

CONSENT



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence
ACTIONALLIANCE

WHAT IS CONSENT?

An agreement to engage in physically intimate and/or sexual activity with another person. Consent is an ongoing, lifelong practice that serves as a way of honoring and respecting the needs of yourself and others and is a way of ensuring a mutually pleasurable experience.

Consent is a mixture of verbal and nonverbal communication and cues exchanged before, during, and after sexual contact. Practicing consent looks like asking questions, using safe words, and conversing about each other's health, safety, and pleasure. It can be enthusiastic or inquisitive, but it must be given freely.

Consent is NOT present when someone is pressured, manipulated, coerced, or forced to say yes to or endure something that they do not want or is painful, unsafe, or inappropriate given their age or existing power dynamics.

CONSENT EDUCATION MATTERS BECAUSE:

It promotes healthy relationships and lessens the likelihood of young people experiencing sexual abuse or assault, which happens far too often. *Over 1 in 4 female and 1 in 5 male victims of sexual, physical, or stalking violence by an intimate partner reported that they were first victimized before age 18.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CONSENT:

- VSDVAA Teach Consent Campaign: teachconsent.org
- Queering Consent: queersexedcc.com/zines
- School Programs: comprehensiveconsent.com
- I Ask for Consent handout: nsvrc.org/i-ask-consent

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PRACTICE CONSENT:

- Understand their own body boundaries and respect that of others. Ask others before engaging in physical touch.
- Learn their likes and dislikes and practice communicating this mutually with a partner.
- Take accountability if they mess up.

HOW ADULTS CAN MODEL CONSENT:

- Teach boys, girls, and gender expansive youth the same messaging about consent.
- Believe what youth say about their body sensations (e.g. “I’m cold.” “I’m not hungry.”) to help them build trust of their own body.
- Normalize and encourage bodily autonomy in everyday interactions, and model how to respectfully accept rejection.
- Allow youth to refuse contact they are uncomfortable with without pressure, guilt, shame, or force (e.g. saying no to hugs).
- Avoid talking about consent like a contract, but more like a way to practice communication and respect.
- Treat people with different backgrounds and identities than your own with humanity, empathy, and respect.
- Encourage youth to repair any harm they may cause and commit to doing better next time.
- Create a safe environment for youth to ask questions.

*From The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence by National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022

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