

The FireHeart Manifesto

Relationship Principles

Created in loving consensus by Sam Chupp and Cynthia Armistead

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Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS 2

INTRODUCTION 4

 Changes.....4

BACKGROUND 8

 Cyn’s Poly Bio 8

 Sam’s Poly Bio..... 8

 Our Family’s Story 8

NEW BEGINNINGS 10

 “Shopping list” for New SOs 10

 Getting Started..... 12

 Step 1: Introduction of a new potential SO 12

 Step 2: the Yes List..... 12

 Step 3: the First Meeting..... 12

 Step 4: the First Date 12

 Step 5: Sex 12

 Non-standard Relationship Situations 12

 Long-Distance Relationships 12

 Festival Flings..... 13

 Affection/Friendliness/Civility 13

 Display of Affection or Sexual Interaction? 13

 Attraction/Assumption Issues 14

 Who Are We Talking About Here?..... 14

 Vetoos 15

 Time..... 16

 Scheduling 16

 Child Care..... 16

 Comfort 17

 Money..... 17

 Combining Households 18

SAFETY 20

 Privacy..... 20

 Our Kids..... 20

 Our Partners’ Kids 20

 Extended Families..... 21

 Business Associates 21

 Friends/Acquaintances 21

 Security..... 21

SEX 23

 STDs and Safer Sex..... 23

 Condom Commitments 24

 Birth Control..... 24

 Pregnancy 25

HONESTY & COMMUNICATION 26

 A word about privacy 27

DANGER SIGNS 28

 Red Flags..... 28

 Yellow Flags..... 28

SUGGESTED READING 29

TECHNOZOO HOUSE RULES..... 30
GLOSSARY..... 32
 Relationship Types..... 32
 Other Terms..... 33

Introduction

This work is an attempt to codify things we've talked about in the past and write out how we see our "rules of engagement" so that we can then discuss them and come to consensus, perhaps with feedback from some trusted friends.

Because our relationship is so very precious to us, we feel a need to create explicit agreements to protect it. The process of creating these agreements has been a rich time of discovery, drawing us closer together. We are fully in accord on all important issues that affect our web of relationships. It is expected that this will be a living document that grows and changes as we do so, as other issues may come to light. The intent will remain the same—to be fully open and in consensus with each other, and to do whatever it takes to maintain a healthy partnership.

This document contains principles, not rules. Rules are handed down in an adult-child type of relationship, and that isn't healthy. These are the principles we want to uphold in our relationships.

All of the "chapters" that follow are equally important. The only way to fully understand the entirety of the document is to read the whole thing in whatever order you like. Cyn has fantasies of indexing it, but we know what those tech writers are like, don't we?

This document contains the public part of our agreements. We aren't concerned about who reads them, and will happily share them with others who may be looking for ideas about the agreements held by other polyamorous people. There are a few more sensitive sections that will only be shared with those with whom we are considering starting an intimate relationship immediately, as part of the full disclosure we would make to those people.

This document, with the other sections as appropriate, will be freely shared and discussed with all SOs and prospective SOs. We expect that new SOs would enter into similar (if not necessarily as extensive) explicit agreements with us. Those who are not willing to enter into explicit, written agreements are not compatible with us as SOs.

Please note that the pronouns "he" and "his" are used herein to refer to males or females. Feel free to mentally substitute "she" and "her" if you wish.

Changes

It is expected that this document will grow and change as we grow and change.

We will come to consensus on any changes made to our agreements, however long that may take.

If an issue arises that isn't covered in this document, we will resolve it by reaching consensus as soon as possible.

If the issue arose because of another relationship, that relationship may have to be in limbo for a time until we have worked things out together.

Covenant

We, Cynthia Lynn Armistead and Samuel Hodges Chupp, do hereby adopt the following agreements for our relationship. These agreements can be renegotiated on a point-by-point basis at any future date if both parties are amenable. As we have created these agreements in love, we will carry them out in a spirit of love at all times.

1. We are primary partners to each other. We have joined our lives in every respect, and consider our relationships with each other and our children to be more important than our relationships with anyone else no matter how much love or lust is involved. Being primary to each other means:
 - a. We and our children have first claim on our time, energy and attention and other resources.
 - b. Our feelings about any given situation will be given more weight than the feelings of any other party. Even if one of us and his or her other partner(s) think that all is well, any concern from either of us means that there is a problem. We will deal with it in good faith whether we share the concern or not.
2. We agree to be radically honest with each other at all times, holding nothing back, no matter how irrational it may seem.
3. We covenant with each other to bring up and discuss reasonably and rationally any significant feelings, especially those of insecurity, abandonment, loneliness, unfairness, resentment etc. as soon as we are able to articulate them. We will honor each other's feelings, never ridicule them, and consider them in love.
4. We agree to change our behavior whenever necessary with regard to polyamory to help each other feel loved and valued.
5. We promise to be honest about our feelings at all times, never to play the martyr in order to look generous, never to dismiss a feeling on the basis of irrationality, and never to give in to "shiny new lover" syndrome, in which infatuation with the new toy precludes attention to the old.
6. Children:
 - a. We affirm that as long as there are any minor children in our household, care of that child or children will take priority over any other relationships or interests.
 - b. We fully expect that any other partners who have minor children will place the same priority on care of their children.
 - c. There will be no presumption of availability of childcare so that a primary partner may attend an event with another partner.
7. We agree that although sexual and romantic liaisons with others are permitted, they are permitted only under the following circumstances:
 - a. If either of us wants to have sexual/romantic relations with someone else, he or she will bring that person in to be interviewed by the other primary partner before sexual relations have occurred. The interview process is unlikely to be a single encounter, but is expected to consist of enough face-to-face

- encounters to build friendships and a reasonable degree of trust between all parties.
- b. The potential lover must affirm that he or she is fully aware of the primacy of Cynthia and Sam's relationship and has no illusions about the nature of our partnership, including his or her place in the priority list.
 - c. The potential lover must be polite and respectful to the other primary partner throughout the relationship.
 - d. If the potential lover has a partner with any serious level of commitment (spouse, steady boyfriend/girlfriend, etc.), that partner must speak to both of us and give his/her blessing to the relationship. Anyone who lies about being in a committed relationship will be vetoed permanently as soon as such dishonesty is discovered.
 - e. If a lover is having serious problems in his or her primary relationship, it is expected that any relationship beyond a friendship with Cynthia or Sam will be ended to give priority to the primary relationship.
 - f. Each primary partner has the right to an irrevocable veto of any partner at any time. The person issuing the veto is required to provide an explanation, but the veto is not open to argument. If an already long-standing sex partner is suddenly vetoed, arguing is allowed and a consensus must be reached.
 - g. Any and all emotional misunderstandings must be settled by consensus, with mediation if necessary, before there's a blow-up. Repeated inability on the part of lovers to talk through misunderstandings and come to useful compromises will be cause to end the relationship.
 - h. Lovers are required to develop and maintain a friendly relationship with the other primary partner. The primary partners will make a good-faith effort to meet other lovers halfway in this process, but will not be expected to take the initiative in pursuing such relationships.
8. The period immediately following a date or liaison with another partner will be spent in quality time so that the primary partners can reconnect.
 9. Healthy communication is vital to the health of our relationship.
 - a. Primary partners will strive to always be available to each other via cell phone or other communication in case of emergencies unless exceptions have been negotiated for a specified period of time.
 - b. Primary partners will communicate clearly with each other as to where they are at any given time and when they expect to return. Any significant changes in plans (such as a time difference of more than half an hour in plans) will be communicated to each other immediately.
 - c. Lovers will not be used as therapists with whom to air or work out issues regarding the primary partner. If we need someone with whom to vent or discuss such things, we will do so only with professionals or non-sexual friends.
 - d. No one will be used to deliver messages to others. All concerns will be brought up directly with the person or persons involved.
 - e. No one will be attacked in any way when he is not present to defend himself.
 - f. There are no secrets between the primary partners. Any other partner will respect this full disclosure and understand that anything that is said or that

occurs between him or herself and a primary partner may be related to the other primary partner. It is expected that the same will be true between another lover and his or her primary partner.

