



# TEN WAYS TO PROMOTE CONSENT IN A FESTIVAL ENVIRONMENT

By Hillary Bernhardt

TRIGGER WARNING: ARTICLE CONTAINS RAPE CULTURE,  
SEXUAL ASSAULT, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, ETC.



Since I was old enough to go to them, music festivals have always been the highlight of any summer for me throughout my adult years. There, a place for free expression, deeper connection with your fellow beings and yes, free love. The open, anything goes sexuality present in the scene was one of the things that drew me to it in the first place. There's an unspoken sort of acceptance to various expressions of love including polyamory, BDSM, the whole Kinsey scale of gender preference, and even the occasional clown orgy at Burning Man.

However, in light of several recent instances of sexual assault that made national and international headlines, it is a time we started talking about the darker underbelly of festival culture. In 2016 alone, 18 women reported being sexually assaulted at Schlossgrabenfest in Germany, five women reported rape at Bravalla festival in Sweden, another five reported they were sexually assaulted at Roskilde Festival in Denmark, and another woman reported she was sexually assaulted at WayHome Music and Arts Festival in Oro-Medonte, Ontario. Due to the unfortunate nature of sexual assault, there were probably more instances of assault and harassment that didn't make the headlines and countless more that didn't even get reported.

In order to get more insight on the topic, I spoke with Gigi D'Lamour of the Bureau of Erotic Discourse(B.E.D), a popular Burning Man camp and consent education group that actively works to end rape and sexual assault on the Playa. Gigi's activism was initially sparked by an instance of assault that one of her friends faced at one of her first Burns. D'Lamour planned a meet up

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with a group of other women online, and they were all pretty bummed when one of the participants who said she'd be there didn't show up.

Once she got home the woman that they missed out on seeing made a post to the group in regards to her absence."That night [the friend from the group] and her boyfriend were on an art car, he jumped off...a stranger gave her a hand to help her get off, and at that moment took the opportunity to reach up her skirt and grab a fist full of labia. She tried to shake it off, but it left her traumatized, unable to leave camp for a few days," D'Lamour said. After hearing similar instances of assault on the Playa and as a means of embracing Burner do-it- yourself culture, she was inspired to start B.E.D. and utilize education as a means of empowerment throughout the community.



Although I can't attest to the trauma these survivors have endured, personally speaking, I can definitely relate to the sickening feeling of having my space invaded without my consent in places that are supposed to thrive off the ethos of Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect. Pro tip: Nobody likes it when you randomly push your erect penis against their butt without any verbal acknowledgement. No.One.Likes.It.

That being said, it's really up to the community to ensure that everyone involved in these magical spaces is able to express themselves, without the fear that they or one of their close friends would find themselves in danger later on in the evening. I've compiled a list of ten simple tips that you can be implemented right now at festivals.

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## CONSENT



**F**reely Given  
**R**eversible  
**I**nformed  
**E**nthusiastic  
**S**pecific

 Planned Parenthood®



#1

## ASK FIRST

This seems like it should be simple, but alas statistics prove otherwise. "Use your words and ask questions. Never trust non-verbal communication, it may be intimidating but asking for what you want and getting a clear answer is amazing and can lead to a better hook-up and a better time. Plus, clear, verbal communication will help everyone get what they want," says D L'amour. If your partner is unable to communicate verbally, for any reason, make sure that you have an established hand signal that can supplement as a "Yes." Nothing besides a clear and definite "Yes." from your partner should be seen as permission to perform any kind of intimate activity. Some examples of good communication: "Are you okay with hugs, instead of handshakes?" "Does this massage technique feel good to you?" "Would you like it if I went down on you? Any techniques I should use?"

#2

## WAIT FOR SOBRIETY

It's no secret that certain substances of various legalities are experimented with and indulged in at festivals. However, we've all read every young adult fiction on this topic, and I think we all know that intoxication blurs the lines of consent. If it's late at night and you're feeling somebody, make sure to look for signs of intoxication - and ask them exactly how their feeling and where their mental state is. If your partner seems less than sober, end the activity, offer your partner a safe place to spend the night, and suggest that you wait until the morning to talk things over. "If they are not sober, take a rain check. No hook up is worth someone later accusing you of assault, it's worth waiting," said D L'amour.



