

WELCOME
D/S SUMMIT

Finding & Working With a Kink-Affirming Therapist



KINK-FRIENDLY THERAPIST

WELCOME!
I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE HERE.



IG: @thewright_rachel



If we haven't met before,
I'm Rachel!

I'm a licensed therapist and sex educator, and I speak, write, and consult for lots of companies, organizations, and media outlets.

I'm a new mom that lives right outside NYC with my partners, I'm polyamorous, queer, and a giant theatre-loving geek who has Celiac Disease.

KINK-FRIENDLY THERAPIST

IMPORTANT

This training was made for educational purposes only and is not therapy or medical advice.

VISUALIZE THIS



KINK-FRIENDLY THERAPIST

WHY

IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- There are many misconceptions about BDSM being inherently tied to mental illness.
- Many therapists lack training in kink-affirming care, which can lead to harm.
- A kink-friendly therapist can support mental health *without pathologizing* BDSM.



UNDERSTANDING KINK-AFFIRMING THERAPY

**What Makes a Therapist
'Kink-Friendly' vs.
'Kink-Knowledgeable' vs.
'Kink-Affirming'?**

KINK-FRIENDLY

(Baseline accepting)

- Open-minded and non-judgmental about BDSM but may not have specialized training or deep understanding.
- Won't shame or pathologize kink, but might not actively incorporate it into therapy.
- Willing to learn but may rely on the client to educate them.

KINK-FRIENDLY

(Baseline accepting)

- Limited knowledge may lead to unintentionally misunderstanding power exchange, play dynamics, or consent practices.
- May assume kink is related to trauma due to lack of specialized education.
- Might avoid discussing kink altogether, leading to missed opportunities for deeper therapy work.

BEST FOR..

KINK-FRIENDLY

(Baseline accepting)

- Clients who primarily need therapy for non-kink-related issues and just want a therapist who won't shame or judge them.
- Someone who is comfortable educating their therapist about their identity if needed.

KINK-KNOWLEDGABLE

(Competent & Informed)

- Has formal education, training, or experience working with BDSM clients.
- Understands kink as a healthy, consensual expression of sexuality and relationship dynamics.
- Recognizes BDSM as not inherently tied to trauma and can differentiate between consensual play and abuse.

KINK-KNOWLEDGEABLE

(Competent & Informed)

- May still have implicit biases depending on their background (e.g., seeing submission as disempowering).
- Might over-focus on kink even when it's not relevant to therapy goals.
- Not all “kink-knowledgeable” therapists are also affirming—some may still view kink through a neutral or skeptical lens.

BEST FOR...

KINK-KNOWLEDGABLE

(Competent & Informed)

- Clients who want a therapist who understands BDSM and can integrate it into therapy when relevant.
- Individuals who don't want to spend sessions explaining basic BDSM concepts.

KINK-AFFIRMING

(The Gold Standard)

- Actively supports and validates BDSM as a positive and fulfilling part of a client's identity.
- Views BDSM as a legitimate relationship and sexual orientation, not just a hobby or behavior.
- Incorporates BDSM dynamics into therapy when relevant without judgment—for example:
 - Supporting healthy communication in D/s relationships.
 - Exploring self-worth in a way that respects a client's masochism or submission.
 - Helping clients navigate polyamory, power exchange, or play dynamics.
- Engages in ongoing education and advocacy for kink-affirming mental health care.

KINK-AFFIRMING

(The Gold Standard)

- Harder to find, as this level of understanding requires specific training and experience in sex-positive therapy.
- Some therapists claim to be affirming but still bring biases about "healthy" relationships that don't align with BDSM.
- It could be more expensive based on limited access.

KINK-AFFIRMING

(The Gold Standard)

- Folks who want a safe space to explore their dynamics, identity, or mental health concerns without judgment.
- Those who want therapy that embraces kink as a neutral or positive factor rather than something to be explained, justified, or ignored.
- Someone who wants to understand better how their kink practices interact with the rest of their lives/psyche.

