And how do you engage in that in a healthy way?

Charity: Negotiation and communication, and really feeling like that that can be brought back to you at any time. What I've noticed and like in having experienced my own DS relationships, and seeing other people in DS relationships is that sometimes you might negotiate consent and boundaries at the beginning of the relationship as you enter into it. But then over time, those boundaries, and that consent may erode, because there's no actual kind of revisiting what those boundaries are. And renegotiating boundaries and renegotiating consent, it just sometimes can seem like it erodes over time after being in this relationship and continuing to explore and push boundaries. And sometimes, in this instance, I think more so for the submissive boundaries can be eroded because they just start to go along with things because they're so used to this power dynamic, or maybe feel that they're not able to assert themselves, because that's not their role, or their position in the relationship.

Anne: So it sounds like the ongoing piece is really key to consent. I mean, all the time, but especially here.

Charity: Yeah, all the time. I mean, consenting, communication, and then really negotiation are just so important for all walks of life, but especially when we're engaging in these activities, that can be risky. And like there are some times where, depending on different types of play you're doing, whether it's like, more risky things, including knives, or electricity,

or even some different types of percussion play, or waterplay, or breath play, like those can lead to people dying if things go wrong. So really negotiating and understand where your boundaries in terms of that and following that. And learning how to do this thing safely, is also critically important.

Anne: So I know and have read about there's a bunch of different ways that folks navigate consent in the moment, sometimes there are words, sometimes there are signals. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Charity: Yeah, so in kink, and BDSM usually have their red light, yellow light, green light, so green light, we're good to go. Yellow Light is like yellow, we need to slow down, things are too intense, like getting near kind of a boundary. And red when someone calls red is usually at the boundary, or we've passed the boundary and things need to stop immediately. Yellow and red are kind of like keywords that can be communicated verbally, when in a play situation to say stop, but sometimes when people particularly those who are maybe engaging as a submissive, maybe they lose the ability to use their words because they're in subspace or they're so into the play that they're, they can't engage in words. So giving them tools, something like you know, maybe they hold a ball in their hand and then when they're done and they need to call like yellow or red, they dropped the ball. And that's them saying like, okay, we're done. Could be like snapping the fingers, but also while the play is going on having the dominant check in and it can be really sexy be like, hey, how are you doing is like hurting or, you know, making consent sexy. And making this check in sexy and making it part of the negotiation that the dominant is going to check in at various points in different ways. And it could be like, if you cannot say yes or no, shake your head up and down or left and right or open, close fists or open hand to use different types of signals, but also negotiating and talking about what different signals or gestures or words you're going to use before the play occurs so that when you in that moment, both people have already agreed on this is how we're going to do it. So it's clear.

Anne: I love that you talked about like consent being sexy, because I think I always see those like short Facebook shareables that say like, consent is sexy and it's crossed out and it just says like, mandatory. And like, yes,

consent is mandatory. But also it can be sexy. Like, it can really be sexy. It doesn't always have to be sexy but there are times when consent is so sexy, right?

Charity: Yeah.

Anne: And so I'm always, like, kind of bummed out by that, because I'm like, obviously, it doesn't have to be sexy. But to take that out, I think it's kind of sad.

Charity: Yeah, like you have someone come up and whisper in your ear, like, the dirty things or naughty things they want to do with you that can be really like, get you going.

Anne: Yeah. Love that.

Charity: And then you have the power to be like, yeah, that sounds really exciting. Let's do that. Or no, I'm not comfortable with that.

Anne: Exactly.

Charity: And with consent too, no matter no matter what activity you're engaging in, whether it's in kind of like the day to day world or in the kink world, you have the ability to take away your consent at any time. And that's so important to just hear and be reassured of that, like, you can say no at any time, and that that know needs to be respected. And also in kink. When we're discussing discussing, what are the words or the signals we're going to use? Sometimes people get really off on saying like, no, don't do this to me. No, don't do it. And so having different words other than no in that setting can be really helpful so that the person is not confused, like, do you mean no, like, stop or no, keep going?

Anne: Yeah, I think like the nuance around that is really interesting and important. And I also think there's a bit of a piece, I think, sometimes, especially as women, there are things that folks want out of sex that they put on their partners and expect from them. And so I love that you're just like sharing that message of like, you can say no anytime,

you can change your mind anytime, and you don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

Charity: And you shouldn't do anything you don't want to do, because you're not going to enjoy it. And if you're with someone who actually cares about you, and they get the sense that you're not enjoying it, they're probably not going to either.

Anne: Yeah, like I think the thing that's really fun and wonderful is that you're both doing something that's like maybe a bit taboo or maybe like a little bit outside of your normal sexual practice together, because you both really want to do it.

