

# Understanding and Teaching about Consent

## Definitions and Useful Resources

Teaching young people about consent is important. This resource provides definitions, explanations, and resources to help health professionals and educators teach youth about consent.

Consent is an essential part of all interpersonal relationships. All people, including children, have the right to set boundaries related to their bodies, their possessions, and their actions. Consent is about respecting those boundaries. When consent is examined this broadly, it is clear that it applies to more than sexual interactions.

### Defining consent

Consent is defined as agreement and approval of what is done or proposed by another person. It involves giving permission for something to happen. Although consent applies to more than sexual activity, it takes on special significance in this area.

*Both partners need to understand what consent means and must feel comfortable at all stages when participating in sexual activity. Sexual activity without consent is sexual assault.*

When consent to sexual activity is given, it needs to be:

- **Affirmative** – a positive response (e.g., saying “yes”)
- **Clear** – the response is easy to understand
- **Ongoing** – consent can be withdrawn at any time
- **Clear-headed/Sober** – the person is awake and not intoxicated or high
- **Uncoerced** – the person does not feel pressured or forced to participate

### Legal definition of consent to sexual activity

The Criminal Code of Canada states that consent to sexual activity cannot be given if:

- The “yes” is provided by someone else
- Sex is obtained through an abuse of position of power, trust, or authority
- One person does not say “yes” or says or implies “no” through words or actions
- One person is unable to give consent (e.g., they are unconscious, sleeping, intoxicated, or high)
- One of the partners changes his/her mind

Canadian law also states that the age of consent to sexual activity is 16. Children under the age of 12 cannot consent to any sexual activity. There are two close-in-age exceptions:

- A 12 or 13 year old can consent to sexual activity if the partner is less than 2 years older
- A 14 or 15 year old can consent to sexual activity if the partner is less than 5 years older

A person must be 18 years old before consent can be given to have sexual activity with a person in authority.

## How can young people be educated about consent?

The following are important skills that can be taught to youth (and even young children) to help them learn about and practice consent:

- Asking for permission (e.g., asking for permission to touch another person or their belongings)
- Learning that “no” and “stop” are important words
- Learning to understand facial expressions and body language
- Learning about consent in the context of sexual health education

There are a variety of **resources and teaching tools** available online to assist in teaching young people about consent:

- **Understanding Consent:**  
<http://teachers.teachingsexualhealth.ca/teaching-tools/understanding-consent/>  
This website provides detailed information about consent and links to lesson plans to assist young people with sexual decision-making.
- **Teaching Consent in Your Classroom:**  
<http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo/node/820>  
Information is provided on the importance of teaching consent in the classroom, along with examples on how to share the rules of consent with children and teens.
- **Boundaries, Consent, and Communication Lesson Plan:**  
<http://sexedtoolkit.com/lesson-plans/erc-lps/erc3/>  
This lesson plan aims to help youth understand the necessity of consent, communication, and sexual boundaries in intimate relationships.
- **Healthy Sexual Relationships Lesson Plan:**  
<http://mygsa.ca/sites/default/files/MyGSA.ca%20-%20Lesson%20Plans%20-%205%20Healthy%20Sexual%20Relationships.pdf>  
This lesson plan focuses on helping youth develop a greater awareness of the concepts of consent, unique relationship issues faced by LGBTQ, and developing empathy.

There are also a variety of videos geared toward youth that can be used when educating about consent:

- **Consent for Kids** by Blue Seat Studios:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9Uljc> (2:42 minutes)  
This video highlights the fact that each person gets to decide what to do with his/her own body. Child-friendly examples of how to ask for consent and how to respond are provided.
- **Consent** by AMAZE:  
<http://amaze.org/video/consent/> (1:47 minutes)  
This video is aimed specifically at youth aged 10-14. The definition of consent is provided, along with the message that not saying “no” does not mean “yes”.
- **Cycling through Consent** by Western University:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JwIKjRaUaw> (3:47 minutes)  
The comparison of getting consent to go on a bike ride with a partner is similar to getting consent for sexual activity.
- **Tea Consent (Clean)** by Juno Beach Squadron:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eS5wYFtfaeU> (2:49 minutes)  
The idea of making someone a cup of tea is used as a metaphor to getting consent for sexual activity.

For more information about consent, please refer to <http://www.consented.ca/>.