#3

## PRE - NEGOTIATION

While this might seem like it goes directly against my previously mentioned point, many couples in the festival/ burner scene who are at a specific level of comfort with each other, might choose to embark on a practice called pre-negotiation. In situations where you are comfortable with your partner and you are about to embark on a night of debauchery out and about and are hoping to come home to some adult intimacy, make that known to your partner prior to any substance ingestion and see how they feel in return. "First, the law in every state is that clear, sober consent is the only consent," says D'Lamour. "However some choose to borrow from the BDSM community in this area and pre-negotiate what is and is not ok between the consenting adults choosing to participate in a sexual activity. For some pre-consenting adults they may agree to share a bottle of wine before sex, but no more." Make sure, however, to remember that a pre-negotiation is not set in stone and both partners should feel completely comfortable calling it off, should their desires change throughout the night. "Regardless of what you and your partners of choice may negotiate, make sure it is clear and outlines what is and is not ok, and what indicates the deal is off."

#4

## CONTINUE TO CHECK IN

Many times, survivors of sexual assault are too frightened, too shy, or caught up in the midst of "just trying to be polite." Remember, only an enthusiastic and verbal yes means yes. If someone seems withdrawn or is unable to communicate that, do not push the situation. Also, keep in mind that just because your partner agreed to one thing, doesn't necessarily mean they are hoping to "go farther" and take part in other intimate acts. For example, if you are making out with someone, don't just assume that you can start undoing their pants. Ask first if your partner is comfortable, and if not, promise to leave your hands in a neutral area. Do not get offended if your partner expresses interest in you, but isn't feeling sexually excited at the time. And make sure not to make your partner feel guilty for expressing their right to say "No." Remember, no one owes you time, attention, or sex.



#5

## PREFERENCES AND TRIGGERS

Prior to any sexual activity, ask your partner what they enjoy and feels good for them. Do they like to have their hair pulled? Are they okay with hickeys? Be open and honest in regards to your needs as well. In terms of triggers, ask if there's anything that shouldn't do, any places on your partner's body that you should avoid, or anything that could result in an unpleasant memory or discomfort. Not all male bodies are interested in getting oral sex, not all women want their boobs grabbed. Remember that sexual assault is astoundingly present in our culture and the statistics are staggering, so there is a possibility that your partner may have survived a sexual assault prior to your interaction. Don't assume anything either way. Be compassionate of people's wants, needs, interests, and especially their disinterests.

#6

## DATE RAPE DRUGS

First off, know that they exist. Rohypnol and GHB are two of the biggest drugs utilized by predators in the party scene. We have all probably heard not to put our drinks down and/or to take drinks from strangers, so I'll save you that lecture. However, it's important to know the feelings associated with these drugs so we can guard ourselves and our friends. What's important to know are the effects of these drugs what they look like, what they feel like, and what to do if you or one of your friends has ingested one.

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**ROHYPNOL (ROOFIES)** After 10 minutes of ingestion, the victim may feel disoriented and nauseated as well as simultaneously too hot or too cold. It's common to have trouble speaking and moving, or quickly passing out.



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**GHB** It has a very salty and soapy taste, but it is odorless and clear. Once mixed with a drink, it takes slightly longer than Rohypnol 10 to 20 minutes to have an effect. It can produce drowsiness, nausea, seizures, severe respiratory depression, amnesia, hypotonia, vomiting and even death. If you see ANYONE displaying these symptoms, take them to a safe place or harm reduction organization where they can get proper medical attention. Provide water, comfort, and support. If the victim is conscious, continuously reassure them that they are okay and in a safe space. Ensure that they have a proper place to sleep that night and friends to watch over and take care of them.

#7

## CONSENT IS A TWO WAY (OR A MULTIPLE WAY) STREET

Remember that sexual assault doesn't solely occur with a male as the perpetrator and female as the victim (although statistics do prove that this is the most common). However, it is up to all of us- especially in sexual situations involving multiple partners, to ensure that all parties are willing, present, and enthusiastic. Orgies can be a lot of fun and are intrinsic to Burning Man/ festival culture. However, always be aware and take note of the other participants' needs and desires. First of all, don't forget to ask. "Just because a situation is sexually charged, or others are having consensual sexual relations in plain site is not an invitation or permission to join," says Gigi. Essentially, all of the same rules that apply to any sexual situation, still apply. "Orgies are no different than any other situation always ask before touching always ask before escalating or engaging in a new activity," said D L'Amour.



#8

## DON'T WEAR A T-SHIRT THAT SAYS "EAT, SLEEP, RAPE, REPEAT."

During Coachella 2015, douchebag of the year paraded around in a shirt, bearing this slogan - a play on Fatboy Slim's "Eat, Sleep, Rave, Repeat. The result was a twitter hurricane and at the very least, an acknowledgement that yes rape culture exists within our utopian festival community. All in all, I shouldn't have to explain this one. Just don't do it.