Charity: Yeah, right.

Anne: The shared desire is so important.

Charity: Totally. And I think sometimes too, that can happen, particularly in kink is, especially when folks are maybe new to kink, and they're playing with someone more experienced, or, you know, maybe they have these preconceived notions that they're just supposed to be able to take whatever, especially being submissive, that it can be really challenging for people to actually use their safe words, or their safe signals, or whatever. So something that I just do in my own kink practices, like when I'm playing with, especially new folks, is I make them practice saying that, calling those words so that I know that they can do it, and so that they feel safe doing it, because I think I've definitely heard horror stories of people continuing to play because they didn't feel safe that they could call the safe words, or that they didn't feel like they could actually if they did call the safe words that they would be respected, or felt like they had something to prove and just kind of took it. And then that's also problematic from the dominant side, because they should be creating a safe space where people feel safe and comfortable to call safe words, or call safe signals if they need to, and that those should just be respected.

Anne: I love that. And I actually feel like maybe that would be a really cool sexual practice for all the forms of sex, even the sex that is not kinky, to

practice saying no, with a new partner, because sometimes that is really hard. I think that that would actually just be really cool for folks to do like all the time regularly.

Charity: Yeah, and especially if we're thinking of people in general who maybe have had challenges setting boundaries, or have had experiences where boundaries haven't been respected. It can be really, really hard to say no, and learning and practicing to say no can be really empowering.

Anne: I love that. Okay, so our next question is what is aftercare and why is it important?

Charity: So, aftercare is kind of the care and attention given to both parties. I think it's usually given to the submissive but I believe all dominants also or the top whoever, all parties engaging in the play needs aftercare. And it's just the things that help you feel safe or secure, or comfort. So like if people go to a play party, take your favourite blanket, because sometimes if you're the submissive and you've just done a really intense play, your body kind of goes into shock and like you have all this adrenaline and then all the adrenaline is gone, and then you get cold and shiver, and that's just the adrenaline leaving the body. So taking things that are comforting for you, and negotiating that with the person that you're going to play because sometimes people process differently and for one person, they might need this care in the moment immediately. And the other person, they might not be able to give that care in that moment immediately and they might need a day or something to kind of be like okay, I can now provide this care because I have done the processing I need to so knowing the different types of aftercare for the people involved in the play, or the scene or whatever is going on is really important so that expectations can be met. And if expectations cannot be met, there's other people that are there that can support with the aftercare, because it's just about kind of caring for that scene and a lot of bonding and things can happen in the aftercare.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. We're talking about that. Because I know one of the things we talk about when we talk about consent, is the idea that you have to care about the person you're having sex with, you don't have to

be in love with them. You don't have to be in a relationship with them. But you do have to care about them on a base level of like, are they safe? Are they comfortable? Do they want to be doing the things they're doing? Are they like doing okay? I like this discussion of care. And I think it's really important for all the healthy sex things.

Charity: I think respect is so important to put in there too, because if you're playing with people and you don't feel respected, then that's not going to be a healthier safe play. So I think respect is also just so critical and respecting the other person that you're playing with. And vice versa.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. So we're gonna switch gears now, cuz we've been doing a little bit of like, 101 I think that's really wonderful. But I would love to hear about unhealthy BDSM what are some things folks can look out for I think that's what we're going to kind of get into in this part of the discussion. But let's start with what does unhealthy BDSM look like?

Charity: I mean, when your consenting boundaries are continually cross, they're not respected, I would say if your boundaries are not respected, and if consent keeps being violated, those being kind of the cornerstones to what unhealthy play looks like. Or if you're feeling pressured into playing in a way that you don't want to play, for whatever reason, whether you are the top, the bottom, the submissive, the dominant, whatever words you ascribe to it, but more healthy BDSM and healthy play should be things that you seek out without feeling pressure, or coerced into doing, where boundaries are respected, and consent is respected. And there are so often times where you meet someone maybe at a munch or on fetlife, whatever platform where you're meeting kinky people, where people might be like, yeah, I've been kinky for a year, and I am a master and I am a sir, or I am like a ma'am or a mistress. And they're using these big words, but really haven't had any community experience or a lot of play experience to really have earned those words. I know, when I was coming up in the kink and BDSM community, you didn't call yourself a sir, or a master or a miss or mistress, unless you had been in the community for a long time, and could be really vouched for that you were a safe player or a

safe person and did like all those good things like risk aware kink, and all of those pieces.

Anne: Can you describe just really quick, what risk aware kink is?

