



Vancouver Men in Leather

Code of Conduct

Current as of February 13, 2023

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Section 1: Purpose

- A. **Objective:** Vancouver Men in Leather (VML) strives to be a safer space for the exploration of gay leather/fetish interests for the curious to the serious. This **Code of Conduct** provides direction and communication to all **Attendees** (e.g., the Board, the Members, venue staff, non-members attending VML events, etc.) regarding how to conduct themselves.
- B. **Responsibility:** All VML Members are responsible for their conduct and that of their guests.
- C. **Application:** This Code of Conduct applies to all Attendees:
 - 1. At VML events and other VML-supported community events.
 - 2. Online and in-person communication pertaining to VML.
 - 3. Representing VML in an official manner or unofficial manner, (e.g., wearing VML branded items, social interactions online or in-person identifying as a VML Member, etc)
- D. **Venue Rules:** Attendees must abide by the rules of the spaces where VML holds events.
- E. **Agreement:** Agreeing to this Code of Conduct is a mandatory component of being a Member of VML. It is included in the initial membership sign-up and renewal process. A printed copy will be available at all VML events and on the VML website. **A lack of awareness of this code is not an excuse for violating the code.**
- F. **Penalties:** Membership in Vancouver Men in Leather (VML) and attendance at events is a privilege. Violation of this code of conduct may result in penalties, including but not limited to expulsion from the event, a temporary or permanent ban, and/or revocation of membership, including revocation of the right to display/wear VML's logo.

Section 2: Disclaimer

Every reasonable effort will be made to enforce this code. However, VML makes no representations or guarantees about its ability to do so. All Attendees retain complete and sole responsibility for their safety and the safety of others with whom they interact. VML cannot be held responsible for other people's actions at a venue. In the event of a conflict between this document and any current applicable laws, the latter will prevail.

Section 3: Respect and Inclusivity

- A. **Consideration:** Exercise consideration and respect in your speech and actions.
- B. **Respect:** Always treat your fellow Attendees and their personal items, the event venue, and equipment with care.
- C. **Permission:** Do not touch other people or personal property without permission.
- D. **Assumption:** Do not assume the identity, history, or status (age, race, beliefs, sexuality, gender, disability, role, etc.) of others.
- E. **Role Play:** Only engage in role-play (e.g., Dominate/submissive, Daddy/boy, etc.) if you have consent.
- F. **Power Exchange:** Be aware of and respect established power exchange relationships: Do not assume someone else's power exchange role applies to you (e.g., a Dominant or submissive is not your Dominant or submissive).

Section 4: Personal Responsibility

- A. **Communication:** Everyone is responsible for being aware of and communicating their own boundaries and comfort levels.
- B. **Awareness:** Be aware of the effects your behaviour has on others.
- C. **Ownership:** Everyone assumes and acknowledges ownership of their own actions at all times. If you make a mistake, accept responsibility for it and be receptive to constructive criticism.

Section 5: Consent

A. Definition of Consent

Consent means you need to have clear and purposeful verbal or non-verbal confirmation before beginning a proposed activity.

B. Consent Required

Consent is required for any form of sexual contact, kink/fetish interactions, and other forms of intimate contact. If you are not sure if something qualifies as intimate contact, always ask first.

C. Conditions of Consent

- 1. **Consent must be:**
 - a. Informed
 - b. Freely given
 - c. Ongoing (checking in)
 - d. Comfortable
 - e. Clearly asked for and received
 - f. Active
 - g. Retractable
 - h. Enthusiastic
 - i. Respectful of boundaries.
- 2. **Consent cannot be:**
 - a. Given by a person who is incapacitated (e.g., under the influence of drugs or alcohol, in deep subspace/high level of suggestibility, unable to communicate/gagged, etc.)
 - b. Obtained by coercion
 - c. Given under duress
 - d. Assumed based on bodily reactions (e.g., engorged genitalia, erect nipples, moaning, etc.)

D. Rules of Consent

- 1. **Informed:** Before participating, all parties must be fully aware of the aspects of any activity they wish to engage in, including all risks.