- g. All statements will be taken at face value. As all involved parties are presumed to be responsible adults, statements such as “Nothing’s wrong” will be accepted to mean that there is truly nothing wrong. There will be no attempt to figure out any mixed messages or passive-aggressive signals.
10. There are restrictions on the following social activities:
 - a. The following occasions must be spent with the primary partner: Anniversaries, birthdays of any immediate family member, religious holidays, graduations and any other days of special emotional significance. Primary partners may be able to negotiate participation in some such occasions by other partners as well, but it will not be assumed that other partners will be welcome to share those occasions.
 - b. Primary partners will be given first dibs on participation in any social activity. That participation will exclude other partners if the primary partner so desires.
 - c. Any “first time” activities will be explored between primary partners before sharing them with secondary partners.
 11. There are restrictions on the following sexual activities:
 - a. Condoms will be used properly for all sexual encounters outside the primary partnership. There are no exceptions.
 - b. If PIV intercourse occurs, any female lovers of Sam’s will also use another reliable method of birth control (barrier or hormonal) unless she has had a hysterectomy or is well past menopause.
 - c. Any BDSM must be negotiated separately. Full-time BDSM relationships are not a possibility at this time.
 - d. Our bed and bedroom are ours. They will not be used for interactions with other lovers unless that is negotiated ahead of time between us.
 12. Our home is sacred. Any secondary lovers will agree to abide by and respect our house rules. Any person who is not welcome in our home is automatically and permanently vetoed.

We hereby agree to abide by the rules of this contract until it is renegotiated. We will specifically reconsider it in six months, and again after twelve months.

February 16, 2004

Background

Cyn's Poly Bio

Cyn has been polyamorous for over 20 years. She read Heinlein as a teenager and thrilled to find that someone else didn't find monogamy the perfect paradigm. She was part of an intimate network while in high school.

Her first marriage, to a high school sweetheart (Scott), was strictly monogamous. She avoided exclusive relationships for a time after their 1987 divorce. She met Wayne in 1988, and they married monogamously in 1989.

Katie was born in 1990.

Wayne and Cyn separated in 1992. She got online shortly afterwards and discovered that there was a word for responsible non-monogamy. She joined the "big poly list," called triples back then, and met her chosen brother Ron. She read Deborah Anapol's **Love without Limits**.

Cyn met Paul, her third husband, online in 1993. Their relationship was always open. They married in 1994, separated in 1995 and divorced in 1996.

After the separation, Cyn spent a year following "the relationship diet." It was a very healthy experience for her, and one she recommends that all adults try at least once.

Sam's Poly Bio

Sam was introduced to polyamory in 1989, not many months after the birth of his son, Rowan. It was a "take it or leave it" introduction. Faced with a choice between leaving his very young son or accepting the proclamation, he stayed in the marriage for 9 years.

Rowan was born in 1988. Genevieve was born in 1991.

During that time he had few lovers who were approved of by his now-ex-wife, and his wife had many lovers who he essentially had to accept without veto.

When he separated from her in 1994, he spent eighteen months in New York and New Jersey. During that time he was in a kid-in-a-candy store enjoying several polyamorous lovers locally and far away.

He consciously chose polyamory for the first time with Cynthia.

Our Family's Story

Cyn and Sam met in August 1998, at a Unitarian Universalist congregation. Both of them were involved in polyamorous relationships with other people at the time. In November 1998, after those relationships ended, we chose to close our relationship for a time.

Cyn moved in to the Norcross home Sam shared with his children, Rowan and Genevieve, at their invitation in early 1999.

Sam's ex-wife Leigh Ann moved to California in October 1999. Katie had been living with her father, Wayne, who was battling leukemia. After Wayne died in November 1999, Katie joined the household full-time as well.

We moved to a larger home in Stone Mountain in May 2000. Cyn quit work to stay home with the children in 2000, and began homeschooling Katie.

We opened our relationship in 2002. We took many months, first, to mull over why, what we wanted, with whom, how we wanted to work things out, etc.

We were somewhat surprised to find ourselves in a polyfidelitous quad that September. That lasted until January 2003.

We moved to our current home in May 2003, and Cyn began attending Southern Polytechnic State University.

After Genevieve was hospitalized due to suicidal ideation in November 2002, her mother began a custody battle. As a result, Rowan and Genevieve went to live with her in California in August 2003.

New Beginnings

“Shopping list” for New SOs

Your chances of piquing our interest improve with every trait you possess that’s also on this list:

- Size accepting but not a size fetishist
- Pagan or extremely pagan-friendly
- Intelligent and creative enough to be interesting to both of us
- Either a gamer, someone interested in trying gaming or tolerant of our involvement in gaming. (Sam says that he’s pretty sure *tolerant of gaming* wouldn’t be enough, but he’d give it a shot. He would not be able to resist proselytizing about gaming, though.)
- Strong enough in personality to deal with two opinionated alpha-type people without being someone who seeks out or enjoys conflict (this has absolutely nothing to do with being dominant in the BDSM sense)
- And, obviously, polyamorous

The following are areas of particular concern:

TOBACCO: He does not use any form of tobacco and does not use alcohol on a regular basis or to excess. Smoking? All three members of our household are allergic to the smoke and we all hate the smell of it.

ALCOHOL: He does not use alcohol on a regular basis or to excess. If he considers alcohol a vital part of having fun, that’s an automatic veto right there.

ILLEGAL DRUGS: We don’t want to be around illegal drugs at any time. We don’t want them in our house. We don’t want our children around them. We don’t want to be around people who are under their influence, and we don’t want our children exposed to that. We will not, therefore, get involved with anyone who uses illegal drugs.

MENTAL HEALTH: He has dealt with or is well along the way to dealing with any kind of mental health concerns or past abuse. We realize that *dealing with it* is a process and can take a long time, since we’ve both had to *deal with it* ourselves and are indeed still doing so. However, after the initial stages of recovery, things get much better than they are early on. It’s been our experience that during those initial stages, the person in recovery just doesn’t have the energy to deal well with one SO, much less more than one. We’re not holding others to standards we don’t meet, nor do we think that people with mental health issues are bad in any way.

PARENTING: If he has minor children, he is a good parent by our standards and those children are people whose company we and our children enjoy. He participates in “tribal parenting” to whatever extent is appropriate. If he has an infant, we’d be very reluctant to enter into a new relationship simply because that infant deserves most of his energy for the next year or two.

STABILITY: He has a reasonably stable financial and domestic situation: a decent place to live, no frequent financial crises, etc. That provision is there to protect us from any temptation to

ride to the rescue. It's also a priority thing again. If he has that kind of problem going on, dealing with it should take higher priority than starting new relationships.

GRUNGE: He has grunge levels compatible with ours. If Cyn could walk into his home without finding offensive smells, feeling compelled to douse everything in bleach or picking up the phone to call child protective services or the SPCA to come rescue any children or pets, we're probably fairly compatible.

EX-SOs: He has reasonably good relationships with at least some of his ex-SOs, especially any SOs with whom he had children. The ability to co-parent responsibly is very important.

NO DRAMATIC ROYALTY: He shows no drama queen (or king) tendencies. Yes, we do separate that from the mental health/recovery issue for several reasons that we may expand on at a later date. (Well, Cyn already did, to some extent.)

HANDLING CRISES: This one can be hard to judge until there's a crisis of some sort while he is present, but anyway...he reacts reasonably and responsibly during crises rather than getting hysterical or contributing to the crisis. That's part of being a responsible adult as far as we're concerned.

SUPPORT NETWORK: He has his own interests and friends and will maintain those interests and friendships.

