

## What to Expect at a Munch

If you've never been to a munch before, the prospect can be very intimidating. What should you expect, how should you behave, how should you dress, what might happen, what might not? When you add that to a lifestyle that can seem terribly intimidating on its own, the terror mounts. I thought it might be helpful, particularly for novices, to know what to expect on a rather detailed level.

A munch is a social gathering. They've been around for quite a while, after legendarily starting in Portland, Oregon, a city known for the scope of BDSM activities available. It's a combination of the word lunch or brunch and meeting. There are also other meetings called sloshes, which are similar, only the focus is less likely to be on a meal. Bear in mind, too, that there are a number of people in this lifestyle who are recovering alcoholics and drinking to excess doesn't usually fit well with the things we do. The word "slosh," then, refers to the liquid refreshments, not to the state of the attendees. If you prefer not to drink, no one will think it odd in any gathering if you stick to soft drinks or coffee. You won't be the only one.

Munches are designed to provide a safe and public location for people with a common interest to gather. Not every munch or every munch organizer has exactly the same agenda, so bear in mind these are general truths. It's a good idea to let the host know you're coming to a munch if you've never been before, just to make sure that your information is current or that you don't need an invitation or a reference from someone. In addition, some locations make it necessary to know how many people to expect. Most munches are open to the public, but rules do vary, so it's wise to check. The host will appreciate knowing to expect a new face, as well.

What you can expect to happen at a munch is not really much different than what might happen at a company party or a class reunion or a bowling banquet. If you accidentally wandered into the room, what you'd see is a group of people, numbering from 10 or 12 up to 50 or 60, depending on the location and popularity of that munch. Munches are almost always held in public locations, so fetishwear isn't appropriate. You might note a few more pieces of leather clothing - vests, skirts, jeans - but not of a style to cause comment and nothing to tip off anyone. You might notice some collars in the room, but nothing that couldn't be passed off as a fashion statement. On first glance, we look like any other group of people, which

we are, after all.

The next thing you might notice is that the people in the room are doing a lot of laughing and talking. If you wandered around the room, you'd overhear conversations about the preferred material for floggers, or the new corset that's just been ordered, but you'd also hear conversations about a child's graduation, or the car that broke down, or the movie that was on television last night. We are a regular group of people. We have, by and large, regular lives. We pay taxes and obey traffic laws (well, ok, MOST of them), and have jobs and houses and families.

The usual age range in most groups is late 20's to late 40's. That's not to say that you won't see both younger and older people there, simply that the bulk of people would fall into those ranges. If you're older or younger, don't feel disqualified or unwelcome. You're not. Please make sure that you're of legal age, but beyond that, age is unimportant. There are some groups that are more geared to older members or younger ones, but I've never known anyone to be sent away because of their age, as long as they were over 21. That is the youngest most groups admit.

Munches are usually a good mix of males and females, of singles and couples and of Tops and bottoms. That is not to say that it's evenly divided among those categories, only that it's a mix of them. It seems that there are more submissives than dominants, but the ratio is not usually wildly skewed, either.

What shouldn't you assume a munch is, unless you're told otherwise specifically? It's not a dating service. It's not a singles group. It's not a swinger's club. The purpose of a munch is not specifically to find you a date and/or a partner. If the only reason you come to a munch is for that reason, you are likely to be disappointed. Relationships take time and effort and relationships in this lifestyle are no different. If anything, they require more of both. It's possible you'll meet someone who is appealing to you, and that something will come from it, but if that is the only reason you go, you're unlikely to find it. At best, the expectation is unrealistic. At worst, it's predatory behavior and completely unwelcome in responsible circles.

The best reason to attend a munch is to find people who have similar interests as you, people with whom you can talk and learn from, whether you are a novice or an experienced player. The more people you know, the more likely it is that you WILL find someone who captures your fancy. Consider, too, the odds of dating in the

vanilla world and just hoping that you'll find someone who won't run screaming into the night when you bring out the ropes. At least at a munch, you know that issue is already dealt with.