2. **Scene:** Negotiate the scope of your scene prior to the activities. Before the scene begins, it must be clear that all parties have given consent to the proposed activities.
3. **Responsibility:** Each participant is responsible for making sure everyone involved has the mental and emotional ability to give informed and voluntary consent during their negotiation for the activity.
4. **Relationships:** Consent applies to all activities, including those between repeat partners and between people in a relationship.
5. **Safewords:** Prior to beginning an activity, partners need to share with each other what safe words or safe signs are being used for ongoing communication during the activity.

Universal verbal safewords are:

- a. Green: keep going
- b. Yellow: pause
- c. Red: stop immediately

Non-verbal signs can include:

- a. Thumbs up: keep going
- b. Thumbs down: stop immediately

6. **Withdrawal:** Anyone can withdraw consent before or at any time during an activity. Once consent is withdrawn, the activity must stop immediately. Everyone is responsible for being clear and unequivocal when withdrawing consent.
7. **No Means No:** If consent is not given, or withdrawn, accept the refusal with grace and do not immediately keep asking.
8. **Post-Activity:** Consent cannot be withdrawn after an activity ends.
9. **Renegotiation:** When a person is in subspace or otherwise not in a clear state of mind, informed consent can be compromised. Therefore renegotiation during an activity is not advisable.
10. **New Activity:** If any participant wishes to introduce any new activity to a pre-agreed upon scene or begin another new activity with existing parties, everyone must ensure all criteria from the Consent Checklist have been met again.

E. Rules of Photography and Video

1. **Personal Photos/Videos:** Consent is required from all subjects in the image, including people in the background prior to photographing or video recording anyone.
2. **Sharing:** It is your responsibility to clearly negotiate with all of these parties what will happen with an image or recording once it is taken.
3. **Tagging:** Do not tag other people via social media or file-sharing platforms without their explicit permission.
4. **Event Photography/Video:** The exception is if VML arranges an event photographer, in which case that person will wear a VML Photographer ID Lanyard. **Any Attendee who wishes not to be photographed must alert the official photographer they do not wish to be photographed.**

Section 6: Confidentiality

- A. **Privacy:** All Attendees have the right to anonymity unless required by VML, the venue, other authorities, etc.
- B. **Outing:** Outing of people (such as their sexual orientation, gender identity, kink/fetish interests, etc.) to others without explicit permission to share such information is prohibited.
- C. **Personal/Private Events:** Divulging the details of a personal/private event (such as its location, time, date, nature, etc.) to non-Attendees is prohibited.
- D. **Activities:** Divulging the names or details of the participants in activities observed at a private event is prohibited.
- E. **What Happens Here Stays Here:** If you are unsure if you can divulge details or discuss something, ask the participants involved first.

Section 7: Harassment

Harassment and bullying of any kind (verbal, non-verbal, physical, in-person, online, etc.) are not permitted. Examples of this include but are not limited to:

- A. **Offensive and Discriminatory Actions:** Offensive or discriminatory comments and jokes related to gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, mental illness, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, etc.
- B. **Misgendering:** Deliberate misgendering or use of a rejected name or names.
- C. **Threats and Intimidation:** Threats of violence, intimidation, or stalking.
- D. **Unwanted Sexual Advances:** Repeated unwelcome sexual attention or advances. This includes sexualized comments or jokes, inappropriate touching, groping, etc. Casual interactions do not necessarily indicate a desire for greater intimacy.
- E. **Unwanted Communication:** Continued one-on-one communication after a request to cease.
- F. **Blackmail:** Posting, reposting, or threatening to post other people's personally identifying information without permission.
- G. **Group Bullying and Peer Pressure:** Advocating for or encouraging any of the above behaviours by others.
- H. **Vexatious Complaint:** Making a complaint and/or allegation under this policy that has been found to be false, misleading, or otherwise untruthful.
- I. **Exceptions:** Any of these behaviours listed above that are within the context of a negotiated and consensual activity (in accordance with this document) will not be considered harassment.