#9

## REMEMBER SAFETY FIRST!

Even in a casual hook-up situation, it is best to have a clothed conversation about STD history, birth control, etc. Come up with a plan that both partners can agree on. Many festivals have trading posts where you can purchase condoms, and some will even have them available at the medical tents. Stock up on supplies prior to the festival and have some on hand to give out to friends.



#10

## HELP A BUDDY OUT

If a friend (or a complete stranger) reports an instance of assault to you, the first and most helpful thing you can do is believe them. Stop what you're doing, take some time, go to a quiet spot and hear them out. Let them know that there are people there that can help them if they are willing to report the incident. Offer to direct them to the paramedics as well. Keep in mind that it is the survivor's decision whether or not they want to involve the law with the situation and aid them in whatever way they deem appropriate. Although it's tough to say whether or not all festival staff is properly equipped to handle such sexual assault, festival security and police should be there primarily to ensure that all participants are safe. Furthermore, we can all actively work to prevent sexual assault from happening in the first place by keeping our friends in check. "If you see a friend touch without asking, say 'Hey you need to ask first.' When we remind each other constantly we create change," said Gigi. Don't be afraid to intervene in situations that don't sit well with you. "It's OK to step in and say 'Hey is everything consensual here?' I feel that often times, we fear that we are coming off as busybodies, but the consequences could be far worse.

## DRUNK?

Just because they aren't saying

**NO**

Doesn't mean they are saying

**YES**

#GotConsent?

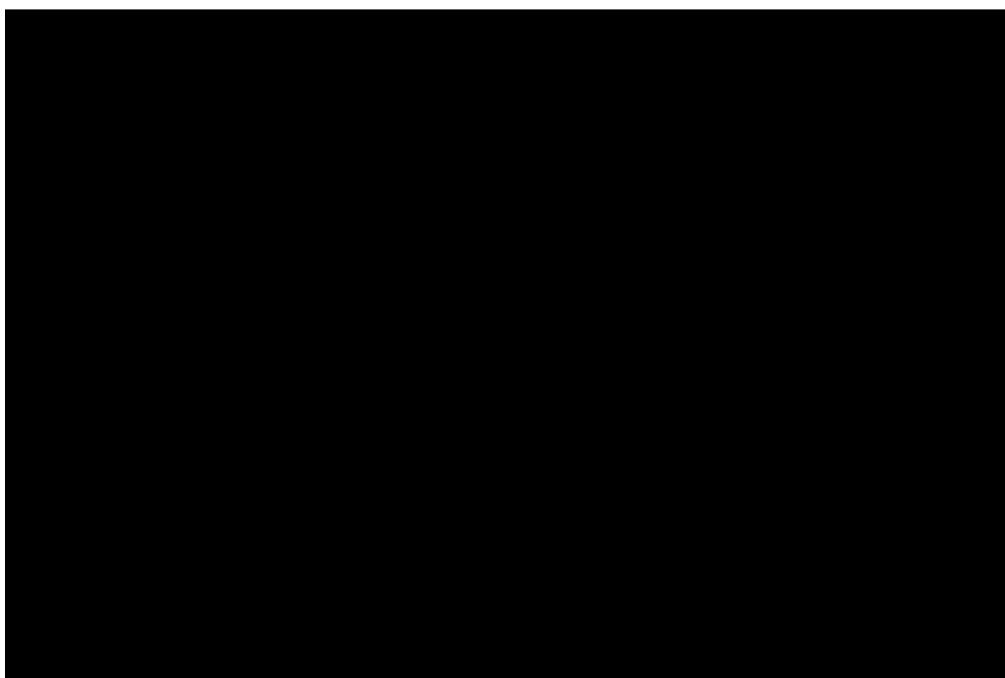


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Overall, Gigi D'Lamour said that she feels very positively in regards to future of consent in music festival culture. "In 2003 when I went to festivals and raves I NEVER heard phrases like 'ask before touching'....the attitude was saying no was not participating and everything should be ok. Then I watched a tiny group of people change the dialogued," said Gigi. She also reminded me that the smallest actions can make a big difference in regards to creating positive safe spaces for all people to enjoy partying. "It's OK to start small!...Our primary focus from the beginning was passing out buttons with catchy consent based phrases, putting up consent posters and teaching a couple of workshops...What is amazing is how small actions like this when done consistently can create change," said D'Lamour. Together we can reshape the landscape to one completely free of sexual, harassment, assault, and rape. Remember, first and foremost, like festivals, sex is- and always should be- fun.

Any further questions, could hopefully be answered with the all-time favorite tea metaphor.



*For more information on B.E.D.'s mission and how to volunteer click [here](#). Need help? In the U.S., call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673) or visit the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline operated by RAINN. For more resources, visit the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's website.*

