

UNDERSTANDING CONSENT

In order to have positive sexual interactions, partners balance their power and control by...

- Listening actively
- Asking for clarification
- Making sure they understand one another
- Respecting their partner's boundaries - and communicating about their own
- Only participating when their partner is freely, knowingly and enthusiastically consenting
- Gaining consent for each sexual activity and not assuming anything
- Not being critical, insulting, degrading or humiliating
- Not being intimidating, threatening or coercive
- Speaking assertively (not passively or aggressively)
- Considering their partner's thoughts and feelings as important as their own
- Being equal in decision-making processes
- Not minimizing their partner's thoughts or feelings
- Being mindful of how their privileges (such as gender, race, age, etc.) influence their thoughts and actions and impact their partner
- Not proceeding unless everyone is capacitated
- Talking about safe sex expectations before the heat of the moment
- Showing their partner how they like to be touched
- Openly discussing respect, power and control in their interactions

"For me, I wanted to start out with the baseline that consent is the thing that you need in order to make the rest of the vehicle of sex go. Like, that is the gasoline. You need consent."

-Amy Rose Spiegel,
Action: A Book About Sex

Sources: WellWVU, well.wvu.edu; Student Health and Counseling Services, "Sexual Communication," UC Davis, shcs.ucdavis.edu; "Talking About Sex," American Sexual Health Association, ashasexualhealth.org

WHAT COMES BEFORE CONSENT?

There are multiple things to explore about your own needs surrounding sexuality before the issue of giving and obtaining consent comes into the equation. Some issues to consider on the continuum of healthy to unhealthy behaviors include...

- Your values and how they inform relationships
- How your actions do/don't reflect your values
- What your feelings are about having sex/not having sex
- How you develop emotional intimacy and vulnerability
- What and who you desire
- What your personal boundaries are related to sexual activity, including the use of birth control and/or barrier protection
- How to communicate these boundaries assertively
- How to navigate pleasure for yourself
- What you like and don't like to have done to your body
- How to communicate this to a partner
- What to do if your partner isn't listening
- How to ask for something to change within an intimate relationship
- Understanding various sexual orientations and gender identities, including your own
- How gender roles influence your approach to relationships
- Sexual health care for all life stages, including but not limited to prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy

Source: Lisa Currie, sexuality educator

Consent is All Around

Conversations about consent don't just involve sexual activity. We engage in consent conversations all the time such as...

- May I take your picture?
- There's a hair on the back of your sweater - mind if I remove it?
- Is it okay if I give you a hug?
- Since I missed class on Tuesday, could I please copy your notes?
- I forgot my locker key. May I put my shoes in yours while we swim today?
- May I refill your coffee?
- Do you think I can get a ride?

Think about the last few weeks. What are some examples of conversations you've had with people where some version of consent has come into play?

Keeping these types of consent conversations in mind can help when it comes to addressing bigger issues like intimacy. Asking, communicating, listening, respecting, not assuming... **all of these things and more go into our consent conversations, no matter the topic.**