Section 8: Attendee Actions

A. Reporting

- 1. **Witnessing at a VML Event:** In the case of a question, concern, problem, dispute, or if you witness unacceptable behaviour at a VML event, please immediately approach a VML Event Host (e.g., Dungeon Monitor, Event Volunteer, or Board Member) as identifiable by a VML ID Lanyard.

2. **Experiencing at a VML Event:** If your consent is violated or you experience harassment at a VML event, please immediately approach a VML Event Host (e.g., Dungeon Monitor, Event Volunteer or Board Member) as identifiable by a VML ID Lanyard with your concerns.
3. **At non-VML Events:** If you witness or experience a violation of a non-VML Event's code of conduct by a VML Member at a non-VML event (including online interactions, in-person events, etc.), please report this to VML Board at: vmlboard@vancouvermeninleather.ca who will consider whether any action on VML's part is necessary.
4. **Incident Reporting Form:** After initially reporting as listed above, VML requires the completion of the Incident Reporting Form by all parties involved in the incident.

B. Reporting General Rules

1. **Post-Event:** Reporting any of the above can be done after an event, if for any reason that it was not reported at the event in question by emailing the VML Board at: vmlboard@vancouvermeninleather.ca
2. **Time Limit:** Although there is no time limit for notifying the VML Board of an incident of concern, immediate reporting is recommended. The more time that elapses between the incident and the reporting, decreases the likelihood of an accurate investigation.
3. **Law Enforcement Involvement:** VML will support an individual who wishes to report a potential consent violation according to this document to law enforcement and VML will cooperate with any law enforcement investigation.

Section 9: VML Actions

If Event Staff receive notification of a potential **Incident of Concern**, they have the option to:

- A. **Intervene:** Event Staff may intervene immediately if they determine it is necessary, up to and including expulsion from the event.
- B. **Fill out an Incident Reporting Form:** Immediate reporting is highly encouraged, for which Incident Reporting Forms will be available online and in printed form at all VML events.
- C. **Resolve:** If all parties feel as if the Incident of Concern has been resolved to their satisfaction, they may choose to withdraw their claim. This does not eliminate the option to fill out an Incident Reporting Form at a later date.
- D. **Escalate:** The VML Board will follow the process outlined in Section 10.

Section 10: Investigation and Decision

If the submitter of an **Incident of Concern** requests an Investigation, it will be conducted in the following manner:

- A. Rules of the Investigation
 1. **Presumption of innocence:** People are presumed innocent until proven otherwise.
 2. **Fair and respectful:** Investigations will be conducted in a fair and respectful manner.

B. Investigation Committee

1. Forming a Committee

- a. **Role:** An Investigation Committee is formed to investigate the incident of concern, provide the Board with a report of their findings, and recommend outcomes (e.g., guilty/not guilty, discipline, etc.).
- b. **Composition:** For the investigation of an incident of concern, a Committee will be appointed consisting of three current Board Members. Exception: for the investigation of an incident of concern directly involving an existing Board Member, a Committee will be appointed consisting of any three former Board Members or other Members in Good Standing.
- c. **Exclusion:** Investigation Committee Members cannot be directly involved (e.g., the reporter(s), the person(s) being reported, and other direct participants) in the Incident of Concern.

2. Investigation Process

- a. **Participants:** The Investigation Committee will call upon other participants, witnesses, Attendees, etc. to share their recollections of the incident of concern by filling out the Incident Reporting Form.
- b. **Information Gathering:** The above may be called upon for communication/interviews to gather further information.
- c. **Rights:** The Attendee who is being investigated will have an opportunity to request a meeting before the Investigating Committee using the email address: vmlboard@vancouvermeninleather.ca.
- d. **Communication:** The Investigation Committee will communicate to the person(s) involved in the incident of concern with the recommendations to be put forward to the Board.
- e. **Concerns:** If the Reporter(s) have concerns that the recommendations are,, inappropriate/insufficient, the investigation may reconsider their recommendations.
- f. **Contact:** The Investigating Committee will contact the person(s) involved every two weeks with an update until a decision has been made.
- g. **Complaint:** If you believe that an investigation is not being conducted in accordance with the process outlined above, you may approach non-Investigation Committee Board Members (except a Board Member under investigation).
- h. **Report:** The Investigating Committee will report in writing its findings and recommendations to the Board using the Investigation Committee Reporting Form.

