



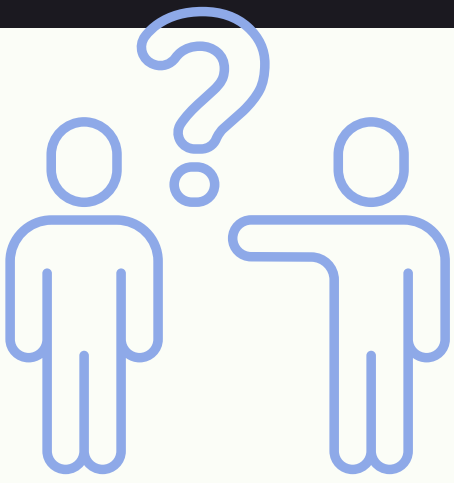
Step 1: Talking consent with other adults

Let's get on the same page about consent



Australian Government

**Consent
Can't Wait**



Support is available

Talking about consent, or even reading through this guide, may be triggering for some people.

This includes those who have experienced, or are experiencing, sexual violence or other forms of trauma.

Counselling and support services

1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)
1800respect.org.au

Australian Sexual Assault
Directory of Support Services
nasasv.org.au

MensLine (1300 78 99 78)
mensline.org.au

13YARN – 13 92 76
13yarn.org.au

Lifeline (13 11 14)
lifeline.org.au

If you are in immediate danger,
please contact 000



What is the best way to respond to someone who discloses their experiences with sexual violence or assault?

When a person who has experienced sexual violence or assault decides to disclose their experience, they usually confide in a person they trust. It could be a friend, family member, carer, colleague or educator. They will often be seeking guidance to help them decide the most appropriate course of action or what choices are available to them.

Providing a supportive and compassionate response is vital. It validates their experience, creates a safe and trusting environment and helps them to feel heard, understood and not alone. It can also have an impact on their decision to seek further help.

The most important things you can do are:

- Listen attentively, without interruption or judgement
- Demonstrate that you believe what they are telling you
- Let them know they have your support
- Provide relevant information that will help them to make their own informed choices about the next steps to take.

The timing of the person's disclosure will directly affect their immediate needs and the most suitable way to respond. For example, the person may need immediate protection if they are at risk of further violence or assault. There is a range of national, state and territory support services available that provide support, ensure safety and assist in the person's recovery from trauma.



What is sexual consent?

Sexual consent is a free, voluntary and informed agreement between people to participate in a sexual act. This agreement is only present when these people mutually and genuinely feel they want to engage in that sexual act and actively make sure their partner does too.



This means there is only consent to a sexual activity if everyone involved:

- agrees with each other to take part
- really wants to take part – they don't feel they have to
- checks in with each other to make sure everyone wants to take part
- shows or says they want to take part in a clear and open way.

Sexual consent relates to sexual activities, such as:

- sexual intercourse
- touching someone in a sexual way
- sharing sexual images
- online sexual activities.

Sexual consent is not:

- a problem to solve
- a transaction or a contract – an exchange where someone 'gives' or 'receives' consent.

Reaching, withholding and communicating consent is part of a set of skills people can learn to have safe, fun and pleasurable sexual activity and healthy sexual relationships. It doesn't matter if you're in a relationship or not. There must be consent to engage in sexual activity that is free from violence, pressure and control.

Why is consent important?

Not only is consent the baseline for sexual activity free of violence and control, it's at the heart of every safe and healthy sexual encounter. It establishes a foundation of respect, communication and trust.

It creates a space where both partners can freely express their desires, boundaries and needs, creating a stronger and more fulfilling connection between them. Healthy and respectful sexual experiences and relationships involve feelings of safety, as well as enjoyment and pleasure.



Why should we care about sexual consent?



As parents and family members, we want the best for our kids. We want them to be happy and to make safe, responsible decisions. Recent research shows that young people agree the adults in their lives should talk to them more about sexual consent.



Fortunately, we have the power to positively shape their attitudes and behaviours. But we need to work together.

When we think about sexual consent, many adults think of the negative side. How getting it wrong can lead to serious consequences for everyone involved. This is natural because we want to protect our children and it's how many of us were raised. But talking about consent doesn't have to be something that only happens when things go wrong.