Charity: Yeah, so it's understanding the risks involved with the kink you're playing. So if you're doing bondage, knowing where to put the ropes, so that you don't get nerve damage, because if you tie the ropes incorrectly, and then knots slip on certain parts of the body, it will cut off circulation to like the hands or the feet. And then that can create nerve damage that can be permanent. If you're playing with more risky things like knives or something like this, if you cut in the wrong spot, and too deeply, that's very risky. So understanding the various risks associated with the play you're doing. Like if you're doing bondage, but you're just using handcuffs, that can be less risky than using rope because they won't slip in the same way, understanding the risks that are involved in the kink, and then consenting to taking those risks. So it's like informed consent, you understand what's going to happen, and what could go wrong. And you play anyways, knowing that those are possible things that could occur. And it's important for all parties involved in the play, to be aware of those risks. And then to have a plan of like, if this goes wrong, what are we going to do before we play?

Anne: I think that's so important, because I know some of the things we've been talking about are things that could cause harm. So I love the idea that folks are going into it with this, like wealth of knowledge and you know, are kind of prepared to navigate those risks. I think that's really wonderful. Another question that we wanted to go through was, are there any red flags that folks can look out for if they're looking for a new partner? Or if you know, they're trying something new with an established partner? Are there any things that might like tip somebody off that this is maybe not like the most consensual or safe person to be doing these things with?

Charity: Do you feel safe in their presence? Yes or no? Does this person do what they say they'll do? Like? Are they honest? Are they truthful? Do they give you kind of the information? Do they just tell you about the kink? Or have you both like looked into it and kind of done your own or

knowledge because sometimes we, someone can be like, yep, I know how to do this. And maybe they actually don't, right. And within kind of the kink and BDSM communities, most of the time people know people. So if you feel like a little unsure about a person, maybe talk to the community and be like, hey, has anybody played with this person? Or does anybody know anything about these kinks? So that you can go into the situation knowing. Do you feel like you're being like forced into things, or coerced into things? Or do you get like, maybe you've done something with someone before and like, you had that like feeling in the pit of your stomach where you're like, oh, that wasn't good or I feel icky from that, follow that voice. And let that be a flag for you. Like, if you're getting that, like, oh, I don't know about this, or that felt wrong, or I don't know if I should do that again. And then maybe we do like those are kind of that's our body telling us that's a flag, whatever it is.

Anne: That's so important. I think we talked about that so much that sense and how accurate it is, like, we're all really good at knowing when things are not safe, or when they're not feeling good for us. And I think that we're really taught not to trust that or that we're overreacting or being too sensitive. And I think one of the most radical things we can do is to trust our own body senses.

Charity: Yeah, our bodies carry so much wisdom, and just recognizing that kind of tuning into it.

Anne: So another thing I would love to talk about is how does revoking consent work? And what does it look like to change your consent or ask someone to stop? I know, we've covered this a little bit, but I would love to go into the details of like, what does that really look like if somebody's saying like now I need to stop?

Charity: The message is be respectful, stop. And it's kind of having the courage to really say that, because sometimes it can be really scary to like, and we think that we should just keep carrying on for the sake of the other person or other people. But really be tuned to like this needs to stop. And I'm saying that I'm being kind of like strong with it, like forceful. And if the other person doesn't listen, and you're in kind of like a community setting, call for help, especially if you're at like a play party

or something and you've called red and the person has continued or you've said no stop, and the person has continued, try to call for help. Usually there's a dungeon master or someone a dungeon angel around and you can fight for them to get support. If you're alone at home, or with this person in a private space, and you're engaging in a sexual activity and you say no, and they continue. That is sexual assault. That is rape.

Anne: I love that we're just putting that out there. If you said yes to something, and then you say now I want to stop and that person continues. That is not okay. And that is a form of sexual assault. So important, because I think sometimes there's a bit of confusion for folks around like, well, I said, yes, and then I changed my mind. Or like, maybe they didn't mean to, like nope, if you said you need to stop and they didn't listen to you. That is not okay.

Charity: And it does not matter if it is someone that you've just met. And you've said yes. And then you've changed your mind. And you said no, and they continue. That's assault. If it is with someone that you have been in a long term relationship with. And you said yes. And then you said no, and they continued. That is assault. The only time where it might not be assault is if you've negotiated that when you say no, that that is not a word to actually stop prior to the encounter going on. Maybe you've negotiated that before. And it is applicable to a certain situation. But that does not give it blanket permission to occur every time.

Anne: And I think in those situations, too. Like you've said, there's a different thing that then means no when that's happening. So you either have the like red light, yellow light, green light system, you have a hand signal, you're using nodding or head shaking, like there's some other way that folks can revoke consent, if that's happening.

Charity: And again, it's like negotiating and talking about that, what that will be before the player occurs.

