

Youth Engagement:
**Opening the Door
to Difficult
Conversations**

Toolkit

Module 3:
Consent



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Module 3: Consent

Please note, community standards should be set (see Module 1) before beginning this module.

Background

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 broadly, it is clear that it applies to more than sexual interactions.

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

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- **Ongoing** – consent can be withdrawn at any time.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

Sexual activity without consent is sexual assault.

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, under the influence of substances, or high).
- one of the partners changes his/her mind and withdraws consent.

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 (e.g., manager, teacher, supervisor).

Remember that it is important to model consent in all interactions with youth, including while facilitating modules in this toolkit. Respect youth's autonomy and their choice to participate in activities or not. Refer to Appendix A for supplementary resources created by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute on the subject.

An additional aide to help youth understand sexual consent further is the #ASKFORIT campaign by Saskatchewan Sexual Assault Center and Rebellion Brewery: <https://www.askingforit.ca/>
The following video may also help in understanding the concept of consent in a simplified format: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>

Materials

- Flipchart/whiteboard
- Markers
- Consent traffic light visuals
- Consent traffic light sample scenarios

Objectives

- Understand and define consent
- Explore the concept of personal boundaries
- Promote communication and respect
- Recognize how power imbalance influences consent
- Discuss consent in the law

Activity 1: Defining Consent

Gather participants in a circle and explain that this activity will focus on discussing and defining consent. The discussion should encompass consent in a wide range of scenarios, beyond sexual contexts, such as personal relationships, friendships, and daily interactions.

Part One: Brainstorming

Write down the word "CONSENT" on a flipchart/whiteboard and ask participants to share what they think consent means. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, and that the goal is to discuss what consent means to everyone personally. As ideas come up, write them down on the same flipchart/whiteboard.

Facilitator's Tip: Encourage participants to build upon each other's answers. Remind everyone of the community standards and the importance of adhering to them in this discussion.

Part Two: Building a Comprehensive Definition

Once everyone has had the chance to share, identify common themes to begin to form a definition of consent. In general terms, you should highlight answers that explain consent as synonymous with a mutual agreement to do something.

Facilitate discussion on the key aspects of consent that arise. These include, among others, clear communication, enthusiastic agreement, ongoing consent, and respect. Ask further questions to delve into participants' understanding of these aspects. If participants raise questions, address them respectfully and encourage group discussions around them.

Discussion questions:

1. How do you think consent differs between daily interactions and sexual interactions?
2. Why is understanding consent important?
3. What should happen if consent is not given?
4. What is needed for someone to be able to consent to an intimate act?

Facilitator's Tip: This is a good place to discuss the concepts of affirmative, clear, ongoing, clear-headed, and uncoerced consent as well as the legal age of consent.

Activity 2: Drawing the Line¹

After having discussed consent as a mutual agreement to do something, explain to the group that everyone has the right to set and maintain their own boundaries and that it is our responsibility to understand and respect other people's boundaries. For this activity, equally divide participants into two groups. Separate the groups and position them on opposite sides of the room so that each individual is standing facing a member of the other group.

Facilitator's Tip: If you have an odd number of participants in your youth group, you could have one participant act as an observer and then rotate roles with other participants in the group. It is best that the facilitator does not participate in this activity, due to differences in power, and the importance of the facilitator focusing on the group as a whole.

Explain that the individuals in Group 1 will be taking small steps towards the participant facing them in Group 2. Before each step, participants need to seek consent from the person facing them to move forward. The activity continues until either of the participants are uncomfortable about the other person coming closer. Encourage both partners to remain attentive to the verbal and body language cues of their pair as they come closer to each other. Let them know to stop before coming into physical contact with their partner.

Facilitator's Tip: Remember that this activity is about the importance of seeking consent and listening to others. Everyone has the right to have their boundaries respected, so it is important to know how to listen to other people setting their boundaries.

When all pairs have stopped moving, instruct everyone to look around and ask them what they notice. Because everyone has different boundaries, each pair will have stopped at different distances. To debrief, sit

¹ Activity adapted from 'Parallel Lines' activity discussed by Bragg et al. (2022).

in a circle and ask participants to share their thoughts about this activity. To help facilitate a discussion, ask the following questions:

- Why do you think pairs stopped at different distances?
- Why is it important to stop when asked? *Remember that consent is the responsibility of the person seeking it.*
- How did you recognize that your partner wanted you to stop moving closer? *This is a good place to discuss verbal and non-verbal consent cues (e.g., nervousness, tense body language, nervous laughter).*
- Did anyone feel pressured to give consent to move closer because of how close others around you were getting?
- Are boundaries only valid for in-person interactions? How do we set and respect boundaries online? *(e.g., asking before posting an image of someone, not sharing images shared with you only)*

Emphasize that everyone has unique boundaries and that this is a normal part of human interactions. It is important to respect other people's boundaries and never pressure them into crossing their personal boundaries.

Activity 3: Consent Traffic Light Game

To set up this activity, place the traffic light visuals in different areas of the room. Explain to participants that just like traffic lights communicate and organize the flow of traffic to prevent accidents, consent serves as a guide for respectful interactions between individuals.

Traffic lights can be used to model communications of consent.

Red Light – STOP, do not proceed.

This represents a scenario where there is explicit refusal/withdrawal of consent.
Remember, NO means NO.

Yellow Light – STOP and check.

This represents a scenario where one person exhibits signs of discomfort, hesitation, and uncertainty.
Remember, only a YES means YES. If you are uncertain, it is essential to slow down and have an open and honest conversation about boundaries.

