

Consent for Sexual Health Workshop

Outline

This workshop is made of up three parts:

1. Learning about consent
2. Sundae activity
3. Debriefing

Learning about consent

Throughout your life you are going to come across various experiences of consent, maybe you already have. So, let's talk about consent and the different kinds of consent.

Consent

Consent is the idea that someone needs to ask your permission before doing something. This is the most basic form of consent.

All parties must agree to an action before it occurs. This definition looks at consent from a legal perspective. "Can I kiss you?" is an example of consent.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is a more formal term. It is used in healthcare and in research. Informed consent is the idea that you cannot consent to something without having all of the information, including the right to change your mind.

Informed consent often looks like really long forms people sign but do not read. Maybe when you got a new phone or installed a new app you gave this type of consent.

This type of consent, especially in healthcare setting is consider "ethical consent." "Can I kiss you? I have an active herpes outbreak, and I'm in a monogamous relationship," is informed consent. You can see the difference. Sure, they are asking for permission in the first example. But asking for permission doesn't really tell you what you are consenting to. Which, in this case, would be exposing yourself to herpes and kissing a person who would be engaging in cheating.

If you want to do those things, that is your choice. That's the point. It is YOUR choice. Your decision. You can't decide to do or not do something if you don't have all the information.

Full and Complete Consent

The final type of consent comes from the therapy world. This is full and complete consent. In full and complete consent, the person isn't just given all of the information. Full and complete consent makes sure that the person understands what that information means and that they do not have to consent to every part. This type of consent is about making someone feel comfortable and good. It is about looking at more than what a person says, but their body language and even this situation they are in.

If consent is based on legal standards, and informed consent is based on ethical standards, then complete consent is guided by compassion and empathy.

Daily Life Consent

Consent is NOT just about sex. By which I mean any sexual activity. Consent is something that all people of all age have a right to in basically any situation involving their body or their property. You may have recently learned that the phrase “I do not consent to entry or search,” is what people are supposed to say to ICE. This is an example of the law’s requirement to uphold consent.

Maybe your friend took a picture of you, and they want to post it on social media. A good and empathic friend would ask for consent before posting it. Maybe you are experiencing a hormonal shift that is making your skin sore and itchy, and you really don’t want to be touched but your grandparents are visiting. You don’t have to consent to giving them a hug if you don’t want to. You have autonomy over your body. What other examples of daily life consent can you think of?

Pressured and Power Dynamics Consent

So, if we are looking at complete consent, consent where what matters is more than someone’s words, we need to look at the situation.

If there is a power dynamic can there be consent? For example, if a person’s boss or teacher tells them there will be negative consequences if they don’t do something outside their job description, is that consent?

What if we take out them saying there will be negative consequences but they are implied or there is fear about their being negative consequences?

Can we consent when we are afraid for our safety? No!

What if it is not a boss or teacher but someone with higher social status? *Ask the students for their responses.*

How Many Times Should a Person Have to Say No?

One. What happens in real life though is that people tend to be forced to say no over and over again. Which is weird.

If you had a friend come over and you offered them a glass of water, and they said no thank you, what would you do?

Would you bring them the water anyway? Would you pour water in their mouth? Would you say “Are you sure? But are you really really really really sure? What about now, do you want water now?”

Use teacher for roleplay that lasts the whole session. Periodically re-ask the teacher if they want the water.

No, you wouldn’t do that with water, because there is no real benefit to you if they drink the water. This can be hard with sexual activity because there is a benefit, one you might really really really want. I am going to assume that everyone in here is a nice person who doesn’t want to force someone to do something they don’t want to do, no matter how badly you want it. But when we want something, it can be hard to clearly see the whole situation. So, let’s talk about some ways outside of words to know that someone isn’t into the situation.

Non-Verbal Cues

What are some non-verbal ways to know that someone is uncomfortable?

- Looking around the room for an exit
- Leaning away or recoiling
- Looking down
- Curling in their shoulders or making themselves small
- Speaking softly

Consent should be enthusiastic. If a person is using non-verbal cues or even words that don't seem enthusiastic like "yea, sure, whatever," instead of yes, you may be getting legal consent, but you aren't getting "I'm a good person compassionate consent."

Conversations

Having a discussion outside of a sexually charged situation give you the opportunity to make sure you are on the same page both with language and with what you desire to do. Having these conversations during or seconds before a sexual situation can change make things cloudy. It changes the situation.

If everyone is REALLY thirsty, the question "do you want a glass of water," might make you not take the time to think about if the water is clean, or the glass is clean, or if you'd rather have pop than water.

Conversations about consent are best done in a location and a time when the decisions about that conversation can't be acted upon immediately, like in a coffee shop or walking through a bookstore. It can even help to have a conversation over text, but it is not a great idea to do something that you aren't comfortable talking about face to face.

Slang

We all use slang every day

When it comes to consent slang can make conversations easier, less awkward and even sexier. There are all kinds of sexual words that people are uncomfortable with or they plain dislike. For example, people might not find the words, penis, vagina or vulva attractive so they might use slang instead.

The downside of slang is that people might not know exactly what you mean.

Example: To a certain group of people, a thong is a type of underwear, to another group it's a type of shoe. The question "can I remove your thong" has very different consent implications depending on what the person thinks a thong is.

What can we do?