Instead, we can see reaching, withholding and communicating consent as part of the suite of skills that anyone can learn. These conversations become an important part of each young person's development, setting them up to have healthy and safe relationships.



How do we think about consent?

Right now, men and women have very different views on how consent is put into practice. We aren't aligned on what it looks like, what's involved, if it's easy or difficult to discuss, or even its role in our relationships. Our lack of shared understanding has a direct impact on the next generation and their ability to have healthy relationships.

One study into the attitudes of 16-to-24-year-olds revealed that 33% agree that 'it is common for sexual assault accusations to be used as a way of getting back at men'. Around a quarter of them (32%) believe it's common for women who say they were raped to have led the man on and then had regrets. This suggests young Australians can struggle to recognise consent and sexual violence.*

However, providing positive information and examples during the early years and adolescence can help young people to develop mutually respectful relationships and prevent harm. But before we talk to young people, we need to focus on talking among adults first.



Why should we talk to other adults first?

Before we have these conversations with young people, we adults need to get on the same page about consent to provide them with a united message.



Sexual consent is not usually a topic that adults openly discuss. It's not even a topic that many of us fully understand ourselves. Some of us avoid it altogether because we don't have all the answers and it makes us uncomfortable.

The best way to get around this is to learn about the issue and talk with others. There is a range of information and resources at consent.gov.au to help you find out more about what consent is. Talk to other adults you trust, like your partner or a close friend. Your personal views on consent might not align perfectly and that's okay. When we consider different perspectives, we can come to a shared understanding about the issue.

Remember that these conversations will help you feel more confident. The more you educate yourself, the more equipped you'll be to have informed conversations with other adults about consent, and ultimately that means the kids in your life will be safer.

**National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey 2017 and 2021*



Five things to remember when it comes to consent

There are 5 main ideas that help define sexual consent:



1. Consent is free and voluntary

Consent is always a free choice. There is no consent if any person involved:

- experiences violence
- is forced or pressured to do something
- feels intimidated or threatened
- feels humiliated
- has something taken away
- is being spied on or tracked
- is being controlled.

Consent doesn't come with conditions. Consent is present only when all people genuinely, enthusiastically, and without hesitation, want to engage in the sexual activity.

2. Clear and informed

Everyone feels genuinely sure, enthusiastic and knows what they're agreeing to.

Consent is when everyone:

- wants to take part in the sexual activity
- understands what that sexual activity is.

Agreeing to one sexual activity, like kissing or touching, doesn't mean agreeing to other sexual activities. Everyone must also agree on how the activity will happen. Partners must check about the use of condoms and contraception.

3. Active and communicated

Consent is all about communication. Sexual partners need to actively say or do something to check if their partner wants to take part in a sexual activity.

People can communicate consent by:

- speaking
- showing without words – e.g. enthusiastic body language, active participation, pulling closer
- writing it down – e.g. in the case of online sexual activity.

People must check if their sexual partner wants to take part in a sexual activity. Not saying 'no' doesn't mean that someone agrees; they must communicate that they agree. If there are any signs of hesitation or uncertainty, like freezing, it means the person does not consent. Physical arousal also does not mean there is consent.

There aren't different levels or degrees of consent. There is either consent or no consent.

4. Ongoing and mutual

Consent is an ongoing and shared process. It's the responsibility of everyone involved to make sure there is consent at all times. You don't just communicate it once before starting the sexual activity, and anyone can withdraw consent at any time during the sexual activity.

If one person consents but another doesn't, there is no consent. All people must want to take part in the sexual activity.



5. Able and capable

Everyone involved in a sexual activity needs to be able to consent, or communicate that they don't. People **can't consent** if they are:

- under the age of consent (either 16 or 17) this varies in different parts of Australia and there are exceptions for people consensually having sex who are close in age
- drunk, high or heavily affected by drugs or alcohol
- unconscious – not awake and alert.

Sexual partners need to actively say or do something to check if their partner is capable and wants to take part in a sexual activity.

You can visit [consent.gov.au](https://www.consent.gov.au) to learn more about the principles of consent.



Approaching the conversation with others

To help you get the discussion flowing with other adults, you might like to consider using one or more of these conversation starters so you feel as prepared as possible.