As to what to wear, dress as you would dress for dinner and a movie on the weekend, wear what you'd wear to go out on a date. If you like to dress up, this is a good place for it. If, on the other hand, you want to wear a sweatshirt and jeans, feel free. No one will throw you out and you won't be the only one. Clothing at an average munch will range from relatively casual to party clothes, and all of them are welcome. Again, this isn't the time to wear that fabulous new latex dress with the cut-out breasts, because they're normally at public locations. If you're still unsure, check with the host. A good bet for the first time is something in the dressy casual range, nice jeans and a sweater, khakis and a sport shirt.

What you should expect to happen at a munch is that you'll talk to some pleasant people about a lot of things, nothing more. There won't be an orgy in the back booth, there won't be an intense scene at the table next to you, you won't be expected to participate in anything other than conversation. Nothing will happen at 99% of munches that you might not see from a fairly rowdy and happy group in any restaurant. If you're a submissive, you're not expected to be anything but courteous to anyone, unless you've expressly agreed to do so. If you're a dominant, the only submissive you have a right to expect anything other than courtesy from is the submissive(s) with whom you have that relationship. Don't expect someone who is not employed by the establishment to fetch you a drink and don't feel compelled to offer to fetch anyone else a drink, unless you truly want to do so.

If you feel uncomfortable with a situation, please tell the host. We would very much rather deal with something at the time it happens than find out later that there was a problem we never knew about. Bear in mind, too, that these ARE public events. While it's probably a good start that the person you've met who seems so interesting is attending a munch, it does not vouch for his or her character. Don't assume that everyone you meet there is safe and trustworthy simply due to their presence. Most are, in fact, but you still need to behave as responsibly as you would had you met them in other circumstances. If you do run into someone you'd like to get to know better, giving your email address is usually safer than giving your phone number.

Many people worry about the discretion of attending a public meeting. It IS possible that you will meet someone you know. If, on the other hand, you do, they're at the same event you're attending. It's rather hard to point fingers at someone else for an interest that you share. When and if you run into someone you know from a munch in a vanilla setting, please remember to respect their privacy. Most people won't mind a greeting, but keep in mind the situation, as well. If you didn't know that nice man you've talked to at the munches was married, and you're a beautiful blond female 20 years his junior, probably greeting him with a big hug and a kiss in front of the woman who is probably his wife is NOT a good idea. Be discreet and treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.

Munches vary in terms of how expensive they are. Most are as expensive as you'd like them to be, meaning you're responsible only for what you order. If you want to have a single soft drink, then that's the cost. If you want dinner and appetizers and dessert, that's the cost. Some have arrangements with the location for a set menu, or must pay for a room and may ask you to contribute something - usually under \$5 - to cover that expense. If your funds are limited, check with the host(s).

Bear in mind that as long as you keep servers happy and don't antagonize other patrons, restaurants will usually welcome you. If you're in a public room, the people around you did not consent to hear your overly-loud descriptions of the exquisite spanking you delivered last night. They have a right to their privacy and the enjoyment of their meal as much as you do. However, I think conversations held in normal tones of voice are the business of those having them, and if someone chooses to listen, they should be able to deal with what they hear. If you have a more private location, those concerns will be lessened. Take your cue from those around you who have been there before.

Keep your restaurant servers happy. While you may only have had a single soft drink, you still are expected to leave a tip. Munches often occupy tables for three and four hours. I don't believe 15% is enough to tip in those situations. We, above others, should recognize and reward good service. Your one soft drink may have been refilled ten times. You're not obliged to tip for poor service, but if the service was adequate, leave a decent tip. If it was good service, leave a good tip. If you're on a tight budget, you need to take that tip into account in terms of what you order. It IS part of the cost to you and you should not consider it discretionary or optional.

Say please and thank you to the server and keep in mind that one person may be covering a room of up to 40 people, so be patient. Hosts often don't know how many people to expect, so the restaurant may not be prepared for the number of people that attend. Many times restaurants will make soft drinks available on a serve-yourself basis. If they do, take advantage of that to allow the server to concentrate on food orders. If the service is slow, please don't sit at your table and complain loudly to everyone around you about it. You're not there for a fine dining experience, you're there to enjoy the company of others who share your interests. If you walk through the door expecting to have a good time, you're almost guaranteed to be right.

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[Ky\\_in\\_munch@hotmail.com](mailto:Ky_in_munch@hotmail.com)

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