Green Light – Consent to proceed.

This represents a scenario where there is explicit, enthusiastic, and ongoing consent.

To begin, ask all youth to stand in one place and explain that you will be reading out sample scenarios and that they must stand next to the light they think corresponds to the consent status of each scenario. Facilitate a discussion after each sample scenario by inviting a few participants to share why they chose a particular light for each scenario.

Facilitator's Tip: Some scenarios may create confusion among participants. Make sure you revisit the scenario together and that everyone has a clear understanding of its context. Encourage students to share

their perspectives and interpretations of the scenario. Encourage participants to engage in respectful debates and allow them to move around if they change their opinion.

Remember that the goal of this activity is to create a supportive learning environment for discussing consent, boundaries, and communication. Remind participants that no always means no, and that the absence of a no does not mean yes; only yes means yes.

Debrief after the Completion of Activities 1-3

Now that youth have visualized and explored multiple scenarios of consent, return to the flipchart from Activity 1. Ask participants if they would like to make any changes or additions to the chart and if they have further comments to add. Does anyone have a different perspective on consent now? Are there any new elements or aspects you'd like to add to our definition?

Activity 3 Sample Consent Scenarios

Scenario	Rationale	Can this situation be improved?
Red Light Scenarios		
<p>Jessy enjoys watching her friends sing karaoke but has said that she does not want to participate because she is afraid of singing in public. Her friends think it would be a good idea to sign her name up for karaoke to help her get over her fear.</p>	<p>Her friends did not ask for consent before they decided to sign her up. Even if it wasn't mean-spirited, this act risks putting Jessy in a situation where she feels pressured to agree to singing even if it will make her feel uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Jessy's friends should ask her for her permission to sign her up for karaoke. If she says no, her friends should respect her boundaries.</p>
<p>Alex and James have been dating for 6 months. They have kissed many times before. Today, despite Alex's clear verbal refusal and uncomfortable body language, James still tries to lean in for a kiss.</p>	<p>Despite Alex having previously consented to kissing James, this does not mean that consent will be granted every time.</p>	<p>James should respect Alex's boundaries and verbal indication of non-consent ("No").</p>
<p>While driving, Omar hands over his phone to Taylor to choose songs for their road trip. Omar receives a text message and Taylor opens the chat and starts reading Omar's messages.</p>	<p>While Omar consented to Taylor using his phone to choose songs, he did not consent to them reading his messages.</p>	<p>Taylor could inform Omar that he received a text message and ask if he would like them to read it for him because he is driving.</p>
<p>Aditi is 13 and she is going out with Charlie who is 17. Aditi feels ready to be more intimate with Charlie.</p>	<p>Even though Aditi has expressed that they are ready to have sex with Charlie, Canadian law states that a 13-year-old can only consent to sexual activity if the partner is less than 2 years older.</p>	<p>Charlie can bring up the age of consent laws in Canada and the two can discuss their relationship in light of this.</p>
<p>Lucas, a 16-year-old high school student, started working part-time at a restaurant. He started dating Kelly who is 18. Kelly is Lucas's manager at the restaurant. Kelly and Lucas decide they are ready to have sex.</p>	<p>Lucas and Kelly have agreed that they both want to have sex with each other. According to the law, a 16-year-old can consent to sexual activity with an 18-year-old. However, Kelly is Lucas's manager, and therefore there is a power imbalance in the relationship. A person must be 18 years old before consent can be given to have sexual activity with a person in authority.</p>	<p>Kelly and Lucas can have a discussion about the age of consent and what this means in relation to their relationship.</p>

Yellow Light Scenarios

Emilia and Ava just met. They discover that they share a lot of interests and decide to exchange contact information to hang out. Ava leans in to hug Emilia goodbye, but Emilia looks confused.	Ava overlooked asking Emilia for consent to lean in to hug her.	Ava should stop and ask, “can I give you a hug?” and respect Emilia’s boundaries.
Lucas and Andie are making out. They have both agreed they are comfortable doing this. Andie starts pulling away.	Even though consent was given initially, Andie is now pulling away. This is a non-verbal cue that shows uncertainty or hesitation.	Lucas should stop and have a respectful conversation with Andie to ensure mutual understanding. If consent is withdrawn, Lucas should respect Andie’s boundaries.
Theo and Ace are members of a friend group that tend to be very physically affectionate. Theo comes up behind Ace and starts massaging their shoulders. Ace pulls away.	Physical touch is common amongst members of the friend group, but it is still important to check in to find out if the intended touch is wanted in a specific moment.	Theo can ask “shoulder massage?” and wait for a response. If Ace shakes their head or moves their shoulders away or says “no thanks” then Theo should respect their boundaries.

Green Light Scenarios

During a group project, team members openly discuss their preferences and agree together on the division of tasks.	Everyone came to a mutual agreement together.	Keep ensuring that everyone in the group is comfortable with the tasks they were assigned, and re-visit task assignments as needed.
Karmen and Arnav were on a date. At the end of the date, Karmen asks Arnav if she can kiss him. He smiles, enthusiastically agrees, and leans forward.	Karmen made sure to seek consent and listened to Arnav’s reply.	Karmen should pay attention to Arnav’s non-verbal cues to ensure that consent continues to be given.
Mathew and Sarah have been going out for a while. They both communicate openly about their desires and boundaries. They agree that they are comfortable becoming more intimate.	The relationship is based on mutual respect and they both communicated their boundaries before agreeing to become more intimate.	Keep checking in with each other to make sure that they both feel comfortable.