3. Possible Recommendations

- a. **Goal:** Aside from keeping our spaces safe, the primary goal of VML is to provide fun and educational experiences for our Attendees and Members. As such, there are multiple actions we may take after an Investigation. Those actions include, but are not limited to: Warning, Mediation,, Sanction, and Removal.
- b. **Our capacity:** We stress that VML is not law enforcement. While we are a volunteer-led organization and are able to restrict individuals that seek access to our events, we are limited in what we can do within the legal and justice systems.
- c. **Summary of possible actions:** At the conclusion of our Investigation, we will determine the appropriate course of action for the situation at hand. Below, we have included a short summary of some possible actions that we may take.
 1. **No Action:** The VML Board may decide that no action is necessary.
 2. **Warning:** The VML Board may issue verbal and/or written warnings.

3. **Mediation:** Incidents can include a wide range of actions. While we often think of major violations when we hear the term, Incidents may also include less severe conflicts, actions or miscommunications. In these circumstances, if both parties are interested, we can assist with (or recommend a neutral third party for) mediation between the different parties. We believe that, in some cases, supporting and fostering communication between two (or more) parties in a neutral environment can be a worthwhile course of action.
 4. **Sanction:** In situations where full removal of an individual may not be best, but action is still required, we may choose to sanction or restrict their access to our events instead. The exact nature of the sanction will be individualized to the situation at hand and may incorporate re-education and/or mediation.
 5. **Removal:** While we prefer to look at removal of an individual as a last resort, it is something we will do without hesitation should the situation require this level of action. Removal of an individual may range from up to and including a lifetime ban. They will no longer be able to participate in any VML online and offline activities, parties, events, and classes.
 6. **Additional options:** Please note, this is a non-exhaustive list of possible actions The VML Board may take in situations involving Incidents of Concern. Actions taken will be based on each situation, and more than one action may be taken.
- d. **Records:** A record will be kept of all actions taken (with a copy emailed to the Member being disciplined).

C. VML Board Decision Process

1. **Role:** The VML Board's role is to approve or not approve the findings and recommendations of the Investigation Committee.
2. **Review**
 - a. **Discussion:** The Board (excluding any members under investigation) will review and discuss the findings and recommendations of the Investigation Committee's Report.
 - b. **Clarification:** The Board may request clarification or further information from the Investigation Committee before voting on the recommendations.
 - c. **Further Investigation:** The Board may request the formation of a new Investigation Committee if they have major concerns.
3. **Vote:** The Board will vote to accept or reject the Investigation Committee's Report. The vote will require a 60% positive vote to pass by the entire Board, excluding any Board Member(s) under investigation. The possible outcomes of this vote are:
 - a. **Pass:** If the Board votes to pass, the recommendations will be carried out as is.
 - b. **Reject:** If the Board does not vote to pass, they have one of two options:
 1. **Alternative recommendation:** The Board may implement an alternative outcome after consulting with the Investigation Committee.
 2. **Request further investigation:** The Board may request further investigation including the option to form a new Investigation Committee.

D. Appeal Process

If you feel you have been falsely or unfairly accused of violating this Code of Conduct or disagree with the Outcome, you may notify the VML Board at: vmlboard@vancouvermeninleather.ca with a concise description of your grievance. All submissions will be acknowledged by the VML Board and they will inform you of the results of your appeal.

Section 11: Revision of the Code of Conduct

In order to revise the Code of Conduct, the revisions must be put forward to the VML Board at least 90 days prior to an AGM or SGM. Any revisions to the Code of Conduct requires approval by a vote of the Members at an AGM or SGM.

Section 12: References and Acknowledgement

This Code of Conduct has been produced by the 2022/23 Vancouver Men in Leather Code of Conduct Committee and is based in part on:

- A. [The Knights of Leather Code of Conduct](#)
- B. [The OhioSMART Consent Policy](#)

Thank you to both organizations for permission to refer to your documents.