MEETING PEOPLE: He is not reluctant to meet our friends and family or to have us meet his friends and family. It isn't necessary that he be "out" about being poly, and we certainly wouldn't intentionally out him to his friends or family without his consent.

HONESTY: He is either not involved with anyone else, or has been completely honest with any other SOs about his interest in one or both of us and has put us in contact with his SO(s). (We would actually prefer that the person have other healthy relationships.)

STAMPING THE POLY CARD: He is not new to polyamory, preferably having at least one or more years of experience with actually living responsible non-monogamy (not being interested in it or wishing he could try it or cheating). That one isn't a hard and fast rule, but a very strong preference.

NO SWINGERS: There aren't any "swinger" style expectations. The fact that one of us is interested in one member of a couple doesn't mean the other will have any interest in him or his partner. There is no swapping and the slightest hint of such expectations or pressure is an incredible turn-off. Having "swung" with others in the past is not the primary concern here, but it is important to know about.

HEALTH OF OSOs: He's not married to or living with anyone who is

- Seriously mentally ill (either untreated or in very early stages of treatment)
- Abusive, physically, emotionally, verbally or otherwise
- Has a substance abuse problem (and isn't well along the road to recovery)

Getting Started

Beginning a new relationship can be wonderful and stressful. It is a very delicate time, as people get to know each other in new ways and we all feel our way to sustainable patterns.

Step 1: Introduction of a new potential SO

As part of our policy of continuous communication and honesty, we will explicitly discuss the possibility of someone becoming an SO as soon as we become aware of feelings or thoughts that indicate that possibility. We do so to keep relationships from being “below the radar” and surprising a Primary later on down the road.

Step 2: the Yes List

In order for a relationship to be approved to progress beyond simple friendship and into a stage where romance and sex begin to be considered, the new potential SO must be placed on the “Yes” list. “Yes” listing does not require any action on the part of the “Yes” listed person, but it does give implicit permission for the heart and the mind (but not the body) to wander further afield into the realm of romance and sex.

Step 3: the First Meeting

The first meeting will take place between the Primaries and the prospective SO and their SOs. It will be a civil, friendly gathering in a neutral location and it will not include children. During that meeting, it should be made obvious to both Primaries that everyone present understands the proposed relationship and everyone is OK with that going forward.

Step 4: the First Date

Both Primaries need to be in agreement before proceeding with a date. For a time, each date will be agreed upon mutually, in advance.

Step 5: Sex

We will explicitly discuss and agree on any situation in which interpersonal sexual contact is to be contemplated with a new SO.

Non-standard Relationship Situations

Long-Distance Relationships

Since we don't have funds available to do much traveling, it is unlikely that having LDRs as primary or secondary partners is a very feasible situation. Tertiary relationships are a possibility.

The steps for screening potential SOs remain the same, regardless of the distances between us.

If our first face-to-face meeting with a new potential SO involves that person traveling here, there will be no presumption of him staying or even coming to our house. Initial encounters will be in a public place and with both of us, and if we both feel comfortable that person may be invited in to our home to visit, but not to stay.

If we are meeting a new potential SO elsewhere, we would prefer to stay in a hotel and meet that person in a public place, together.

We will not fund anyone else's travel costs. Of course, we don't want anyone else to fund ours, either.

We may choose to waive one or more of the steps outlined above for a particular new SO. That will only happen with express and explicit consensus-based agreement to do so ahead of time. LDRs are already on shaky ground to start with, so it's important that we follow all the steps that can be followed.

Festival Flings

If a Primary is attending a special event such as a convention or gather, whether alone or with an SO, he may arrange ahead of time to suspend the normal new-SO steps for the duration of the Festival in case he meets someone with whom he'd like to have a Fling.

Criteria for Flingees (Fling SOs):

- He must be provably unattached and unencumbered.
- He must be the sort of person who could reasonably qualify as a "normal" SO at some point in the future.
- He must be someone met spontaneously at the Festival (pre-arranged Flingees are perilously closed to unauthorized Dates).
- He must understand that the relationship is for the duration of the Festival only, and after the Festival they must resume simple friendship until they can take appropriate steps to go forward as a regular SO.
- Sexual activity with the Flingee is allowed as long as it does not include penis-in-vagina or penis-in-anus penetration.
- Flingees take last place in consideration as to where and how they will spend time with the primary in question, especially if the primary is at the same festival.
Remember: A primary always has first call on his primary SO's time.

Affection/Friendliness/Civility

If a PSO does not feel friendliness and civility toward an OSO, something is very, very wrong. A rule to use is that if the PSO cannot envision genuinely hugging the OSO, then there is a problem. This problem must be immediately addressed and taken care of, or the relationship is soon over. All SOs will treat each other with courtesy, civility, restraint, tolerance, friendliness, and affection regardless of their gender or affiliation.

Display of Affection or Sexual Interaction?

Generally, one can use common sense. Snuggling is not sexual. Any kiss you'd give your mother or a child isn't sexual. For us, going beyond that outside an acknowledged SO relationship isn't okay. Hugging, holding hands casually, etc. is perfectly fine and we do it with many people with whom we're friendly. Snuggling without clothing, though, is simply too likely to turn in to something sexual, so it isn't okay (at least panties and a t-shirt/gown for females, underwear and shorts for a male, preferably with a shirt of some sort).

There will never be any explicit sexual communications of any kind with anyone who isn't already on the **Yes List**. *Important safety tip: cybersex, online interactive erotica, or writing an erotic story for the purposes of sharing with a specific person is considered "explicit sexual communication."* The same goes for pictures (video or still).

Attraction/Assumption Issues

If one of us is attracted to someone, there should be no assumption that the other primary or any of our OSOs will be attracted to him or any of his OSOs. We neither swing nor "swap."

Who Are We Talking About Here?

The **Yes List** is a list of people with whom either of us can start a relationship at any time. Circumstances have shown us that some people are not compatible with us as OSOs. We can be friends with them, to a certain extent, but we will very carefully maintain our boundaries with them. These people are on the **No List**. By default, then, everyone else is on the **Maybe List**. People can be moved from the **Yes List** to the **Maybe List**, or directly to the **No List** or even the **Hell No List**, because of facts that come up about them.

Once someone is on the **No List**, it's very, very difficult (if not impossible) to get taken off. But it could conceivably happen, depending on the level of miraculous life changes that take place. Of course, those are not likely to happen. We acknowledge that sometimes the leopard changes its spots, but usually the leopard doesn't have any reason to do so and refuses.

Moving someone to the **Yes List** is a slow process that requires building trust, mutual respect and friendships all around. People can be removed from the **Yes List** permanently or temporarily, but it will involve explicit discussion and agreement between Sam and Cynthia. People on the **Yes List** will be told that they are there.

We have exercised prior veto power regarding some people in particular, and they are on the **Hell No List**. Those people will never be considered close friends or anything more than fairly distant acquaintances should circumstances bring them back into our lives. We will not be involved with anyone who is an OSO or family member to any of these people, either (and probably not with anyone who is even friends with them). There will be absolutely no "friendly" or "social" communication of any kind with anyone on the **Hell No** list. That includes email, chat, telephone calls, text messages, saying hello on the street, and sending information through third parties. This is not open to negotiation, and need not be explained to the person in question. Any communication that is initiated by someone on **Hell No** list needs to be reported as soon as possible, whereupon the recipient may be cleared to send a civil, terse reply. People on the **Hell No** list will not have our contact information or anything else that we wouldn't publish openly on a web site.

The **Wish List** is about people in whom at least one of us is interested. We don't currently have enough information to know if they meet the criteria for OSOs, but we have no information to the contrary. In some cases we don't, however, know that they'd even be interested in being OSOs, and we don't necessarily tell them of the existence of the **Wish List**, much less that they're on it. You could think of it a something like a crush list.

