

A CULTURE



OF CONSENT

# CREATING A CULTURE OF CONSENT

It's everyone's responsibility to create a culture of consent among our campus community members. Instances of sexual violence — which are sexual acts committed against an individual without consent — have *no* place here. Learning about and practicing consent when it comes to sexual activity is a key way to prevent the harm of sexual violence.

**“Consent means actively agreeing to be sexual with someone. Consent lets someone know that sex is wanted. Sexual activity without consent is rape or sexual assault.”**

— PlannedParenthood.org

## Sexual Violence Includes...

- Sexual assault
- Sexual harassment
- Stalking
- Domestic violence
- Dating violence

We must each work to ensure that all individuals have the right to enjoy and engage with their academic, professional and social spaces free from harassing, harmful behavior. And talking openly about consent will lead to enhanced understanding, the prevention of sexual violence and a campus climate of respect.

So, tune in to this guide to help spark honest conversations about consent.

## Consent is

✓ ACTIVE  
✓ CLEAR  
✓ ONGOING  
✓ COHERENT  
✓ VOLUNTARY  
**ALWAYS ASK!**

## A Community of Consent

We all play a role in creating a healthy, supportive community. Some ways you can help include...

- Educate yourself and others
- Understand sexual violence
- Understand and practice consent
- Be a role model for respect through language and behavior
- Intervene as a concerned bystander to interrupt a situation where someone may be in danger

# UNDERSTANDING CONSENT

**Sexual Consent** is when all parties agree to engage in sexual activity. It must be freely, affirmatively and enthusiastically communicated among all individuals. In other words, **YES MEANS YES!**

**Enthusiastic Consent** encourages individuals to provide their yes, to express intent to participate and to ask their partner for their yes.

While it might be common to rely on nonverbal actions, it's the responsibility of the person initiating sexual activity to make sure they have consent. Asking for clear, enthusiastic and verbal expressions of consent can avoid any miscommunication.

## Consent Is...

- Clear and communicative
- Active
- Mutual and respectful
- Voluntary
- Freely given without pressure, intimidation or fear
- Obtained at each step of sexual activity, each and every time
- Only able to be given by people of legal age in their jurisdiction
- Present throughout sexual activity
- Affirmatively and enthusiastically communicated between all individuals
- Able to be withdrawn *at any time*

**Sexually coercive behaviors** such as threatening to break up with someone because they won't engage in sexual activity or pressuring them to consume a substance so their ability to consent is impaired might invalidate any expressions of consent and violate policy.

And, **incapacitation**, where someone is asleep, unconscious, drunk or drugged, or otherwise unable to give consent to sexual activity, means that consent *cannot* exist.

## When It Comes to Consent, You Can Change Your Mind at Any Time

"You can withdraw consent at any point if you feel uncomfortable. It's important to clearly communicate to your partner that you are no longer comfortable with this activity and wish to stop. The best way to ensure both parties are comfortable with any sexual activity is to talk about it."

— Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

## Consent Is NOT...

- Flirting
- Silence
- Reluctance or saying "maybe"
- Persuasion or coercion
- Lack of protest or resistance
- Intoxication/Incapacitation
- Assumptions
- Sexual history
- Unconsciousness
- Revealing clothing
- Being in a relationship
- Previous sexual contact
- When someone in a position of authority makes you feel you don't have a choice

# COMMUNICATING ABOUT CONSENT

Communicating about sexual consent can take practice, yet it's necessary — and can enhance the experience, too! It means there's no guesswork involved about what you and your partner like or want to do. The conversation is a two-way street.

## Some questions you can ask each other include...

- How can I make you feel good?
- I'd really like to \_\_\_\_ — would you be into that?
- What do you want to do tonight?
- What are you comfortable with?
- Is this okay?
- Where do you want to be touched and how? And where should I steer clear of?
- Are you still enjoying this?
- What do you like to hear about yourself?
- Would \_\_\_\_ feel good to you right now?
- What are your turn-ons? Your turn-offs?
- Do you want to \_\_\_\_?
- Would it feel good if I \_\_\_\_?
- Or would you like it better if I \_\_\_\_?
- How do you feel about trying \_\_\_\_?

