

# What is Consent?

(Adapted from [Vassar College](#))

Consent is the most misunderstood concept in comprehending the issues around interpersonal violence. Learning how to talk about consent, gain consent, and refuse consent can help clarify each person's responsibility to minimize the risk of unwanted sexual contact.

## **Consent should be:**

- A voluntary, sober, imaginative, enthusiastic, creative, wanted, informed, mutual, honest, and verbal agreement.
- An active agreement: consent cannot be coerced.
- A process, which must be asked for every step of the way; if you want to move to the next level of sexual intimacy, you should ask!
- Never implied and cannot be assumed, even in the context of a relationship. Just because you are in a relationship does not mean that you have permission to have sex with your partner.

## **Consent is not:**

- If someone says no repeatedly and finally says yes.
- If someone is incapacitated by substances.
- If someone has only agreed to an earlier act.
- If someone says nothing.
- If someone is never asked for consent.
- If someone has been made to feel that they must say yes.
- If someone uses their position of power or authority to coerce or manipulate someone into saying yes.

## **In what circumstances can a person *not* give consent by law?**

- When the person is incapacitated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs
- When the person is mentally disabled
- Once a person says "no," it does not matter if or what kind of sexual behavior has happened previously in the current event, early that day, or daily for the previous six months. It does not matter if it is a current long-term relationship, a broken relationship, or marriage. If one partner says, "NO," and the other continues with the sexual interaction, a sexual assault is occurring

## **What are the perks of asking for consent?**

- Asking for and obtaining consent shows that you have respect for both yourself and your partner.
- Enhances communication, respect, and honesty, which make sex and relationships better.
- Ability to know and be able to communicate the type of sexual relationship you want.
- Knowing how to protect yourself and your partner against STIs and pregnancy.

- Opportunity to acknowledge that you and your partner(s) have sexual needs and desires.
- Identify your personal beliefs and values and respecting your partner's personal beliefs and values.
- Builds confidence and self-esteem.
- Challenges stereotypes that rape is a women's issue.
- Challenges sexism and traditional views on gender and sexuality.
- Positive views on sex and sexuality are empowering.
- Eliminates the entitlement that one partner might feel over another. Neither your body or your sexuality belong to *someone else*.

### **What if someone is drunk, high, or out of it?**

Drugs and alcohol can affect people's ability to make decisions, including whether or not they want to be sexual with someone else. This means that if *someone is really out of it*, they cannot give consent.

Being with them in a sexual way when they don't know what is going on is the same as rape.

If you see a friend who is out of it and is being intimate with someone, you should pull them aside and try your best to make sure that person is safe and knows what he or she is doing. If it's the opposite situation, and your friend is trying to engage in a sexual encounter with *someone who is out of it*, you should try to pull them aside and stop them from getting themselves into trouble.

### **How do you know that someone has given consent?**

The only way to know for sure if *someone has given consent* is if they tell you. It's not always easy to let people know that you are not happy about something. Sometimes the person you're with might look like they are happy doing something, but inside they are not. They might not know what to say or how to tell you that they are uncomfortable. *One of the best ways to determine if someone is uncomfortable with any situation, especially with a sexual one, is to simply ask.* Here are some examples of the questions you might ask:

- Is there anything you don't want to do?
- Are you comfortable?
- Do you want to stop?
- Do you want to go further?

### **How can you tell if someone isn't into it?**

There are many ways of communicating. The look on someone's face and their body language is also a way of communicating and often has more meaning than the words that come out of their mouth.

Here are some ways body language can let you know if the person you're with is not comfortable with what is happening:

- Not responding to your touch
- Pushing you away
- Holding their arms tightly around their bodies
- Turning away from you or hiding their face
- Stiffening muscles

Asking questions and being aware of body language helps you to figure out if the person you're with is consenting and feeling comfortable, or not consenting and feeling uncomfortable. If you get a negative or non-committal answer to any of these questions, or if your partner's body language is like any of the above examples, then you should stop what you are doing and talk to them about it.

### **How can someone slow things down?**

Taking your time, making sure you are both comfortable, and talking about how far you want to go will make the time you spend together a lot more satisfying and enjoyable for both of you. Sometimes things move very quickly. Below are some things you can say to slow things down if you feel that things are moving too quickly.

- I don't want to go any further than kissing, hugging, touching.
- Can we stay like this for a while?
- Can we slow down?

### **How can someone stop something from happening?**

You always have the right to say "no" and you always have the right to change your mind at any time regardless of your past experiences with other people or the person you are with. Below are some things you can say or do if you want to stop:

- Say "No"
- Say "I want to stop"
- Say "I need to go to the bathroom/toilet"
- In a situation where the other person isn't listening to you and you feel unsafe, you could pretend you are going to vomit. (It's amazing how quickly someone *moves away from you* if they think you are going to be sick).

### **What can someone do if they think they may have been sexually assaulted?**

- Know it is not your fault and there are numerous community and campus [resources](#).

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