

# Preparing Your Relationship(s) For Burning Man (and other festivals)

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Headed to Burning Man this year? Whether your sweetie(s) is going with you or staying back in the “Default World”, having your relationship(s) ready for the event can be a proactive and powerful step in avoiding potential disaster. The playa has a way of amplifying the current state of your relationship so if you are on the brink of turmoil the playa will bring it out. If your foundation is strong, this could be your opportunity to fortify it even further.

There are few environments that challenge connection, intimacy, and vulnerability as well as the Burn does. One of my favorite quotes comes from [Smudge](#):

*“The playa is a crucible. It will melt you down. It could refine you into a gem. It is a magical cauldron filled with the energies of thousands of people, their hopes, dreams, addictions, attitudes, angels and demons, in a freed environment without most of the normal societal stabilizing structures. Things can change and flow in any one person's consciousness. ... Go to a communication workshop together, or something zaney, or run loose in separate directions with the commitment to get together for morning tea at sunrise. ... When you're done with Burning Man, you go home and unless you're going to jump into someone else's car, you're going home together. The event is a 168 hour moment in life; a long moment in a crucible.”*

As a professional International Communications Coach, I love gifting my skills to the playa. After years of attending the Burn, I have a few tips to share with you. My hope is to help you prepare your relationship for the fire and come out the other side as a more refined gem.

### **Know Yourself**

Before you go, take some private time to reflect on what you want from this experience, both as an individual and as a relationship partner. What is your intention for the Burn? It's a magical place where just about anything can happen (and will, given enough opportunity) — so what do YOU want to manifest?

Where are you in your personal growth journey? What demons might pop out of your closet when life gets intense? What tools do you need for self-care before you go to the playa? The truth is that you are ultimately the only one responsible for your own pleasure and growth.

### **Make A Plan Before You Hit Playa**

After you give some consideration to your desires, then explore what your partner wants. What are their hopes and fears for this event? Walk through hypothetical situations and allow yourselves to talk about the scary topics; remember that it's just talking and may possibly prevent harmful behaviors from happening in the future.

Take inventory of your current relationship. Are there any unresolved issues you haven't brought up with your partner(s)? Is something bothering you that you that has not been addressed yet? Do it before you go—the middle of the desert IS NOT the right time.

### **Do Your Homework**

Whether you are monogamish, single, or in an open relationship, make sure you have brushed up on your safer sex education before you go. Get tested for STIs and understand your results. Be ready to share them with new partners. Learn how different STIs are transmitted, what impact they might have on your life, and your comfort level with sexual risk.

### **Self-Care**

Taking care of yourself is one of the best ways you can take care of your relationship(s). Burning Man is filled with lots of intense experiences—how will you process them? Journaling, drawing, meditation, dance, and yoga may all be helpful tools to try. Make sure to create space for time alone to process and refresh. There are tons of camps that offer opportunities to be kind to yourself even under harsh conditions. Seek out those places for healing tea ceremonies, having your hair washed, enjoying a steam bath, or indulging in fresh produce in the desert.

### **Communication Plan**

This is not going to be your typical day. You can't text your sweetie(s) when life is mind-blowing or terrible. You can't call them when you need help. You may go longer without seeing them than you had planned. Try finding tools that work well for this adventure. Perhaps you set up a white board outside your tent and leave each other important messages.

### **Daily Check-Ins**

The playa is a vortex of time, space, and magic, where the hours will pass incredibly quickly or unimaginably slowly. You might get lost in a sandstorm, or perhaps come across the most amazing piece of art you have ever seen. Set a regular time and place to be together for a 20 minute check-in and cuddle time each day. I liked meeting over breakfast because it was almost impossible to miss when the sun came up and before the heat of the day set in as a reminder to get back to camp to see my beloved(s). Find what works best for you.

## **Boundaries & Agreements**

Before you head off on this grand adventure, take some time to talk about language use. How will you both describe your relationship and boundaries to others? Do these labels mean the same thing to you both, or are there nuances you might need to clarify before you go? There is power in language—be sure to use it carefully.

What agreements and boundaries might you need for this event? Sexual boundaries? Emotional boundaries? Spiritual boundaries? Think through your individual needs and consider making requests of one another. Deciding on a plan ahead of time and staying open to the idea of renegotiation allows for more comfort and ease on the playa.

## **Jealousy**

Jealousy has a way of rearing its head at the Burn more often and with greater intensity than in the Default World. It can come from missing out on a really cool experience, or seeing your partner dance off into the night with a “sparkle pony.” Be proactive about how you will handle these strong emotions when they arise. I like to think of jealousy as a smoke alarm — it’s a developed emotional tool to prevent us from getting hurt. Sadly, most of us don’t use it like a tool. We assume that when the “alarm” goes off there is always danger, whereas underlying fears of abandonment or being replaced are usually at play. When your partner(s) has time and space to listen to your emotions, reactions, and fears, be sure to share them. Action is not always needed—just being heard often quiets the frightened inner voices of jealousy.