Be sure to make consent a conversation, asking questions if you're not sure, checking in with your partner and really listening to their answers. Speak assertively, listen actively, and consider your partner's thoughts and feelings as much as your own. Communicating in clear, respectful, open ways about sexual activity can definitely enhance the connection and experience!

**Sources:** Force: [UpsettingRapeCulture.com](http://UpsettingRapeCulture.com); "How to be Sexcessful: A Guide for UC Davis Students," UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services Health Education & Promotion; American Sexual Health Association, [ashsexualhealth.org](http://ashsexualhealth.org)

## And responses can include things like...

- Yes, please!
- I'd like it if you \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm not really into that, but maybe we can try \_\_\_\_\_.
- I love when you touch me there.
- I'm open to trying \_\_\_\_\_.
- I don't like \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_ drives me crazy.
- Let's take a break for a second
- I'm not comfortable with that.
- I've changed my mind, let's stop.

### Ask Your Partner for Their Yes

When you ask your partner for consent to engage in sexual activity, you demonstrate respect for that person and yourself.

"Asking for consent eliminates the entitlement that one partner feels over the other," according to Temple University's Wellness Resource Center. "Neither your body nor your sexuality belongs to someone else."

**Source:** Wellness Resource Center's "Consent" page, Temple University

# ONGOING CONSENT COMMUNICATION

Sex can be amazing when there's no question about how your partner feels.

Getting consent, making sure you're both capacitated and knowing your partner is just as into the activity as you are can be so freeing. Ongoing communication can lead to this very positive feeling.

So, along the way, consider asking check-in questions such as...

- Does this feel okay?
- I want to make sure you want to do this. Should I keep going?
- What else would you be into?
- Would it be okay if I touched you...?
- How does this feel?
- Is there anything different you'd like me to do?
- Are you feeling comfortable?
- It's okay if you're not into this — we can do something else. What do you think?

## IT'S BEST TO HAVE A VERBAL CONVERSATION ABOUT CONSENT

**Consent is communicative.** The look on someone's face and that person's body language are both ways of communicating. However, these are NOT reliable indicators of consent in sexual interactions.

Talking is the clearest way to make sure you and your partner are on the same page. Only relying on body language can be misleading. For instance, if someone's heart is racing and they're breathing heavily, this may mean that they're turned on, but it may also mean that they're uncomfortable, scared and feeling trapped.

**“The best way to ensure a good experience is through developing communication skills. Expect to tell your partner what you desire but listen to your partner's wishes, too. If your partner needs encouragement to express his or her mind, do what good teachers do: Ask and listen! If you're mature enough to be having sex, you're mature enough to understand that the primary definition of 'intercourse' is communication.”**

– The WellWVU website at West Virginia University

## Not Sure?

Stop and check in with your partner before continuing with any sexual activity if they do or say things such as...

- Avoid touch/don't touch you
- “I don't know, I want to but...”
- Turn their head or body away from you
- “Maybe...”
- Push you away
- “I'm not sure...”
- Lie still and not participate
- “Well, I think so...”
- Silence

When there's uncertainty in a partner's response, they are NOT giving consent. So, stop and talk about it right away.

# HEALTHY, CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIPS

## Some common factors that signal you're likely in a healthy, consensual relationship include...

- You and your partner treat one another with kindness, support, care and respect
- You are truthful and open with each other, without fearing one another's responses or judgments
- You participate in mutually-consensual activities, whatever your level of intimacy is
- Things move at a comfortable pace, without feeling rushed or out of balance
- There's no pressure to have sex — it's a mutual decision if the time feels right, if that's how each partner wants to proceed
- You consider and care for one another's physical and emotional well-being
- There's a sense of trust — and partners don't make you work hard to "prove" your trustworthiness
- Partners don't feel threatened when you spend time without them — instead, they encourage you to have friends and a life outside of your relationship
- Your partner respects your privacy — including who you text, what you communicate via social media and more
- You are equals, with no one person calling all the shots
- You are heard and feel comfortable speaking up
- You are seen and valued for the unique individual that you are
- You are both aware of the roles alcohol and other drugs, social media and other peer influences may play in your relationship
- Partners compromise equally when making decisions that make the other person feel important and respected
- You are both responsible for your words and actions, and avoid placing blame or taking things out on each other
- You can talk with your partner about both good and bad things — and you truly listen to one another
- You are loyal, stick up for each other and have each other's backs — and you don't need to test this loyalty
- There's a mutual give and take, attending to one another's needs as well as your own