It is kinder not to begin a relationship than to begin one that is very likely to have to be ended soon for some reason. If either of us has any concern about the sustainability of a relationship, we will get to know the people involved better before moving them to the **Yes List**.

If you're wondering which, if any, list you're on—well, if you were on the **Yes List** we guarantee that we would have already told you. If you've been involved with one of us on the past and we aren't currently fairly good friends, you're probably on the **No List**. If anything really nasty happened, you can be fairly sure you're on the **Hell No List**. If we socialize with you at all, you're probably on the **Maybe List** and might be on the **Wish List**.

Veto

Primary SOs do hold a veto. They can nix involvement with a particular person or insist that a particular relationship end or change in other ways. We will use our vetoes sparingly, responsibly, with full communication as to the concerns that we feel necessitate its use, and in a spirit of love.

While our other current SOs don't precisely have veto power regarding new SOs, we will fully disclose any movement towards a relationship with someone new, and we will strongly consider the wishes of our current SOs before beginning any new relationships.

Resources

Time

Priorities. Commitment. Attention. Loyalty. All of these are connected to the resource of time. Time is the true “coin of the realm” in any relationship. No matter what anyone says, their actions show the truth—and that truth is often shown in how they choose to spend their time. How time is parceled out can cause major conflicts and misunderstanding in any relationship, and that is especially true in poly interactions.

The relationship between Sam and Cynthia is the only primary relationship either of us has, and as such it will be given priority above all others. That priority will be clearly communicated to all potential SOs. If we don't have time or other resources for couple-only time between us, we don't have the resources for dates with other people.

Our children and our current family unit as a whole is another top priority. We will not do anything that would destabilize our family or threaten our relationships with the kids.

Scheduling

We will not cancel, and probably will not change, any plans made with our primary partners or with the family in order to be with another SO. Obviously, true emergencies would be an exception and will be handled as they arise.

Scheduling anything on dates like family birthdays, anniversaries or significant holidays (cultural or spiritual ones we observe) is a no-no. Having other SOs here to celebrate those holidays with our family is probably fine but should be discussed in advance.

Child Care

Childcare arrangements are an overriding concern. Our children are our number one priority. Our OSO's children, if any, are our next priority. If any child needs his parent, the parent goes to that child immediately, without debate, and with the full support of his SOs.

While one of us may (probably would) offer to stay at home with our kids so that the other could go out on a date, that will not be assumed. At the moment, though, our children are old enough that this isn't too much of a problem.

There definitely won't be any assumption that either of us will provide childcare for any other SOs.

Equity in childcare arrangements is another concern. It is one of the most common causes of conflict we've observed in polyamorous couples who have small children and in poly-mono pairings. Who takes care of the kids when adults are away? Where are they when adults A and B are together, or even Adults A, B, and C? Does Adult D have to watch them while A, B, and C are getting naked or going to the movies, or whatever? That's hardly fair, unless Adult D gets an equivalent amount of childfree time for his own pursuits.

Sam used to care for A and AM's children while they enjoyed dates together. Getting couple time rejuvenated their relationship and had a positive effect on the entire family. Sam was

happy to do that once every other week,. On alternate weeks, A would stay home with the kids so that AM and Sam could go out on their own dates in turn.

Important note: Taking care of your own children is NOT “babysitting.” It’s parenting.

No one person should be “stuck” with the kids night after night. Even if he doesn’t have an OSO at the moment, he should have adult time during which he can do whatever he likes.

Note that there should also be balance in the money spent on childcare and other date expenses. If D is going out alone, there’s no reason that he shouldn’t have just as much money budgeted for childcare and fun as A, B and C had.

If childcare arrangements fall through, we will switch gears and do something that includes the children. We’ve found that spending time at home as a large family, playing games or watching movies ‘til the children are in bed, works well. The adults are then able to get some “us time” later, though they will need to continue to be aware of any need that arises with the children.

We have found that adult time is vital to the health of any relationship. If OSOs are unable to find a way to enjoy adult time with their primary partners, but can find time to date us or others, we worry about the stability of their primary relationship.

Comfort

Every SO should be able to call upon every other SO to relieve loneliness and to provide some kind of comfort. This may be as simple as a telephone conversation and as advanced as non-sexual snuggling.

Primary partners always have “first call” on sleeping with each other if they wish to do so. Ideally, in situations where more than one SO is sleeping in the same house, nobody should **have** to sleep alone if they do not wish to sleep alone. We don’t always have that option, but we do want to keep everyone as comforted as possible. At the same time, nobody should feel compelled to have sex with or snuggle with anyone they’re not feeling snuggly or sexual with.

One way to provide comfort in times when an SO is visiting is to spend some time snuggling and cuddling with the SO and then leave to go sleep with the Primary. This arrangement allows both the SO and the Primary to have affection in the same evening.

Money

Money spent on gas to visit OSOs, telephone calls to them, dates, childcare during dates, gifts—all are expenditures that don’t normally happen unless there’s an OSO in the picture. A family’s entertainment budget is generally spent on fun for the immediate family. Family budgets seldom contain funds for buying condoms or dental dams. Even expenses that seem minor can be a source of conflict, especially if there is a disparity of income between various SOs.

Common courtesy dictates that everyone in a relationship makes about as many calls or visits as everyone else in that relationship. Short-term imbalances aren’t a cause for concern, but long-term inequity is cause for concern.

For example, it was often the case that Sam could procure cheaper disposable phone cards than his girlfriend in California. He used those cheaper phone cards to call her more frequently than she called him. Every so often, she'd send him a small sum of cash to cover the phone cards. When she visited Sam, in GA, she bought some for her to use out in CA. And so on.

At the moment, we have unlimited local and long-distance calls on our cell phones, so we're happy to call our SOs wherever they are.

We also don't believe it would be right for an OSO to give someone a more expensive/nicer gift for his birthday or Yule than his PSO could give him without first consulting his PSO and working that out. It's important to consider the PSO's feelings. By the same token, we'd never want to embarrass someone else's PSO by our gifts.

No SO should lend or borrow money from any other SO. If the money cannot be freely given as a true gift, then money should not change hands.

There may be situations in which various SOs agree to share expenses for extras like going on vacation together. It is extremely important that all parties speak up very clearly regarding what they can truly afford BEFORE any expenses are incurred. Treats should bring joy rather than financial hardship or resentment.

We will not co-sign loans for other people.

We will not enter in to any kind of financial obligation or entanglement with anyone else beyond the cost of a meal or a brief trip. For any kind of travel, the expense arrangements will be worked out very clearly beforehand and agreed to by all concerned.

Nobody else will be given access to our credit/debit cards, checkbooks, checking accounts, PIN numbers, etc.

We will not discuss our finances with others without express prior agreement that it is okay to do so.

We will not do anything that obviously endangers our jobs or livelihoods. That would include engaging in extensive conversations with OSOs at work (online or by telephone). If it is possible that we will miss work due to an OSO, or will be arriving at work late or leaving early because of an OSO, we will discuss the situation between us ahead of time and assess any possible risks.

Combining Households

In order to combine households with someone, we would all need to be sure that we are emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually compatible enough to have common ground, but not so much alike that we bore each other to tears. We will not consider combining households with anyone with whom we have been involved for less than a full year.

We will not consider combining households with anyone unless we have already determined that they do not have dramatic lives, and that we are very sure that their parenting, cleanliness, financial and information security standards and styles are compatible with ours.

It would be best if we did not consider combining households with anyone whose standard of living is significantly different from ours, because of the possibility of resentment or inequities.

Taking more than one joint trip of a week or more (one with, one without the kids?) would be a wise idea before considering combining households. Visiting each other's homes for varying periods of time up to a week is another vital step.

All children involved who live with the adults involved in this decision full time and are old enough to speak and express an opinion will give an opportunity to do so, and any legitimate concerns that are brought up by them will be treated very seriously by all of the adults involved.