Anne: Mm hm. Yeah, I think that's really important. And then I think another thing that would be really lovely to just kind of like outline for folks

listening, how can we tell when somebody is not respecting our boundaries or when they're pushing up against our boundaries in a way that isn't okay?

Charity: I think again, this kind of comes to trusting that like, feeling in your tummy, and also comes from a bit of experience, and especially if you're new to kink or BDSM, going slowly at the start to learn different things like because maybe part of learning where your own boundaries is is exploring a little bit. Do I like bondage? Do I like submission? Do I like humiliation and exploring a little bit at a time and not just diving in headfirst? Because we dive in headfirst, you're bound to have boundaries crossed that you didn't even know you had or needed. But as we explore slowly, we can find where our boundaries are. And I think that's part of it is learning where boundaries are and then learning how to communicate what our boundaries are. And then if someone's approaching the boundary, setting a clear limit, like you are coming too close to this boundary. If you continue, I'm going to end the to play and, or will stop the date or whatever. And if they continue to disrespect that and continue to push over, you have to follow that. So if you're like, yep, I'm going to end the date, you get up and leave pack it up to go, or you end the play, or, like really following through. So when you set the boundary, like, say we're doing like a humiliation play, we've negotiated not to use the term slut. And then the person uses the term slut, you can be like, don't call me that we agreed, we negotiated that you wouldn't call me that, I'm willing to continue to play if you don't call me that again. And then if they use the term slut, end the play, so knowing what the boundary is kind of setting a limit, and then following through with the limit.

Anne: What I like about that is just that we're empowering folks to follow through on their boundaries. And, you know, talking about boundaries and practice, like boundaries are not just things that we set as like these are, these are, what my boundaries are. But letting folks know like you have the right to stop doing things if somebody crosses your boundary, you have the right to leave that date, you have the right to stop seeing that person or not engage with them again. And so I'm really glad that we're just kind of reinforcing that message, you know, you have the right to disengage when somebody isn't respecting your boundaries.

Charity: And you don't owe it to the person to continue.

Anne: Yeah.

Charity: Sometimes we stay in situations that we don't necessarily feel comfortable in because we think we owe it to the person, we don't, or other people, we don't, we owe it to ourselves to follow through with that boundary, because we're going to feel better about ourselves by following our boundary than doing it just for the sake of the other person.

Anne: Yeah, and another way that I hear that come up as well, folks will say, well, they didn't finish yet. They didn't have an orgasm, I had an orgasm, they didn't have an orgasm, so I owe it to them. Or we need to finish like what we started. And like you never have to finish, you don't owe anybody orgasms, you can just get up and leave. That's totally okay to do.

Charity: Yeah, it's not always about the orgasm anyways, it could be about all the bits in between.

Anne: Yes.

Charity: Just like you might have a certain plan for a scene and maybe it goes a different way. And you don't want it to go that way, you can end it, you don't have to follow through with it. We are we are with our body, like we in our body are one of the same. They're they're ours, we can do with them what we want, not what other people want.

Anne: That is awesome. So that is all the questions I have, is there anything else that you want our listeners to know about or like a big takeaway message you'd like to share with them before we wrap up today?

Charity: That kink and BDSM and play are totally normal. And that it is okay to go out in the world and explore your sexual desires, your fantasies, and it can be a really big, beautiful, kinky, wonderful world when you do that. But do it in a way that makes you feel safe, seen, heard and

respected and learning and discovering your boundaries and following through and knowing that your consent is so important, and that if you say yes to something, you can always say no. And don't feel pressured to do what other people in the community are doing. Because all kinks are valid. And that's okay.

Anne: Amazing. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. This has been really lovely. And I'm just really appreciative to have this breakdown of how folks can engage in kink and BDSM from a really healthy and consent based perspective.

Charity: Yeah, I hope that people are able to grow and explore the world and feel empowered to do it. And to practice consent, like it is just so important. And negotiation, and boundaries are just so important for kink and just healthy sexuality and just being a human in the world.

Anne: So that was our discussion with Charity Smith, a counsellor from Berlin, Germany. And again, we'll make sure that all of the information for Charity is in our episode description for you. Thanks so much for joining us today folks.

The Prevent Resist Support podcast is a part of the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor Our full Office title is the office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance and Support. You can find us on our website which is at www.uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support. Or you can email us at our email address which is svsupport@uwindsor.ca. So S V like sexual violence support uwindsor.ca. If you are a member of our University of Windsor community and you would like some support around sexual violence or any unwanted sexual experience, you can reach out to us at the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention, Resistance and Support on our website, which is uwindsor.ca/prevent-resist-support. You can also reach out to us by email at svsupport@uwindsor.ca. If you are not a member of our UWindsor community but would like to learn about support resources near you. You can check out the Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca