



# Approaching Your Local Authorities

National Coalition for Sexual Freedom  
Law Enforcement Outreach Program - Presentation 4

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The purpose of this presentation is to educate law enforcement, prosecutors, or other authorities about SM-Leather-Fetish practices on behalf of a local group(s). The NCSF goal in presenting this material is to assist local group(s) in developing a positive relationship with their local authorities. The contents and delivery method of the outreach presentation are designed on a case-by-case basis. We suggest that local groups work together when presenting info to local officials.

## Introduction(s) & Disclaimers

- Options - whichever one you take is up to you
- Situations, Laws, & Attitudes vary
- Interpretation of the law may be different from the spirit of the law (at each level: officer, prosecutor and judge)

## Goals and Objectives

- The goals and objectives of the outreach to authorities will dictate its' components
- Typical objectives for meeting with local authorities are:
  1. To develop a new relationship - they typically like it when they are approached before potential problems show up
  2. To repair or develop a relationship after a negative encounter (such as post-arrest, or after getting bad press)
  3. To determine their stance on SM - would they be interested in pursuing cases against SM activities (Good information to know ahead of time)
  4. To formulate guidelines for your activities that address their concerns - they may offer guidelines for the group to operate under so as to not become an issue. (Examples: no minors, no alcohol, no money, etc.)

## Preparation

- Research state and local crimes, local permit rules, and local zoning ordinances including:
  - Assault
  - Battery
  - Indecent Exposure
  - Indecent / Lewd Conduct
  - Kidnapping / False Imprisonment
  - Sexual Assault / Rape
  - Weapon Violations
  - Uniforms, equipment, police paraphernalia
  - Alcoholic Beverage Laws
  - Zoning Ordinances
  - Permits
  - Age of Consent
- Research your local political climate and key players
- Choose someone who is tactful, articulate, and knowledgeable about the SM-Leather-Fetish Community to make contact with the authorities and to be your ongoing liaison. Good communication is a key factor to a successful outreach with your authorities. Communication skills and first impressions are under our control when initiating contact -- use them to your advantage. (A clean criminal record is always a good idea too.)

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### **Who to Contact**

- Prosecutor / District Attorney / Commonwealth Attorney
- Law Enforcement (Community Relations Officer, Vice/Sex Crimes Unit Supervisor, Code Enforcement Officer, Precinct/District Supervisor, Domestic Violence / Assistance Services)
- Administrative (City or County Clerk, Building and Safety Department, Health Department, Planning Department, Zoning Department, Tax or Treasurers Office, Fire Department, Public Works Department )
- Colleges / Universities (Criminal Justice, Sociology, and Psychology folks are good allies to have.)

### **Presentation & Delivery**

- All of the involved group(s) should help formulate the goals and objectives of the presentation on behalf of the entire local SM-Leather-Fetish community. Consider holding SM-Leather-Fetish Community meetings in order to identify goals and objectives. This helps achieve community buy-in, consensus building, and support. It will add to the timeline to achieve the eventual goals, but is well worth it in the long run. Our communities must work together if we are to achieve our goals.
- The method of delivery used may be that of a formal presentation, meeting, or seminar depending on need
- This presentation may be proactive (prior to any friction with the authorities) or reactive (responding to a disagreement with authorities)
- The NCSF suggests dressing in standard vanilla business attire for these meetings. While we all enjoy expressing ourselves, dressing in full leathers or fetish attire will put up unnecessary walls between yourself and your vanilla audience. "Lifestyle dressing" throws the stereotype to the forefront, and creates another barrier to break down before a quality dialogue can take place. Remember that one objective of the meeting is to demonstrate that we are commonplace (5-10% of the population according to Kinsey), and not a threat. It is to our advantage to dress "business vanilla".
- Be respectful, courteous, and polite
- Be honest -- you don't have to say anything you are not comfortable with sharing, but be honest in the things you do tell them
- Don't have an "attitude problem" from their perspective
- Don't be dishonest -- they are very good at recognizing fabrications
- Use simple language -- you don't want to come across as speaking down to them
- Use your common sense