After agreeing to combine households, actually doing so would be predicated on finding housing that would suit all of us, that we can afford jointly, and that is actually available to us (i.e., we can qualify for a lease or mortgage). Said housing would have to provide the same degree of privacy and comfort that both families enjoyed before—for example, we wouldn't expect any of the kids to give up having their own bedrooms. We're talking about a very big house!

We will enter into legally binding agreements regarding property, bills, etc. in order to avoid messy disagreements. Any significant property purchased would be obtained after setting up a joint living trust or similar legal entity.

It may be more realistic to find housing in the same neighborhood, perhaps even in the same cul-de-sac. We do not believe in the whole "communal finances" thing. The advantages of combining households, of course, would include economies of scale with respect to housing costs, food, utilities, transportation, and so on. Those living together would be able to see each other daily and rear children together. It's entirely possible (and of significant interest to Cynthia) that we could create a business together. Homeschooling would be even better with more people around to be involved. A personal goal of Sam's, to be a stay-at-home dad who writes for a "living," would be very much helped by this arrangement.

Safety

Privacy

We will not be physically or verbally affectionate in overtly romantic or sexual ways with anyone but our primary partners in public unless all parties involved are comfortable with being completely uncloseted with regards to polyamory.

Private details of our lives and interactions with our SOs will not be discussed or published online without very clear and explicit agreement that it is acceptable to do so.

We will not give anyone any kind of passwords, PINs or other private information.

We have immediate cause to be extremely careful about informational security, due to someone who has been actively stalking our family since 1996. We encourage others to be just as cautious “just in case.” Our phone numbers, places of employment, general or specific details about where we live, where the kids attend school or dance lessons or Scout meetings or soccer practice or absolutely anything else that could enable anyone to physically locate any member of our family in the real world will not be mentioned online, even if you think it’s a private communication, without our express permission. Ever. We don’t honestly care if someone thinks we’re being paranoid, he will agree to these guidelines if he wishes to be involved with us.

Our Kids

We have found it inadvisable to hide our affection for SOs from our children. They would know that there was some big “secret” and would most likely think that it was something bad, or something of which we were ashamed. That would damage our relationships with the children, and it would probably negatively affect their opinions of those SOs, as well. Our family doesn’t do secrets.

Our sex lives are of no concern to our children. They do not need to know any specifics of what we do with anyone, and we prefer to keep it that way. They know that all humans are sexual beings, and that sex is a private thing. They are also accustomed to us being quite affectionate with various friends, so they don’t find anything odd about either or both of us snuggling with people other than each other.

We have spoken to our children about polyamory for many years now, in both theoretical and specific terms. They are accustomed to the notion that their parents may love more than one person at a time, and they have seen for themselves that neither our relationship as a couple nor our stability as a family are threatened by those other relationships. They seem to consider polyamory a perfectly normal possibility in the human relational repertoire.

Our Partners’ Kids

We will do our best to respect whatever boundaries our partners establish with regards to what their own children know, as long as it does not involve any deceitfulness. We strongly believe that it is in the best interests of their families to be as honest as possible in an age-appropriate way.

If your children are very young, it's unlikely that they will see anything odd about new SOs unless there is some strained feeling or attempt to hide things. Older children (four and up?) who haven't been exposed to polyamory in the past deserve some sort of explanation.

One approach that has worked well in the past is to explain that just as a parent can love more than one child without replacing the child or lessening his love for that child, people can love more than one person in the romantic sense. Answer any questions as fully as you like. You may wish to address the issue of what we talk about within the family and what we talk about with just anyone at this time, too. Kids at this age can usually understand that we don't normally go out and tell everybody absolutely everything, while realizing that not talking about, for instance, bathroom matters, doesn't mean that they aren't secrets. They do need to know that if they're worried, upset, or concerned, that they can certainly ask any trusted adult about those issues.

Extended Families

Cyn has been very direct with her family about being polyamorous, although they seem to be in denial for the most part. She has not spoken directly with Katie's paternal grandparents and other relatives about the issue, and has no plan to do so. Sam has chosen not to speak with his extended family about polyamory. If, however, they ask a direct question of us or the children, it will be answered honestly. And, of course, there's always the possibility that they will read this material at some point. Should we ever choose to combine households with anyone else, we would certainly want to explain the situation to our families.

Business Associates

At the moment, Sam works in a very conservative organization, and cannot be "out" as an actively polyamorous person at work. Some of his coworkers who he also considers friends do, however, know. Cynthia has been "out" at work in the past, depending on the environment in which she was working at the time. Again, if asked directly, we aren't going to lie.

Friends/Acquaintances

Our closest friends definitely know about our SOs, and are quite likely to meet them. Other friends and acquaintances do, for the most part, know that we're polyamorous—or, at least, we make no effort to hide that fact from them. We do not necessarily let them know whenever we begin or end new relationships.

Security

Nobody comes to our house or gets the address or any real information more specific than the name of the county we live in before we've both met them in a public place and cleared them for that information.

Nobody will be left alone with any of our kids, individually or as a group, without prior agreement.

Our children will not go anywhere else with anyone without full prior agreement.

We will not give anyone a key to the house, even temporarily, or leave anyone alone in our house at any time without prior discussion and agreement.

There will be no loaning of cars or driving of our cars by other people without full prior agreement and both of us already knowing that the people in question are, in fact, good drivers. We would prefer that we not drive other people's cars due to liability considerations, but there are times when circumstances make it reasonable to do so. Before leaving a parking lot or driveway, we will verify that a valid auto insurance card, registration and other necessary documents are in the vehicle and that we know where they are.

Sex

In our experience, sex itself isn't usually the most difficult part of most poly relationships. The consequences of sex, though, have caused some of the most spectacular "crash and burn" disasters we've witnessed. It is especially easy for sex to become a major source of conflict if there is something special that goes on sexually between two partners that isn't shared with other partners, or if one person seems to prefer one partner over another, or if one person's libido flags and others' does not.

Sex is one of those areas in which aggressive honesty is especially important. There can't be any sexual secrets between one of us and a primary SO. If the primary SO wants to know about all we do together, then he or she will be welcome to know.

There must be full disclosure of all sexual boundaries. If someone has a specific boundary, it will should be acknowledged and honored. Failing to stay within those boundaries is a failure of trust. Sexual boundaries can only be changed by mutual agreement of all parties involved.

Just because something sexual, general or specific, happened once with someone doesn't mean that it will ever happen again.

STDs and Safer Sex

Right now, we are both presumably disease free. We wish to stay that way.

Both of us will be fully tested for STDs every 6 months. Those tests will include HIV, HPV, CMV, herpes, hepatitis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Records of a clean bill of health will be freely shared with all sexual partners. We ask that any sexual partners do the same.

Obviously, we'd prefer that any new sexual partners have a clean bill of health. We realize, though, that there are some things that are fairly common, like HPV and herpes. We want to know if those viruses are present, and that the new partner has sought treatment as is appropriate.

If one of our partners has or acquires an STD, we expect to be notified immediately. If one of us has an STD, we will notify all of our partners immediately and ask that they inform their other lovers immediately. We will promise to work things out in a cooperative, rational fashion. Our intent is to see that STDs are not transmitted at all.

Should an SO develop an STD after we are involved with him, we expect that he would inform as soon as soon as he knows that there's even a possibility of infection, have the appropriate tests immediately, and share their results.

Both of us have been immunized for hepatitis B and hope to be immunized for hepatitis A before long. We would prefer that any new partners do the same.

Barriers will be used consistently and properly during any kind of intercourse, including oral sex, until there is an explicit agreement among all parties to change that practice.

Note: Cyn has a recently discovered latex allergy. It requires the use of other (and, unfortunately, more expensive) barriers.

Condom Commitments

There will be no discussion of discontinuing the use of barrier protection until:

1. All parties have had a full set of tests for STDs, including HIV, herpes, genital warts, and chlamydia (with negative results for all of the above).
2. We have known all parties in question for at least a year.
3. Any concerns about possible pregnancies have been addressed to everyone's satisfaction.