### In a Healthy Relationship, I...

- Feel comfortable talking about consent
- Am my partner's equal
- Build respect and trust
- Am safe

**Sources:** One Love, [www.joinonelove.org](http://www.joinonelove.org); Cornell University Health, Sexual Health & Relationships, <https://health.cornell.edu/resources/health-topics/sexual-health-relationships>

# HAVING POSITIVE SEXUAL INTERACTIONS

In order to have positive sexual interactions, partners balance their power and control by...

- Listening actively
- Asking for clarification
- Making sure they understand one another
- Respecting their partner's boundaries – and communicating about their own
- Only participating when their partner is freely, knowingly and enthusiastically consenting
- Gaining consent for each sexual activity and not assuming anything
- Not being critical, insulting, degrading or humiliating
- Not being intimidating, threatening or coercive
- Speaking assertively (not passively or aggressively)
- Considering their partner's thoughts and feelings as important as their own
- Being equal in decision-making processes
- Not minimizing their partner's thoughts or feelings
- Being mindful of how their privileges (such as gender, race, age, etc.) influence their thoughts and actions and impact their partner
- Not proceeding unless everyone is capacitated
- Talking about safe sex expectations before the heat of the moment
- Showing their partner how they like to be touched
- Openly discussing respect, power and control in their interactions

**“For me, I wanted to start out with the baseline that consent is the thing that you need in order to make the rest of the vehicle of sex go. Like, that is the gasoline. You need consent.”**

– Amy Rose Spiegel,  
*Action: A Book About Sex*

**Sources:** WellWVU, well.wvu.edu; Student Health and Counseling Services, “Sexual Communication,” UC Davis, shcs.ucdavis.edu; “Talking About Sex,” American Sexual Health Association, [ashsexualhealth.org](http://ashsexualhealth.org)

# WHAT COMES BEFORE CONSENT?

There are multiple things to explore about your own needs surrounding sexuality before the issue of giving and obtaining consent comes into the equation. Some issues to consider on the continuum of healthy to unhealthy behaviors include...

- Your values and how they inform relationships
- How your actions do/don't reflect your values
- What your feelings are about having sex/not having sex
- How you develop emotional intimacy and vulnerability
- What and who you desire
- What your personal boundaries are related to sexual activity, including the use of birth control and/or barrier protection
- How to communicate these boundaries assertively
- How to navigate pleasure for yourself
- What you like and don't like to have done to your body
- How to communicate this to a partner
- What to do if your partner isn't listening
- How to ask for something to change within an intimate relationship
- Understanding various sexual orientations and gender identities, including your own
- How gender roles influence your approach to relationships
- Sexual health care for all life stages, including but not limited to prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy

**Source:** Lisa Currie, sexuality educator

## Consent is All Around

Conversations about consent don't just involve sexual activity. We engage in consent conversations all the time, such as...

- May I take your picture?
- There's a hair on the back of your sweater — mind if I remove it?
- Is it okay if I give you a hug?
- Since I missed class on Tuesday, could I please copy your notes?
- I forgot my locker key. May I put my shoes in yours while we swim today?
- May I refill your coffee?
- Do you think I can get a ride?

Think about the last few weeks. What are some examples of conversations you've had with people where some version of consent has come into play?

Keeping these types of consent conversations in mind can help when it comes to addressing bigger issues like intimacy. Asking, communicating, listening, respecting, not assuming... all of these things and more go into our consent conversations, no matter the topic.