
Consent & Consensual Sex

The issue of consensual sex is often only brought up when there is some sort of doubt about whether both people engaging in sex want it to happen. However, **consent is a topic that should be discussed whenever you're thinking about a possible sexual encounter.**

In fact, consent should be the basis for every sexual encounter. Engaging in a sexual act without the other person's consent is considered sexual assault or rape.

Every act requires consent. Even if you have been kissing, that does not mean you cannot say "no" to anything further.

What is consent?

Consent means that both people in a sexual encounter must agree to it, and either person may decide at any time that they no longer consent and want to stop the activity.

Consenting to one behavior **does not** obligate you to consent to any other behaviors. Consenting on one occasion also does not obligate you to consent on any other occasion.

Consenting means only that at this particular time, you would like to engage in this particular sexual behavior.

How do you determine consent?

To determine if someone is giving consent, you must be able to answer two questions:

1. Does the person want to give consent?
2. Is the person capable of giving consent?

The easiest way to determine if a person wants to give consent is simply to ask. This eliminates the uncertainty of guessing and trying to interpret signals.

Someone putting his or her hand on your hand might be a way of indicating that she or he likes what you're doing or a way of indicating that she or he would like you to stop.

The only way to be sure is to ask.

A person may also give consent non-verbally by actively engaging in the sexual act. Clearly, this implied consent is more difficult to gauge, and if your partner seems to become more hesitant or uncomfortable, **you should stop**. Reassure your partner that you don't want to do anything she or he doesn't also want to do, and ask him or her what's wrong.

What if a person does not/cannot give consent?

Above all, if your partner ever says no during sex or asks you to stop, you must stop immediately. Saying no should never be treated as a game or as a signal that someone is "playing hard to get." Simply put, **"no" means "no" in any sexual encounter**.

Certain circumstances make it impossible for a person to legally give consent. These circumstances usually involve cases in which a person is not mentally or physically capable of choosing whether to engage in sexual behavior.

For instance, **if someone is drunk or high on drugs, then that person cannot give consent**. This means that even if someone seems eager to engage in sexual behavior, doing so can legally be considered sexual assault or rape if he or she is intoxicated.

Age can also determine whether a person can legally consent to certain sexual behaviors, such as intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex. The age at which a person can give legal consent is usually 16 years old in the UK.

Having sex with someone under the age of consent is legally considered a crime called statutory rape, even if the person under the age of consent says that she or he wanted the sexual behavior to take place.

Why should you talk to your partner?

Making sure that your partner consents to a sexual encounter is one of the most important parts of having a mutually satisfying and ethical experience. Check in with yourself and your partner often to make sure that both of you are comfortable with what is happening, and respect the feelings that each of you have.

Your partner might consent to oral sex but not to sexual intercourse, or you might consent to genital touching on one occasion but not another. You always have the right to say no, and anytime either you or your partner says no, the other person must respect that decision.

Even though talking beforehand does not mean that both people will consent later, it makes it more likely that you and your partner will understand each other's values and feelings.

Finally, if you're unsure what rights you have in a sexual encounter, such as the right to stop giving consent and end the encounter at any time, read Sexual Rights.