We need to know if an SO is having sex with anyone else without the consistent use of barriers. If that is the case, it is extremely unlikely that we will even discuss discontinuing their use with us.

If we decide to discontinue the use of barriers with a partner, there will be an initial three-month trial period. If, after that time, everybody is still amenable, we will go over the three steps outlined above. Any subsequent condom commitments will be for one year at a time.

Mishaps will be handled by:

- Immediately taking measures to reduce the risk of infection (urinating immediately, washing the genitals thoroughly with antibacterial soap)
- Use of a spermicide if pregnancy is a possibility
- Other emergency contraceptive measures as recommended by 1-888-NOT-2-LATE
- The use of barriers between Cyn and Sam until we are absolutely certain that there is no possibility of infection.
- Full disclosure to all sexual partners for both people involved in the mishap.
- Immediate testing for both parties involved in the mishap.

Birth Control

Any time there is any PIV intercourse, two reliable methods of contraception will be used. An example would be the use of both birth control pills and condoms. If one of the partners has had a vasectomy, tubal ligation or similar procedure, the use of barriers will be sufficient. This practice absolutely will not be changed in the least without the full and explicit consent of all involved parties.

Because there is still a possibility, however small, of a pregnancy resulting from any intercourse between a fertile adult male and female, we will discuss that possibility with any potential SOs and form explicit agreements about what would be done if an unplanned pregnancy did occur. (Any operation less invasive than a total hysterectomy could conceivably fail, and therefore those who have had them will still be considered fertile for the purposes of this discussion.)

Pregnancy

Having intercourse that might result in a pregnancy means that both parties have made a commitment to fully share responsibility, financially and otherwise, for any pregnancy that might result. It also means that the people involved are open to the possibility of co-parenting with us, and we with them.

Safer sex guidelines should always be followed. Birth control is the responsibility of both parties. Obviously, the intent is for no unplanned pregnancies to take place at all, and every step will be taken to avoid them. Because some of the worst relationship disasters we've seen have involved unplanned pregnancies, we have chosen to spell out our principles very explicitly.

There will be a paternity test in order to determine the biological father of any child conceived. The cost of any paternity testing will be shared among the parties involved and all parties will explicitly agree to participate willingly in such testing should the need arise.

If, despite all birth control being in place, a woman who is an OSO becomes pregnant by Sam, we will honor the choice the woman chooses to make. If she wants to have the child, Sam will share custody of the child and/or pay support as mandated by the state.

If she wants to abort the child, we will pay half of the abortion costs and Sam will go with her if she wishes to the operation. If she is interested in having the child and then giving the child up for adoption, then we will support her in this as well. If she chooses to simply end our relationship at that time, then we will accept that choice as well. We have no wish to force ourselves into any family situation.

Note: Cynthia absolutely would not abort a healthy fetus. Any male partner of Cynthia's needs to understand and accept this fact up front, as it is not and never will be a negotiable issue.

If Cynthia becomes pregnant, Sam would react much the same way as described above. He would be a father to the child regardless of its biological paternity. Other SOs would be more than welcome to act as parents as well.

Should a child be born to Cynthia, or should Sam father a child with any other woman, we both want to be involved with coparenting that child alongside any other bioparent, and are committed to working out a healthy and supportive way of doing so for all involved.

A pregnancy or birth will not justify combining households, although having all involved parties living close to each other would certainly simplify logistics.

Due to Georgia paternity laws, there will be legally binding custody and coparenting agreements drawn up between all involved parties if a child is born to anyone other than a legally married couple.

Honesty & Communication

We strongly recommend that everyone read the book **Radical Honesty** by Brad Blanton. It isn't easy stuff, but we've found it incredibly valuable, and we attempt to practice radical honesty in our relationships.

In general, everyone should assume equal responsibility for keeping in touch with one another. Weekly check-ins are fine for non-sexual links, daily check-ins are required for sexual links.

Checking in should include concerns, worries, hopes, dreams, thoughts, ideas, plans, and the like. Daily schedules should be shared so that we all know what's happening with each other. A few lines of email should accomplish that, and everything else is gravy.

It is always better to speak up about what you want or need rather than hoping that someone will telepathically ferret out that information. Being dishonest harms the person being dishonest as well as the relationships in question. Major dishonesty (cheating, outright lies, etc.) is a trust failure. Not saying something important is lying by omission.

If you don't know what you want in a situation, say that too. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Listen more than you talk.

We will be wholly honest and forthcoming with each other, even when the topic is uncomfortable or may be painful to discuss. Avoiding a topic because it is likely to provoke disagreement or a big discussion is absolutely out of the question. There will be no semantics games or relationship "rules lawyering." There are no secrets between us, and OSOs need to know that. We do not expect OSOs to keep any secrets from their primary partners.

If the spirit and the letter of an inquiry seem to indicate different responses, answer fully and with both.

We will interact honestly with all of our SOs, and expect the same from them.

It is difficult to be "aggressively honest" all the time: to not only tell the truth, but to think ahead and say, "OK, what would this person really need to know about me, my situation. What information does this person not have that might influence his or her future thinking?" Healthy relationships thrive on aggressive honesty.

This is not the same as "hurtfully honest." Sometimes, as well, people confuse "honesty" with "hurtfulness." Being "hurtfully honest" is the same thing as intentional harm—it won't be tolerated.

Being lovingly honest requires that we stick around to deal with the consequences of your honesty.

The truth does sting sometimes. Our belief is that people who love you need to speak truths that may hurt at times, but they also stay around to help you deal with that hurt. It's important to remember that living a polyamorous life is about being a loving person. Accepting and loving yourself is the first huge task before you. You have help. You are not alone. If a truth hurts, don't clamp down on your feelings. Express them. Figure out why this truth hurts so much. Allow the person who stated the hurtful truth to soothe and help you, to love you actively.

Recognize how difficult it was for them, too. Give them credit for loving you enough to be wholly honest.

We will not be involved with anyone who is being unfaithful to his agreements (as we understand them) with his other partners. It is unlikely that we'd get involved with anyone we know to have been unfaithful in the past, but we realize that people grow and change and may consider it.

We don't have anything approaching a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" arrangement. We won't have anything to do with them, or anyone involved in a DADT relationship.

A word about privacy

Privacy is important. People should not be forced to tell all of their deepest darkest emotional secrets from day one of the relationship. It is not realistic to expect that someone who has been sexually abused in their childhood to plunk down the full story prior to even dating them. Getting to know someone should also entail building enough trust to be share as many potential emotional landmines as possible.

If a potential partner doesn't feel comfortable enough with us to share most, if not all, of the deepest darkest secrets of their personality (as far as they know them), we don't feel that we know that person well enough to be lovers. Once those confidences are gained, we will not betray them.

Early in our relationship with her, one of our former SOs wrote us a letter about her childhood and past relationships. She expected us to hit the road because the issues raised were very upsetting. Instead, it pulled us closer together, as we understood her and her current issues far better.

Since that time, we've chosen to share as many of the potential "landmines" as we have identified with any potential SOs. They are outlined in another (much shorter!) document that will be shared only with people with whom we are considering immediate involvement.

Some of the things that we would like to know about, and which we would share with potential SOs: physical and mental health conditions (especially if there is any chance of contagion); legal or financial problems that impact our current lives; and child custody concerns.

Danger Signs

Red Flags

Anyone who is found to have any history or inclination towards molesting children or pedophilia will immediately be removed from our lives forever, with absolutely no possibility of further contact.

Any of the following will almost certainly lead to ending the relationship in question immediately:

- Anything that causes either of us to seriously think that another SO is not fully respecting our primary relationship or our commitment to our family.
- Dishonesty or manipulative behavior. Withholding information that should have been disclosed is dishonesty.
- Any suggestions of suicidal or self-destructive thoughts/tendencies (including cutting or other self-harming behaviors), including substance abuse.
- Any possibility of violence or any kind of abuse, including learning about abusive behavior towards other partners, children or pets.
- Any knowledge of a felony being committed or about to be committed.