## **Fighting Fair**

What happens when you put thousands of people in the middle of a desert, strip them of their usual patterns/behaviors/support systems, add lots of loud noises and shiny objects, and crank up the chaotic weather patterns? Toss in the opportunity for mind altering substances and new sexual connections, and you have the perfect storm for an argument or worse: a complete meltdown. As our counselor, Tricia, once told us, “No one is better at pushing your buttons than your significant other. It’s their job.”

But before you take out your stress on your beloved(s), take a moment to do a self-assessment. I like to remember the acronym HALT. Are you Hungry? Angry? Lonely? Tired? What about dehydrated? If any of these things needs attention, call a “time-out” and take a minimum of 30 minutes apart to care for yourself and flush your body of the natural “fight or flight” chemicals coursing through it. You can’t fight fair when operating under these influences. Also, don’t forget that the playa can and will provide a support system for you if you stay open to it. Maybe processing with a campmate or a new friend will remove your desire to pick a fight with your loved one(s).

### **Have a Date Night (or 5!)**

Before you head to the playa, take a break from all the stress of preparing and just have a fun date connecting together. The playa asks a lot of us while we're there. Try not to burn out before you even pass by the Greeters.

Once on playa, plan at least one date night or romantic adventure. You may want to bring something to surprise your beloved(s) while out in the desert.

### **Heart of Forgiveness**

Imagine that you arrived in New York City only to find that it was taken over by Cirque du Soleil and produced with an unlimited budget—welcome to Burning Man. The phrase “Playa Time” implies that it is important to let go of your need to plan while on playa. Simple actions like walking to the porta-potties take more time than you would imagine. There are a million things to do and see. You and/or your sweetie(s) will get distracted or sidetracked. Sometimes your need for a nap will be greater than your need to ride a fire-breathing art car. Be forgiving with yourself, your campmates, and your beloved(s). Don't try to plan and control your experience—just go with it and be flexible when things don't work out like you had hoped. Staying agile and heart-focused will allow you to accept whatever reality the playa serves you and move forward together into whatever is next.

### **Care For Your Beloved(s)**

Once you have taken care of yourself, turn your attention to your partner(s). Have they been hydrating regularly? Would this be a good time to offer them a massage? Have a romantic surprise you can deliver on the playa? What about a deep-playa picnic with their favorite snacks & such?

Another idea for strengthening your bond might be to create a secret ritual signal for telling your beloved(s) that you love them. This will come in handy when you are in really loud or silent places and can't express your love verbally.

### **Stimulate Your “In-Love” Brain Parts**

Want to fall in love all over again? Researchers have found that when people in relationship do something that is new, exciting, and challenging for all parties involved, it activates brain activity that stimulates the same areas of the brain that are activated when we are falling in love. Your dopamine levels rise and those rose-colored glasses appear again, even if you've been together for ages. Burning Man holds LIMITLESS opportunities for new, exciting, and challenging shared experiences!

## **Welcome Home!**

“Welcome Home” is a phrase you’ll hear as you enter Burning Man. Many people feel more at home in this space than they do in the Default World. There is a certain magic and greater possibility to create your own adventure without following the mainstream standards. The same holds true for your relationships. May your experience at the Burn be powerful and intimate. May you create something meaningful and juicy for you and your partner(s).

## **Burning Man Relationship Preparation Check-List**

- ☐ Know Yourself
- ☐ Make a Plan Before Hitting the Playa
- ☐ Do Your Homework
- ☐ Invest in Self-Care
- ☐ Build a Communication Plan
- ☐ Construct a Daily Check-In
- ☐ Create Boundaries & Agreements
- ☐ Understand & Honor Jealousy
- ☐ Learn to Fight Fair
- ☐ Have a Date Night (or 5!)
- ☐ Come with a Heart of Forgiveness
- ☐ Care for Your Beloved(s)
- ☐ Stimulate Your “In-Love” Brain Parts

## Glossary of Burning Man Terms

- **Art Car:** A motorized conveyance that is radically, stunningly, (usually) permanently, and safely modified. Larry Harvey likens Mutant Vehicles to “sublimely beautiful works of art floating across the playa like a Miro painting.” Licensed by the DMV, these vehicles are an important part of the Burning Man experience.
- **Default World:** The rest of the world that is not Black Rock City during the Burning Man event.
- **Greeter:** Volunteers who welcome all arriving participants to Black Rock City.
- **Playa/Black Rock City/BRC:** The annual, temporary city created by the community of Burning Man participants.
- **Sparkle Pony:** Derogatory term for a participant who fails to embrace the principle of radical self-reliance, and is overly reliant on the resources of friends, campmates, and the community at large to enable their Burning Man experience. Often fashionably attired, since they packed nothing but costumes.

## Resources

- [9 TIPS FOR COUPLES GOING TO BURNING MAN](http://worldscolliding.org/9-tips-for-couples-going-to-burning-man/)  
(<http://worldscolliding.org/9-tips-for-couples-going-to-burning-man/>)
- [Will My Relationship Survive Burning Man?](https://eplaya.burningman.com/viewtopic.php?t=24904)  
(<https://eplaya.burningman.com/viewtopic.php?t=24904>)
- [Glossary of Burning Man Terms](http://burningman.org/culture/glossary/)  
(<http://burningman.org/culture/glossary/>)
- [Eri Kardos, International Communications Coach](http://www.EriKardos.com)  
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