1. We can look for context clues when possible. Is the person wearing shoes that might be considered thongs?
2. We can provide more context
3. We can have a discussion ahead of time that includes terms and slang

The Three Things Consent Conversations Need

When having a conversation about consent there are three things to think about: What do you want, what does your partner(s) want, and what does the situation deem safe.

Let's think about rock climbing

- The first step to rock climbing is to decide you want to go rock climbing. Great, maybe you have someone you want to go rock climbing with or maybe after deciding you want to go rock climbing you start looking for a partner to go climbing with.
- The next step in making sure your partner wants to go rock climbing.
- So, there's what do you want. To go rock climbing, check.
- What does your partner want. To go rock climbing, check.
- What does the situation deem safe? Well, if you don't have the right gear, or you aren't in the right circumstances—maybe there's a lightning storm starting, does the situation deem it safe? No. In this situation both partners wanting to isn't enough to make it is a safe situation.

Ok, who thinks I'm really talking about rock climbing? (Raise hands) Who thinks this is really a metaphor for sex? (Raise hands) Okay, but how do you know? Did we have a conversation about metaphor or using rock climbing as slang? If your partner expects you to show up with a climbing harness and some carabiners and you show up with a condom, what happens? It can create an awkward situation. Which is okay. Awkward situations happen. What isn't ok is when people make choices, they don't want to make to avoid an awkward situation.

In this example, what might someone do if they don't want the situation to become awkward?

- have sex when they weren't planning on it
- if someone does something they didn't really want to do because they are trying to avoid an uncomfortable situation, are they consenting?
- Let's go back to our types of consent:
legally they maybe consenting, but are they giving complete and enthusiastic consent?

Role Play Enthusiastic and Non-Enthusiastic Consent:

Students give prompts of things they are or are not excited about and call out if the instructor is enthusiastic or not. Responses get difficult to discern. When students can't agree or don't know move on to Responsibility.

*Example: homework— "Oh! No! I do not want to do homework right now." "Oh my god, I have the best idea for this paper and I'm really excited to get started on it." "Um, yea sure whatever." "I'm like really stressed out about it and I just like need it to be over with because I can't handle being this stressed out it." *Shrug* "I'm cool with whatever you want to do." "I'm cool with whatever you want to do."*

Can you tell the difference? Based on the different responses what would you do next?

Responsibility

If someone says yes but they don't mean it, where does the responsibility fall?

Sex can be amazing and wonderful and there are a lot of positive reason people have sex.

People also have sex or engage in sexual activities for negative reasons.

IF YOU DO NOT FEEL SAFE TO SAY NO, you need to get out of the situation.

If you do not feel safe to say no, you are not consenting.

We are only going to focus on situations where the people are safe. With that in mind, let's jump back to responsibility. If there is a situation with non-enthusiastic consent, who is responsible for the situation?

Remember we are only talking about safe situations.

The responsibility falls on everyone involved. The person asking for consent is responsible for looking for non-verbal cues and being clear/complete in their ask. The person consenting is responsible for only consenting when they enthusiastically want to.

What are some reasons (other than safety) that a person might consent when they don't want to? *Make a list.*

- How would it feel to do something that you don't want to do for any of the reasons on our list?
- Would you want someone to do something with you that they really didn't want to do?
- How would it make you feel if you found out someone engaged in a sexual activity with you that they didn't want to do?

Remember our water metaphor, it only works if the person says "no, I don't want a glass of water." If they shrug or say, "whatever you want," there is no longer a clear understanding. Being able to say no in a decisive and clear way is a skill EVERYONE needs to practice. So, let's practice:

- Do you want me to ask all your teachers to assign extra homework for the next month?
- Do you want me to surprise you with a pop quiz on ancient Mesopotamian society that will count for 50% of your grade?
- Do you want me to make sure the cafeteria only serves beet soup for the rest of the year?

It is easier to say no in these situations. I need each one of you to have that level of confidence in your no, in all consent situations. So, we are going to do an activity that will give you the opportunity to say no, or say yes.

Sundae Activity

We are going to eat ice cream sundaes. Here's the catch. You don't get to make the sundae you eat. Everyone partner up. If there is an odd number, we can have a group of three. You will make a sundae for your partner. But how are you going to know what to put on your partner's sundae? Ask.

I am going to give you some questions to get you started then it's up to you.

- What kind of ice cream do you want?
- How much do you want?
- What do you like on your sundaes?
- **Do you have any allergies?**

Once everyone has their sundae, ask them about their experience.

- Are you enjoying your sundae?
- Is there anything different you would like?
- Are you having fun?

Debriefing

The debriefing portion is an open format that gives the students the opportunity to reflect on the experience.

Questions poised to students include:

- Tell me what that experience was like for you.
- What non-verbal cues did you notice from your partner?
- Did you notice any disconnects between what your partner said and their vibe?
- How can you tell if someone is being enthusiastic?
- What about this exercise was weird or hard?
- In what ways is making a sundae different than consent in real life?
- What about this exercise was easy or fun?
- In what ways can consent be easy or fun in real life?
- What situations can you apply these skills to? How would you do it?
- What should I know that I don't?

I leave you with this. If someone does not respect your consent, they do not respect you. You deserve to be treated with respect. Your body deserves to be treated with respect. Anyone who would ignore your consent or pressure you to consent does not deserve you or your body.