Yellow Flags

These could actually be red or yellow, depending on their severity. If yellow, they would require that a relationship be put on hold at the very least. If red, the relationship would end immediately.

- Significant codependent behaviors. Examples would include triangulation, passive aggressiveness, trying to get someone to “ride to the rescue,” etc.
- Refusal to take responsibility for one’s own feelings and actions.
- Involvement in an abusive or very unhealthy relationship with someone else.
- Ending a long-term primary relationship. While there are perfectly good reasons to end relationships at times, doing so is a major life transition and will take up most of the person’s time and energy. We would endeavor to be supportive friends through, for example, a divorce, and would ask that someone in that situation be a close family friend for a year. During that year we would hope that the person would focus on recovery from the divorce, healing, and finding out what he wants next rather than seeking out new SOs. (See Cyn’s “Relationship Diet” article.)

Suggested Reading

We've found the following resources to be very helpful, and strongly suggest that any partners or potential partners peruse them as well. We have copies of each of these books and will loan them out to potential partners if asked.

Radical Honesty by Brad Blanton

Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits by Deborah Anapol

The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities by Dossie Easton & Catherine A. Liszt. It isn't our favorite, and doesn't reflect the way we do things as well as Anapol's book, but it does have some good information. It certainly isn't as highly recommended as the other two books.

Cyn has written several articles that you may want to read. Ask Sam or Cyn about them.

TechnoZoo House Rules

Our home is sacred. We strive to make sure that it is safe, secure, and comfortable at all times to those who live here and our invited guests. The following rules have been established to help ensure that our household is a haven.

1. Sam and Cyn are in charge of our home. This is not a democracy, and our decisions are not open to debate. We are usually benign dictators, but we are dictators.
2. Sam, Cyn, and Katie live here. Our home exists primarily for the three of us. Our wants and needs will take priority over anyone else's wants and needs.
3. Our home is a no-assholes zone. Anyone of any age who is considered an asshole by Sam, Cyn or Katie is not welcome here. Blood ties, friendships or business connections are important enough to override our wishes. A person who is discovered to be an asshole after being permitted in the house may be asked to leave immediately. He or she will be removed forcibly if necessary.
4. Being allowed in the house once should not be assumed to mean that you will be welcome in our home again. Persons who have been classified as assholes are not permitted to debate or appeal the issue, and may not even be informed of it unless circumstances require that we do so.
5. Every person in our home will be treated with respect at all times. Children are people. Anyone who does not treat other people respectfully is an asshole. See rule #3.
6. Our bedrooms are private spaces. Please do not enter the master bedroom or Katie's bedroom without an express invitation to do so.
7. Do not touch anyone, including a child, without that person's express consent. Hugs are great when wanted, and squicky when not wanted. If your child is of an age to communicate verbally, we expect that you will explain this rule to them so that they may honor it.
8. Any behavior that causes anyone here to feel unsafe will be taken seriously, whether the person admits to intending that result or not. Anyone who shows a tendency toward or makes implicit or explicit threats of violence will be taken seriously and reacted to with force, legal action, and/or immediate reclassification of the violent person as an asshole. We consider any kind of abuse (verbal, emotional, psychological, spiritual or other) to be violence.
9. Please do not presume that an invitation to our home includes anyone you wish to bring with you. If you wish to bring someone else with you, ask us beforehand. It will probably be okay, but please do ask. It does not matter how brief the planned visit is, we do not permit anyone into our home unless we have specifically invited that person in or he's carrying a valid warrant.

10. Our phones and doorbell should not ring between the hours of 10pm and 7am for anything other than a legitimate emergency. People who experience frequent avoidable emergencies are likely to be considered assholes.
11. We try to avoid drama as much as possible. We expect that you will behave as a responsible, stable adult while here, and that you will see to it that your children are well behaved.
12. Explicit sexual behavior or speech in front of children is asinine. See rule #3. Sexual behavior towards children is so far beyond asinine that it will be dealt with in an extremely violent manner.
13. Practical jokes are asinine.
14. There may be firearms on the premises. We will neither confirm nor deny the presence of such firearms if asked. If there are firearms on the premises, we will endeavor to store them safely. If you object to private ownership or use of firearms, you should probably avoid entering our home. The possible presence of firearms in our home should provide yet another reason to monitor your children while here.
15. While here, you will be in the presence of bisexual, polyamorous pagans. We will not change or hide our beliefs or preferences for your comfort. To be blunt, while here you are perfectly likely to see affection expressed between members of the same and opposite sex and to encounter our other significant others or other polyamorous people who are obviously involved with more than one person. You may well witness some kind of spiritual observance, or be present during the discussion of such. If bisexuality, polyamory, or paganism are inherently offensive to you, we respectfully suggest that our home is unlikely to be a comfortable place for you. If you have any problems with your child encountering any of the above, please do not bring your child into our home.
16. If anyone causes you to feel unsafe or uncomfortable while you are in our home, please speak up immediately. If you do not feel as though you can safely address the issue with the other party or parties involved, Sam or Cyn will be happy to speak with you privately. Your safety and comfort here are important to us.

Cyn has written several articles about etiquette: “Being a Pleasant Guest” and “Visiting With Your Children.” They cover the basics of common courtesy, and were written due to vast, gaping holes in some visitors’ educations. We consider people who cannot manage those basics to be (you guessed it) assholes.

Glossary

We've decided to define some terms so that we are absolutely clear as to how we use them, whether they are commonly used outside the community of polyamorous people or not. Having common vocabulary is very important for clear communication.

Relationship Types

FAMILY OF CHOICE are those people we chose to be an active, integral part of our lives, sharing in our joys and frustrations, who we trust with our safety and sanity, and to whom we see ourselves permanently bonded. These are people we'd want to consider when making any kind of major life decision that would affect them.

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS (SOs) are people with whom one of us has a relationship that goes beyond friendship, distinct from "family of choice" although SOs are likely to be considered family of choice.

PRIMARY relationships in which your lives are intertwined in ways most people assume would happen in a standard-issue monogamous marriage. You're Life Partners (capital letters and all). You're living together, you've combined finances, if either of you have minor children you are co-parenting them, and you make decisions of any real importance together. We believe it is perfectly possible to have more than one primary partner, which may be confusing to some (we know of one situation in which four people are primary to each other). The living together/co-parenting part pretty much removes LDRs from the possibility of being primary for us, but we don't assume that others share our definition. For us, being primary means that if any aspect of a relationship with someone else is causing a problem between us, the other relationship ends or changes. It also means that we prefer to share new things with each other first. Things we haven't done with each other aren't going to be done with someone else unless we have already decided that we do not want to do them together.

SECONDARY relationships where you are very close friends and lovers, but you aren't partners. If you have kids, they probably know your secondary SOs and you'd trust the SOs to take care of the kids for a short time, but the SOs aren't co-parents. You'd help each other move, you'd call each other if you needed to get to a doctor's office or had a car problem, etc.

TERTIARY relationships are those where you're friendly, but you aren't really close friends—sex is usually most of what you have in common, maybe in addition to whatever shared interest brought you together (you do the same kind of work, you play the same kind of music, you met at a science fiction convention, etc.). In general, tertiary SOs are not the kind of people you'd call in the middle of the night during a crisis or ask to babysit. YMMV, etc.

QUARTENARY relationships are those that are just about sex. You aren't really friends, precisely, may not know a lot about each other's lives—some people would call them "fuck buddies." We feel that such relationships are not in the best interests of the kinds of relationships we are trying to develop and maintain right now.

LONG DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS (LDRs) are those that require an airline flight or (for us) traveling for more than an hour outside the metro Atlanta area by car to see each other.

