

## What Does Consent Mean?

As important as consent is, we don't talk about it enough. So it's understandable if you're a little unsure about what it is – and what it isn't.

People typically talk about consent in the context of some kind of sexual or physical activity with a partner. In a healthy relationship, both (or all) partners are able to openly talk about and agree on what kind of activity they want to engage in. Whether it's holding hands, kissing, touching, intercourse, or anything else, it's really important for everyone in the relationship to feel comfortable with what's happening.

You may have heard the phrase “no means no.” That's totally true, but it doesn't really provide a complete picture of consent because it puts the responsibility on one person to resist or accept an activity. It also makes consent about what someone *doesn't* want to do, instead of being about openly expressing what they *do* want to do.

### Well, How Does It Work?

Some people are worried that talking about or getting consent will be awkward or that it will “ruin the mood,” which is far from true. If anything, the mood is much more positive when both partners feel safe and can freely communicate about what they want. First off, talk about what terms like “hooking up” or “going all the way” mean to each partner. Consider having these conversations during a time when you're not being physically intimate.

If you are in the heat of the moment, here are some suggestions of things to say:

- Are you comfortable?
- Is this okay?
- Do you want to slow down?
- Do you want to go any further?

### What consent looks like:

- **Communicating** every step of the way. For example, during a hookup, ask if it's okay to take your partner's shirt off. Don't just assume that they are comfortable with it.
- Respecting that when they don't say “no,” it doesn't mean “yes.” Consent is a clear and enthusiastic yes! If someone seems unsure, stays silent, doesn't respond, or says “Maybe...” then they aren't saying “yes.”
- Breaking away from gender “rules.” Girls are not the only ones who might want to take it slow. Also, it's not a guy's job to initiate the action (or anything else, really).

### What consent does NOT look like:

- Assuming that dressing sexy, flirting, accepting a ride, accepting a drink etc. is in any way consenting to anything more.
- Saying yes (or saying nothing) while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Saying yes or giving in to something because you feel too pressured or too afraid to say no.

### Here are some red flags that indicate your partner doesn't respect consent:

- They pressure or guilt you into doing things you may not want to do.
- They make you feel like you "owe" them — because you're dating, or they gave you a gift, etc.
- They react negatively (with sadness, anger or resentment) if you say "no" to something, or don't immediately consent.
- They ignore your wishes and don't pay attention to nonverbal cues that could show you're not consenting (ex: pulling/pushing away).

### Get Consent Every Time

In a healthy relationship, it's important to **discuss and respect each other's boundaries** on the regular. It's not okay to assume that once someone consents to an activity, it means they are consenting to it anytime in the future as well. Whether it's the first time or the hundredth time, a hookup, a committed relationship or even marriage, nobody is ever obligated to consent to something, even if they've done it in the past. A person can decide to stop an activity at any time, even if they agreed to it earlier. Above all, everyone has a right to their own body and to feel comfortable with how they use it.

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