### **Tips for Presentation Content**

- Avoid graphic descriptions of SM activity -- some may find it entertaining to shock vanilla people with extreme examples of our activities, but this is not the time or place to do so
- Stress that there is NO alcohol allowed (if applicable)

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- Stress that there are NO drugs allowed
- Stress that there are NO minors allowed
- Stress that it is a desired and consensual activity by all participants
- Focus on education and support aspects
- Include "supervised environment" and/or "safety rules" when applicable
- Stress that it is NOT an escort service, NOT prostitution, NO penetration (if applicable), and NOT adult entertainment
- "Safe, Sane, and Consensual" creed (see definition at end of this document)

### **Pros and Cons of Approaching Local Authorities**

The official stance of the NCSF is this ... its up to the individual, group, and/or business. We are simply not going to say that one course of action is always the correct course of action. The NCSF does suggest that groups should research the zoning, licensing, and legal issues and should have a plan for dealing with the authorities if and when they choose to contact the group. Furthermore, groups could proactively contact the local authorities (police, DA, zoning, etc.). Bottom line... it is up to the individual group to evaluate their situation as it is assumed they know their local political climate best. However, we do want point out the pros and cons of such a decision:

### **Not Approaching the Authorities**

- By not going to the authorities, you can operate the group/business "under the radar" -- for a time anyway
- By not going to the authorities, you will always be fearful of the authorities finding out about the group/business
- By not going to the authorities, you may "get busted" due to numerous reasons and for numerous things (they will find something if they want to)
- By not going to the authorities, you will not be giving yourself the opportunity to establish a good rapport with authorities if you do come under scrutiny. Once discovered (and you will most likely be eventually), they may see this as an attempt to avoid them which lends itself to a stereotype of illegality

### **Approaching the Authorities**

- By approaching authorities in advance, they may say they don't like you or will not issue the permits, etc. (This is good info to have ahead of time, and lets you evaluate the potential move elsewhere to a more scene-friendly locale)
- By approaching authorities in advance, you most likely will have to go through many legal hoops to open/operate. (This equates to extra time and potentially money)
- By approaching authorities in advance, you can take comfort that most likely you will not get busted or that they will come to you if issues arise
- By approaching authorities in advance, a disgruntled scene person can't go to the authorities to call attention to you -- they can but so what

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- By approaching authorities in advance, you establish a good rapport and a working relationship with authorities. This could prove to be very helpful in the future
- By approaching authorities in advance, you present less risk to your members/customers -- i.e., arrested during a "raid"
- By approaching authorities in advance, members are able to report crimes that occurred that have a connection to SM -- i.e. stolen toybag, etc.

The NCSF-LEOP suggests doing things on the up and up. At worst, you find that the atmosphere is not scene-friendly and you don't open, and (maybe) you fight for change that does allow our clubs/groups/businesses/etc. At best, you get all the permits/endorsements you need and are on your way with authority "approval" -- safe and theoretically no hassles. Many groups that have approached the local police, District Attorney, etc. have had very positive results from such contact.

### Aftercare

- After meeting with authorities, follow it up in writing if possible/appropriate -- i.e. a thank you letter documenting expectations
- Once a relationship is established with authorities -- KEEP IT GOING -- make periodic contact
- Volunteer to help with law enforcement programs (Special Olympics - Law Enforcement Torch Run, kid fingerprinting programs, etc.)

### NCSF-LEOP Assistance

The NCSF-LEOP will work closely with any group(s) requesting such a presentation/assistance prior to the event to determine content, design, and specific goals. This assistance may be in the forms of:

- Consultation
- Training your contact / liaison people
- Facilitating or assisting with the actual meeting (resources permitting)
- Conducting the meeting on behalf of the local group

### Other Useful Materials and Handouts

- NLA-I Video: "Abuse vs SM"
- NCSF-LEOP Handout: "Consensual SM Activities: A Field Guide for Law Enforcement"
- NCSF-LEOP Handout: "What is SM?"

### "SSC" as defined at the Leather Leadership Conference II

**Safe** - Safe is being knowledgeable about the techniques and safety concerns involved in what you are doing, and acting in accordance with that knowledge.

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**Sane** - Sane is knowing the difference between fantasy and reality.

**Consensual** - Consensual is respecting the limits imposed by each participant at all times.

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