Other Terms

BDSM refers to Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission, and Sadomasochism.

BPD is an acronym for Borderline Personality Disorder.

BOUNDARIES are the dividing lines between people, including loved ones. The lines represent physical and emotional limits. Generally, when we feel intense anger, hurt or outrage, a boundary has been violated. Setting clear and definite boundaries is the best way to ask for what you want/need in a relationship.

CATEGORY is a term Sam came up with to refer to people to whom he is attracted and with whom he'd probably be interested in exploring a relationship if there were opportunity and mutual interest. If he refers to someone as being "Category" it doesn't mean he's pursuing them. It's simply part of his aggressive honesty strategy. "Category" is not necessarily a permanent classification, but can come and go as he gets to know a person and observes their behavior.

COMMUNITY: a place of belonging, interconnectedness, acceptance, and sharing. The individual and the family are celebrated and supported in a healthy community, and members are able to build relationships and accomplish shared purposes more easily than if they were alone. When a person is "in community" he has consciously chosen to participate in, contribute to, and protect a community.

COMPERSION is the good feeling one gets from seeing your loved one with another loved one. Compersion is the opposite of jealousy.

CODEPENDENT people have a tendency to become entwined with other people in dysfunctional ways. They define themselves by what those people want or need, and by those relationships. They are not usually capable of setting and maintaining healthy boundaries, and often violate other people's boundaries as a result.

CONSENSUS is solidarity in sentiment and belief. It is not compromise. We engage in consensus decision-making in our primary relationship and prefer to have it with all SOs. It may take much longer than other ways of coming to a decision, but it is the only way that we have found to interact with each other as full and equal partners.

CONSENT is assent or approval given without any kind of coercion or manipulation.

DADT: "Don't ask, don't tell" is a relationship style based on denial. One primary partner agrees that the other can have other SOs, but doesn't want to know anything about them, much less meet them. Sometimes the partner in denial wants her primary partner to lie about where he's going or otherwise completely shield her from any awareness of interactions with the other SOs.

DATES are defined as *1.) any social situation where the primary focus of the interaction is that of romantic intent.* Although they are essentially self-defined, it is important to note that it is possible to have a "non-date" activity morph into a date activity at some point. For example, you go to a CUUPs meeting (non-date), then decide to go out for coffee (date or non-date, depending on the romantic content and intent). The words "primary focus of the interaction" are key here: if you go out to eat to talk about your nifty new roleplaying game, and that's all you talk about for an hour, and you have no romantic interest in the person you're talking to, then

you are not on a date.

2.) *any time you host or accompany someone on your “Yes” list to any location, it’s a date, automatically, even if you’re going to a funeral. **NOTE: THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE “DATE” IS ONE THAT SATISFIES DEFINITION #2. DEFINITION #1 IS PUT THERE FOR PURPOSES OF POTENTIAL INFRACTIONS.***

DEPENDENT people are those who cannot function on their own, and must rely on others to take care of them. While normal in children, this is extremely unhealthy in adults unless there are major health issues that force the adult into a dependent situation.

DRAMA QUEENS are people who attempt to focus all attention on themselves, suck up all the relationship energy available, and frequently create crises or overreact to situations in order to gain more attention. They seldom have or use good coping skills or live in such a way as to minimize avoidable problems. Males can be called drama kings—the principal has nothing to do with gender.

ENABLING is a pattern of rescuing someone from the results of their dysfunctional behaviors so that they never have to change those behaviors.

ENVY is the feeling of “I want what you have.” Not just “I’d like some, too” but “I want to have it **INSTEAD** of you.” Envy is always negative and is extremely dangerous in relationships, as it is related to regarding people as possessions.

EXPLICIT: fully revealed or expressed without vagueness, implication, or ambiguity; leaving no question as to meaning or intent.

IMPLICIT: implied, assumed, or not fully expressed or revealed.

INFIDELITY OR CHEATING is breaking the explicit agreements into which a person has entered.

INDEPENDENT people have proven that they can take care of themselves and are fully functional, responsible people.

INTENTIONAL FAMILY: a group of unrelated adults, with or without children, who have chosen to establish a loving, caring family household together. They have a commitment to staying together that does not necessarily involve any sexual relationships.

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY: a group of people who have chosen to live in close proximity to each other in order to build a true sense of community, to explore whatever level of interdependence that community has chosen, to share resources, and to build relationships. Some ICs may involve sharing a dwelling and some involve private homes clustered together with shared common spaces

INTERDEPENDENT people have proven that they can be independent, and are therefore able to choose to depend on each other in healthy, consensual ways without falling into codependency.

INTIMATE NETWORK: a group of people within a social circle who are in varying degrees of intimate relationships with each other. All know and enjoy the company of the others, but they aren’t necessarily all sexually involved with each other.

JEALOUSY, in our experience, usually comes from a feeling of insecurity. That is understandable, and when expressed in a healthy way the insecurity can be addressed and, hopefully alleviated (fear of loss, a sense of scarcity, a need for reassurance, etc.). However, if the jealousy stems from any kind of “ownership” issues (“That’s MY WIFE!”) it is a serious problem and may represent an insurmountable difference in philosophy.

LIMERENCE is what most people refer to as “being in love.” It is a relatively shallow, though exciting, emotion. It is often called NRE (New Relationship Energy) by polyfolk.

LOVE is a verb more than anything else to us. It is a state of consciously choosing to act in someone’s best interests.

MAKING OUT is defined as heavy kissing, petting, etc. A good rule of thumb is that if it isn’t sex but it wouldn’t be appropriate in front of the kids, it’s making out.

MONOAMORY is the practice of having significant loving relationships with only one person at a time.

NRE: acronym for New Relationship Energy. See limerence.

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE behaviors are those in which negative emotions—especially anger—are expressed indirectly through negative attitudes and resistance to reasonable requests.

POLYAMORY is the practice of having significant loving relationships with more than one person at a time in an honest and open fashion. It is not swinging.

POLYFIDELITY is a type of polyamory involving closed, committed relationships between more than two people.

QUAD: a relationship involving four people who are all involved with each other. While there may or may not be sexual/romantic connections between each of the four people, all of them have emotional connections and commitments to each other.

SECRET: something that deliberately isn’t revealed. Secrets are damaging. We will not condone them between the two of us, between us and any of our SOs, or between SOs and their OSOs. Secrets are very different from surprises, which are by definition time-limited.

SERIAL MONOAMORY is the predominant kind of lifestyle practiced in the US today. Participants go from one relationship to the next, often ending one relationship in order to begin another. At times there may be some overlap due to infidelity. If the relationships involve marriages, it is serial monogamy.

SNUGGLING is non-sexual cuddling that might happen with anyone with whom we feel comfortable. It’s appropriate with children or adults in almost any casual situation.

SWINGING is the practice of openly having sex with multiple people without building committed relationships. Some people refer to it as “sport sex.”

TOCOTOX: “too complicated to explain.” Used in poly circles to refer to a relationship that defies any simple label.

TRIAD: a relationship involving three people who are all involved with each other. While there may or may not be sexual/romantic connections between each of the three people, all of them have emotional connections and commitments to each other.

TRIANGULATION is taking issues you have with someone to a third party, rather than dealing directly with that person.

UNILATERAL DECLARATIONS come from one party involved in a situation. He attempts to impose his wishes on all the others involved. Unilateral declarations are completely incompatible to consensus decision-making. While each person is understood to be (and encouraged to be!) an individual who will have his or her own values and goals, if those values and goals change in such a way as to contradict those explicit agreements and goals shared with the other people involved, then the relationship(s) as they current stand are over for all practical intents and purposes. The relationship(s) may be reborn in new forms after renegotiation, but one person cannot change agreements alone and expect the relationship(s) to survive.

VEE: a relationship involving three people. A is involved with B who is also involved with C, but A and C are not in a relationship with each other.