

QUICKIES: sexual consent basics a sex ed summary from scarleteen.com

Sexual consent is an active, mutual process of negotiating if and how we are (or aren't) going to be sexual with each other. Sexual consent is about everyone having and making real choices. Consent is a shared responsibility. **Everyone** needs to ask for consent when they want to do something. No one should have anything done to or with them without their consent.

Someone who is freely choosing to say yes to something that they understand and want to do is giving consent. If someone is saying no, isn't giving a clear yes, or isn't even asked, they are *not* giving consent.

Consent is usually easiest to do well with words, where we use language in a form everyone involved can understand to ask each other for permission before we do anything sexual. There are other ways than words, like eye contact or other body gestures. But they're much trickier. When those ways work well, it's usually because the people involved already use words for consent and have had lots of practice communicating with each other.

When we're seeking consent, we ask questions like: "Can I kiss you?" Or, "Do you like it when I hold you tightly? Is it okay if I do?" Or, "I want to do something sexual with you: do you want to do something sexual with me? What do you like and want to try?" Or, "I'd like to try oral sex. Is that something you want to try, too?" Consent should be specific. Everyone should be deciding what exactly they will do together (not just "whatever") and when, where, and how. For example, giving specific consent to someone asking to be naked with you might sound like, "Yes, but I still need you to ask if you can touch me, and I'll probably say no, because I'm not sure I'm ready for that. I'm also shy about this, so please be sensitive to that."

Consent isn't something we only give once. We should always be checking in with each other during sexual activities as we go. We should make sure our partners want to be doing what we're doing, and that they are okay with the way we're doing it. Sometimes people still want to do something but want or need to change how they're doing it.

If someone consents to one thing, that doesn't mean they consent to everything. Consent can also ALWAYS be withdrawn. Even if someone says yes to something once, they're always allowed to change their mind and say no later.

For something to be consensual, there can't be any force, coercion or manipulation. Talking or tricking someone into something is coercion.

Full consent to sexual things just isn't possible in some situations. If someone is drunk or high, asleep, very upset, sick, grieving or scared, or is unable to fully understand what's being asked of

them they cannot fully consent. People also need to be able to understand the possible risks or consequences that can be part of what they're being asked to do in order to consent.

A lack of no is not yes. Doing consent right means we ask each other questions. If we don't ask, and no one says anything, that doesn't mean there was consent. If we ask and the other person doesn't respond or doesn't clearly tell us yes, that also isn't consent. We should only move forward with anything we do to or with someone else if they are clearly telling us yes. If we're ever not sure, we should ask. If someone says yes, but doesn't *look* like they really want to say yes, we should check in.

Nothing makes consent a given or automatic. Being someone's spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend doesn't give anyone consent. Someone loving you or saying they love you doesn't mean they have your sexual consent, or that you have theirs. No one kind of sex means consent to another. No one is ever "owed" sex. Because someone has had any kind of sex in the past does not mean they will or must consent to sex again with that same person or anyone else.

One way to think about consent is compare it to a stoplight, the way Columbia University Health Service's Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Program did:

Red Light: Signs You Should Stop

- You or a partner are too intoxicated to gauge or give consent.
- Your partner is asleep or passed out.
- You hope your partner will say nothing and go with the flow.
- You intend to have sex by any means necessary.

Yellow Light: Signs You Should Pause and Talk

- You are not sure what the other person wants.
- You feel like you are getting mixed signals.
- You have not talked about what you want to do.
- You assume that you will do the same thing as before.
- Your partner stops or is not responsive.

Green Light: Go, but Keep Communicating

- Partners come to a mutual decision about how far they want to go.
- Partners clearly express their comfort with the situation.
- You feel comfortable and safe stopping at any time.
- Partners are excited!

Nonconsent means STOP: If someone does not give consent or says no, the other person **MUST** not do that thing. If they are already doing something a person says no to, they must stop, immediately. If they do not stop or exert emotional or other pressure so that person gives in, they are abusing or assaulting that person.

This handout was prepared by Heather Corinna and is a summary of **Driver's Ed for the Sexual Superhighway: Navigating Consent** (https://www.scarleteen.com/article/abuse_assault/drivers_ed_for_the_sexual_superhighway_navigating_consent) by Heather Corinna. © 2010–2019 Scarleteen/Heather Corinna. All Rights Reserved.