Conversation starters about parenting

- How do you talk to your kids about awkward topics?
- Where is a good place to start when talking about consent?
- When is the right time to start talking to your kids about sexual consent?
- What do you consider age appropriate and why?
- How can we teach kids to handle rejection or withdrawal of consent? What can they do in that situation?

Conversation starters about relationships

- Why is consent important to safe sexual activity and healthy relationships?
- Who is responsible for communicating sexual consent? Does consent need to be established every time?
- Is asking for sexual consent more important in a new relationship than in a committed, long-term relationship?
- Do you need to be in a relationship with someone for consent to be necessary?
- At what point during a sexual encounter are you meant to ask for consent?

Conversation starters about consent

- How are you communicating consent, and are there ever situations where it is implied?
- Why might someone find it hard to communicate 'no'?
- Some people think that asking for consent 'spoils the mood'. Are there some more fun and natural ways to check for consent?
- Does your culture or religious beliefs impact the way you approach consent?
- Why does talking about consent sometimes feel awkward? How can we overcome this?

Consent FAQs



Here is a series of questions that commonly come up when you talk to young people about consent. You can use these to check your understanding and help guide conversations with other adults.



What is consent?

We define sexual consent as a free, voluntary and informed agreement between people to participate in a sexual act. This agreement is only present when these people mutually and genuinely want to engage in that sexual act and actively ensure that their partner does too.

When is the right time to talk about consent with a partner?

Consent is part of the active communication throughout any sexual activity, including before it even starts.

Everyone has the right to say no, even if they initially said yes. Remember everyone has complete control over their body, and that control remains with them at all times.

It's completely okay for you or your partner to change their mind, and everyone should respect boundaries if someone decides they don't want to do something. No one is entitled to someone else's body. Comfort and wellbeing should be the priority, and everyone should honour and respect if someone no longer wants to continue with any activity.

Consent is about respecting each other's autonomy and making sure everyone involved feels safe, respected and in control of their own body so they can have a fun, pleasurable experience. If you are not sure if the other person is into it, slow down and ask them. If they say no, or seem uncertain, it is important to stop. Show that you respect that they don't want to continue.

How is consent communicated? Is it as easy as saying yes or no?

Non-verbal communication can include positive body language and active participation. These signals can show a person's willingness and desire to engage in a particular activity.

However, just because a person doesn't say no or doesn't resist, it doesn't necessarily mean they consent. They could be unsure or worried about what will happen if they don't say yes. Silence is never an indication of consent.

It is important to look out for other people's signs of hesitation or uncertainty in their body language as well as the words they use. You need to pay attention to all the signals.

For example, if your partner starts to pull away during a kiss or becomes visibly uncomfortable, it may be a sign they no longer want to continue. You must respect their decision. Nobody can read minds, so verbal communication is the most reliable way to ensure mutual understanding and consent.

It is also important to know a person might not express themselves at all if they feel discomfort. They could simply freeze. This is a natural response to stressful situations and can be outside a person's control. It does not imply consent, even if the person doesn't verbally or physically resist.

It's important everyone only ever does something that they genuinely want to do. No one should ever feel made to do something just because someone expects them to or because they feel pressured.



How do you ask for consent?

Asking someone directly is the best way to make sure they feel safe and comfortable. This can sound scary, but it doesn't have to feel overly formal or awkward, in fact it can make it more fun and pleasurable for everyone. Here are some ways to ask for consent for intimate activities:

- "Can I hug you?"
- "Do you want to try...?"
- "Can I kiss you?"
- "Do you like this?"
- "Does this feel good?"
- "Can I touch you here?"
- "Do you want to take this further?"
- "Do you want to have sex?"

If you are involved in a sexual activity with someone and you feel a change in their enthusiasm or body language, it is important to stop. Check in, and see if the other person is still into it. It's as easy as asking questions like:

- "Do you want to slow down?"
- "Do you want to take a break?"
- "Do you want to stop?"
- "How about I get us some water?"
- "What do you want me to do with those photos?"

Can someone consent if they've been drinking or if they're high?

Alcohol and drugs can affect people's judgement and ability to make informed decisions. It's understandable that drinking or getting high might impact someone's ability to consent.

That's why it's important to be aware of the signs of intoxication. Always be aware that someone who has been drinking or taking drugs might not be able to have the capacity to react, communicate or withhold consent. If you are unsure, the best thing to do is slow things down and wait until everybody is sober.