REMEMBER

Depending on your needs, there is usually not a “right” or “wrong” therapist — it’s just right or wrong for *you*.

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COMMON THERAPY PITFALLS SURROUNDING BDSM

01

**Pathologizing D/s
relationships or assuming that
all kink stems from abuse.**

02

**Ignoring the role of consent
and autonomy in BDSM.**

03

**Viewing submission,
masochism, or degradation
play as self-harm.**

CASE STUDY

THE MISDIAGNOSIS TRAP

SCENARIO

Alex, a 32-year-old submissive, seeks therapy for general anxiety. When they disclose that they're in a 24/7 Total Power Exchange (TPE), their therapist immediately labels it as an abusive dynamic.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

The therapist didn't understand consensual non-consent and power exchange, so Alex spent the next few sessions trying to justify their healthy relationship instead of addressing their actual anxiety.

THE RIGHT APPROACH

A kink-affirming therapist would have explored Alex's anxiety without assuming that BDSM was the root issue. They would have validated Alex's dynamic and focused on their stated therapy goals.

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HOW TO FIND A KINK-AFFIRMING THERAPIST

WHERE TO LOOK

- **Online Directories**
 - Kink-Aware Professionals (NCSF)
 - Open Path Collective
 - Psychology Today (filter for “sex-positive”)
- **Community Referrals**
 - BDSM groups, Discords, FetLife recommendations
 - Social Media Accounts & Recommendations
 - Local kink-friendly medical & mental health practitioners
- **Professional Networks**
 - AASECT

RED & GREEN FLAGS IN THERAPIST SELECTION

GREEN FLAGS

- ▶ Understands BDSM as an identity and relationship style, not a pathology.
- ▶ Has training and/or experience with power exchange, impact play, and ethical kink.
- ▶ Practices non-judgmental curiosity rather than assuming dysfunction.

RED FLAGS

- ▶ Uses language like “fixing” or “healing” BDSM clients.
- ▶ Suggests that submission, masochism, or degradation stem from low self-worth.
- ▶ Pushes “healthy vanilla relationships” as the ideal.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN A CONSULTATION

- “What is your experience working with BDSM or kink clients?”
- “How do you differentiate between consensual kink and unhealthy dynamics?”
- “Have you received specific training in sexuality and kink-affirming therapy and/or have personal experience in this area?”



WORKING WITH A KINK-FRIENDLY THERAPIST

BUILDING A STRONG THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

- ▶ Be upfront about what you need - ex. General mental health support vs. BDSM-specific discussions
- ▶ Clarify when therapist is 'off.'
- ▶ Correct misconceptions when/if they arise

CASE STUDY

THE SELF-EXPLORATION JOURNEY

SCENARIO

Jordan, a 40-year-old Dominant, enters therapy feeling burned out. Their therapist is kink-aware but assumes that their role as a Dom is emotionally exhausting and suggests they should “take a break” from power exchange.

THE ISSUE

Jordan wasn't looking to step away from BDSM but to explore how to manage stress within their dynamic. The therapist misunderstood Dominance as a burden rather than a fulfilling identity.

A BETTER APPROACH

A kink-affirming therapist would have asked how BDSM intersects with Jordan's stress levels and emotional fulfillment. Instead of suggesting they abandon their role, the therapist could have explored self-care and other tools within their D/s framework.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS & RESOURCES

Key Takeaways

Not all therapists are equipped to work with kink/BDSM clients — finding the right therapist for you is crucial.

Key Takeaways

**You deserve mental health care
that respects and understands your
dynamics.**

Key Takeaways

Advocating for yourself in therapy ensures that BDSM is treated as a valid, consensual expression of self, not a disorder.

REFLECTION PROMPT

If you were to start therapy today, what are three things you would want your therapist to understand about your BDSM identity or relationships? How would you communicate those needs?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

- **Kink-Aware Professionals (NCSF) Directory**
- **Books: *The Ethical Slut*, *Playing Well with Others*, *BDSM and Therapy***
- **BDSM-friendly therapy communities and workshops**