

Understanding Consent

Guiding Principles for Teens

As you and your parent/guardian participate in the discussion, write down what you learn. If you are participating on your own, share your ideas with them afterwards.

What is Consent?

Consent is an agreement between individuals that is **enthusiastic**, **reciprocal**, and **continuous**.

Enthusiastic means: _____

Reciprocal means: _____

Continuous means: _____

In my own words, consent is:

When to Consent?

Consent is important in dating and relationships, but it is so much more than that. Think of consent as a set of guiding principles that you can apply to a variety of interactions and situations.

Principles of Consent:

Respect: Giving and receiving respect is key in consent. Others should respect your choices and you need to respect the choices of others.

Boundaries: A boundary is a line or limit that separates what you're okay with from what you're not okay with. You have the right to choose and to express your preferences and desires. Others also have the right to define what behaviors feel acceptable to them.

Communication: Communication can be verbal or nonverbal, and body language can be a strong indicator of someone's comfort in any given situation. Continuous communication helps to ensure everyone is still comfortable with what is happening.

Ability: Consent requires the ability to understand and agree to any action before it happens. If someone is unable to agree to something, they don't have the ability to give consent. For example, a child may not be able to comprehend what they are agreeing to—which indicates a lack of ability to consent. If someone is asleep or unconscious, or in an altered state (i.e., under the influence), they are also unable to consent. Additionally, power differences may influence a person to feel pressured to make a choice that they would otherwise not make.

Ongoing: Ongoing mutual interest means that just because you received consent once doesn't mean you've received a permanent yes. Anyone involved may change their mind at any time and has the right to express that change.

Real Life Situations

Directions: Read through these situations. For each one, try and evaluate how well the principles of consent were followed or how they were violated. Hint: Use the principles of consent found on the other side of this page to help. Place yourself in each situation and decide what you would say that would help consent to be honored. How would you finish the sentence?

A

Jay is a little shy but really likes Zoe (a girl in his science class). He asked her out to a dance last month, but she said no. It was disappointing to Jay, but he still wants to show respect for her and others.

What are some ways Jay should show respect, honor boundaries, and practice communication as he continues to interact with Zoe in class?

Jay: "Thanks for letting me know how you feel..."

Zoe: "I'm not interested. Thanks for..."

B

Lily sets up an online profile with a new photo. Annabelle screenshots the photo and edits it to include several facial blemishes and neon red eyes. She then adds the caption "#1 Class Witch" and sends it to several friends at Lily's school.

How have the principles of consent been violated here?

Lily: "This makes me feel..."

Lily: "This isn't right. Will you help by..."

C

Tim and Terry have been spending a lot of time together this month. Last week when they were walking home, Terry kept "accidentally" bumping into Tim's arm. Tim didn't seem to get the message, so Terry quietly said, "Tim, my hands are cold." Tim finally seemed to get the idea, took Terry's hand in his, and asked, "There, is this better?" Terry smiled and replied, "Yeah, much better."

Today while watching the school play, Tim took Terry's hand and held it for a few moments until Terry abruptly pulled her hand away. Terry didn't say anything and kept watching the play. Tim later decided to place his arm around Terry's shoulder, but Terry shook it off and gave him a small frown before looking back to the stage. Tim chose to sit quietly through the rest of the play.

How did Tim and Terry do at practicing consent? What can they do to continue to improve?

"Can we talk about this for a minute?"

"It's important to me that we are on the same page about this..."

"What are you trying to communicate by..."

D

Cara is at party when Patrick approaches her and starts a conversation. He doesn't seem quite himself and Cara is certain she can smell alcohol on his breath. She feels uncomfortable and turns to leave. Patrick firmly grabs her arm and says, "C'mon Cara, you are always playing hard to get. I deserve to get a least one chance with you."

How did using substances/alcohol impact consent? How could Cara get out of this situation?

Cara: "I am not okay with this. Stop it right now!"

Cara/Patrick: "This is wrong because..."