Do you need to give consent for photos or videos?

Definitely. When it comes to someone's digital image, it's like an extension of their own body. That means you should always ask for consent before sharing someone's image or video. You also need to honour their decision if they say no or change their mind later on.

You could seek digital consent by asking:

- "Can I take a photo/video of you?"
- "Can I share this video/photo of you with [insert name/group chat]?"
- "Can I post this video/photo of you to my [insert social media platform]?"

Remember, it's never okay to share private, sexual, embarrassing or inappropriate content of someone with others without consent. Just because someone takes a photo or video of themselves, it does not mean they have consented to it being shared. Respecting someone's privacy and getting their consent is essential for any kind of digital content, including photos, videos and messages.

Sometimes you might feel pressure to share content of yourself with someone else even if you don't want to. Just because someone has sent you an intimate photo of themselves, it doesn't mean you have to send one back.

If you're not sure about sending a picture of yourself and it makes you feel uncomfortable, take a moment to pause and reflect on it. It's a good idea to talk to a trusted friend or adult for guidance. Keep in mind that once a photo or video is shared, you can't control where it goes. Your safety should always come first above everything else.

Consent also applies to sending content to other people. It is important to always ask for consent to share intimate content of yourself or any type of sexual content with another person.

Can sexual consent be withdrawn at any time?

Yes, absolutely. Consent is an ongoing and continuous process. It's important to understand that giving consent doesn't mean it's a one-off pass for the other person to do whatever they want.

Anyone can take away their consent at any time during a sexual activity. For example, a person may agree to have sex, but, they might change their mind and want to stop. Consent for something on one occasion doesn't mean you automatically consent for future occasions.

Are there any situations where it's more acceptable for someone to give uninvited attention, like at a house party or a night club?

Uninvited physical attention, like touching, hugging, kissing or brushing up against someone is never okay, no matter the setting. Consent applies in all situations, regardless of the setting, or how someone is dressed or behaving.

Everyone deserves to feel safe and comfortable, and nobody should ever assume consent. To avoid miscommunication, it's everyone's responsibility to check in and make sure everyone is happy, safe and having a pleasurable experience.

Does asking for sexual consent spoil the mood?

Not at all. If anything, consent can be fun, flirty and sexy. Consent means better sex and better relationships. When both people are open about what they want, don't want, or are willing to try, it forms the basis for a respectful, pleasurable sexual encounter.

Consent doesn't have to feel overly formal or awkward. It can be as simple as asking questions like:
"What are you into?"
"Does this feel good?"
"Do you like this?"
"Do you want to keep going?"
"Is there something you'd like to do instead?"

Asking for consent can be playful and flirtatious and gets easier over time. What will 'spoil the mood' is going ahead without being sure if the other person is truly comfortable and willing. Imagine finding out later they didn't enjoy the experience or that they felt violated.

How do you withdraw your consent if you're not feeling comfortable?

You can change your mind at any point of a sexual interaction. Even if you're already having sex, you have the right to stop at any time. You do not need to give any excuse or have a reason.

If you tell your partner to stop then they must stop. The same goes if your partner tells you to stop. Everyone has the right to decide what happens to their own body.

Some verbal examples of what withdrawing consent might sound like:

"I've changed my mind"
"I don't feel comfortable"
"I don't want to do this anymore"
"Let's stop"
"I don't want to go any further"

Indirect expressions can also indicate withdrawing consent. Here are some examples:

"I'm tired"
"I don't have the energy"
"I'm not sure about this"
"I'm not sure I'm in the mood anymore"
"I'm feeling a bit off"

Not everyone finds it easy to assert their boundaries verbally. People may change their mind without actually saying anything. Non-verbal communications are just as valid as words. Some non-verbal cues to be aware of are:

- Becoming withdrawn
- No longer participating actively
- Going still or quiet
- Avoiding eye contact or looking away
- Physically distancing oneself
- Showing signs of tension or discomfort, such as tense body language or facial expressions
- Displaying hesitation or uncertainty.

Clear and open communication is key. If you find yourself feeling uncomfortable or unwilling to proceed, let your partner know. It's important to be honest about what you are comfortable with. You have the right to set boundaries that make you feel safe and respected.



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