

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

Defining consent

Consent is defined as agreement and approval of what is proposed or done 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 give consent 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
- **Specific** – is obtained for each sexual activity
- **Ongoing** – consent can be withdrawn at any time
- **Clear-headed/Sober** – the person is awake and not intoxicated or high
- **Informed** – the person knows all of the necessary information (e.g., no lies or tricks)
- **Voluntary** – 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 their 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 young people (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, including the following:

- **Teach Consent**
<https://www.teachconsent.org/>
Video and discussion guides for parents or group facilitators to use to start conversations with youth about consent including how to ask for it, what is enthusiastic consent, and how “no” is an important and normal boundary in relationships.
- **Teaching Consent in Your Classroom**
<https://teachingsexualhealth.ca/teachers/sexual-health-education/information-by-topic/consent/>
Information about important points to educate youth about related to consent, sexual consent, and sexual assault. Provides lesson plans and resources for teaching students in grades 6 through 12 and students with differing abilities. *Note.* These lesson plans were designed to align with the Alberta curriculum.
- **Communicating Consent**
<https://www.sieccan.org/resources/information-sheet%3Acommunicating-consent>
Information sheet on how to ask for consent and give consent created by the Sex Information & Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN).

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

- **Consent for Kids** by Blue Seat Studios: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9UJjc> (2:42 minutes)
Highlights the fact that each person gets to decide what to do with their own body. Child-friendly examples of how to ask for consent and how to respond are provided.
- **Consent** by AMAZE: <https://amaze.org/video/consent/> (1:47 minutes)
Provides the definition of consent, along with the message that not saying “no” does not mean “yes”. This video is aimed specifically at youth aged 10-14.
- **Understanding Consent** by Teaching Sexual Health: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raxPKkIDF2k> (3:02 minutes)
Covers what consent is, how to get consent, how consent can be withdrawn at any time, and what is not consent.

