What is consent?

Consent means agreeing to do something. Sexual consent means actively agreeing to take part in a sexual activity. This might be touching, kissing, oral sex (going down, giving head), vaginal sex or anal sex.

Getting and giving consent before taking part in any sexual activity with a partner means you can both be sure that the sexual activity is wanted and agreed to.

Doing something sexual to another person without their consent is sexual assault or rape.

Ways to think about consent

- Did you and a partner both agree to sex?
- Did you both agree to every sexual activity you did?
- Did you feel you could say no to anything you didn’t want to do? Could the person you were with say no to you?
- Is it what you wanted to do? Is this what the person you were with wanted to do?

Enthusiastic consent

Sex should be enjoyable for everyone. Consent is about saying yes to what you want, not just saying no to what you don’t want. You can use both words and body language to say or show what you want and don’t want. If you’re not sure if your partner consents to something, always ask them.

Giving and withholding consent

- You can express what you want or don’t want through words, body language, hand gestures, or facial expressions.
- If you’re not sure if a partner consents to something, always ask them.
- Either you or the person you’re with can withdraw your consent at any time.
- Even if you agreed to something at first, it’s always OK if you change your mind.
- If a partner withdraws consent, or says they don’t want to carry on, respect their choice and stop immediately.
- Even if you’ve consented to a sexual activity before, it doesn’t mean you consent to it again.
- Just because you’ve consented to a certain sexual activity, it doesn’t mean you’ve consented to every sexual activity.

Ways to identify consent

Consenting

Verbal signs (using words)
- I’m sure
- Don’t stop
- More!
- I want to...
- I want you/I/it/that
- I still want to...
- That feels good
- Yes
- I love this
- I want to do this right now
- I’m ready
- I want to keep doing this
- This feels right

Non-verbal signs (using body language)
- Direct eye contact
- Suggesting sexual activity
- Pulling someone closer
- Actively touching someone
- Nodding yes
- Comfortable being naked
- Laughter and/or smiling
- Loose and open arms and legs
- Relaxed facial expressions
- Turning towards someone
- A satisfied hum or enthusiastic moan

Not Consenting

Verbal signs (using words)
- No
- I’m not sure
- I’m scared
- Stop
- I want to, but...
- I don’t want you/I/it/that
- That hurts
- Maybe
- I love you/them, but...
- I want to do this, but not right now
- I don’t know how I feel about this
- I’m not ready or not sure if I’m ready
- I don’t want to do this anymore
- This feels wrong

Non-verbal signs (using body language)
- Avoiding eye contact
- Not suggesting any sexual activity
- Pushing someone away
- Avoiding touch
- Shaking head no
- Uncomfortable being naked
- Crying and/or looking sad or fearful
- Tense, stiff, or closed arms and legs
- Turning away from someone
- Silence
- Whimpering or a trembling voice

“Ways to identify consent” adapted from Scarleteen, scarleteen.com
When they’re drunk or high, people can be less able to get or respect consent. They can become less willing or able to negotiate sexual activity, especially safer sex. For example, they might not talk about using condoms.

If you or a partner is too drunk or high, you can’t legally consent to sex. Checking in with your partner will help you understand how they feel, as well as how drunk or high they are. If you’re not sure, stop. Having sex with someone who is too drunk or high to understand what’s happening is sexual assault or rape.

If you sexually assault someone when you’re drunk or high, it’s still a criminal offence.

Age of consent

It’s against the law to have sex or sexual activity with a young person under the age of 16. This is known as the age of consent.

If you’re under 16 and having sex or thinking of having sex, you can talk to a doctor, nurse or other professional about it. They have rules that they can only break your confidentiality if they think you or someone else is at risk of harm. They’ll always talk to you first before telling anyone else.