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National Youth Mental Health Foundation

# understanding sexual consent

**Romantic and sexual relationships come in all shapes and sizes. Yet there are some things that healthy relationships have in common; they are built on respect, clear boundaries and consent.**



## Why is it important?

Asking for and giving sexual consent is one way we can maintain healthy relationships and make sure everyone's feeling safe, comfortable, respected, and that no-one is breaking the law. The older we get the more common sexual and romantic relationships can become so it's important to get this right.

## What is sexual consent?

Sexual consent is an ongoing and freely given agreement between people who are engaging in sexual activity together. It involves paying attention to what they're saying (or not saying), their body language and their facial expressions.

## What does consent look like?

- you and your partner are excited, happy and eager to engage in sexual contact
- no-one is forced, pressured or manipulated into any kind of sexual contact
- anyone can change their mind, stop at any moment or choose not to engage any further
- everyone is fully conscious – no one is asleep or drowsy
- no-one is so affected by alcohol or other drugs that they can't make safe or informed choices
- everyone must agree upon choices regarding safe sex e.g., using condoms and other contraception
- consent applies only to the sexual act you're doing at the one time, in that very moment. Just because someone consents to kissing, doesn't mean they consent to someone touching their body.



Consent doesn't have to be awkward – just ask! And the other person can choose to agree or not.

## What are some ways I can ask for consent?

Consent doesn't have to be awkward – just ask! And the other person can choose to agree or not. Like all agreements and conversations, we must also pay attention to someone's body language and tone of voice. If their facial expressions, body language (e.g., shrugging, arms crossed or avoiding kisses) or tone of voice don't add up with their answer, then you don't have consent. Remember, consent must be enthusiastic.

### Asking for consent may sound like:

'Can I kiss you?'; 'Would you like me to touch you there?'; 'What else can I do for you?'

### When you don't get consent:

Remember, if a person doesn't give consent, then you can't force or pressure them to change their mind. This means that everyone feels safe and respected, and that you don't break any laws.

## What are some ways I can give my consent?

**As well as asking for someone else's consent, it's important that you've given consent.**

**Showing your consent might sound like:**

I really like that; can you keep doing it?

Yes. That sounds like a really nice idea.

Feel free to touch me here.

**Showing that you don't consent might sound like:**

No. I don't want to.

That's sweet of you, but I'd rather not.

That doesn't feel good for me anymore. Let's try something else.

## What does the law say?

### Age of consent

The age that someone can consent to any kind of sexual contact varies slightly between state and territories in Australia.



You can check which laws apply to your state or territory at [yla.org.au](http://yla.org.au)

### Sexting

There are also different laws around consent and sexting/sending nudes.



You can find out more at [yla.org.au](http://yla.org.au) and navigate to the topic of sexting via the internet, phones and technology section.

## Power and control

**Not everyone can give sexual consent, even if they want to. This is because there must be equal levels of power and control between everyone involved. It can be hard to say no to sex if there is an unequal power balance.**

Things that can influence our power in relation to someone else include:

- our age
- our relationship to the other person
- our ability to fully understand what someone is asking us to do
- their control in our lives – they might control the money, decide if you can see your family and friends, or tell you what to wear.

Some professions have rules that prevent certain people/occupations from engaging in sexual contact with young people. This is because they may be seen as providing care for and/or they have more power and control over the young person.

The following people can't engage in sexual contact with young people:

- direct family members
- anyone who is seen to care for young people e.g., teachers, tutors and coaches
- treating medical professionals e.g., doctors, psychologists and support workers
- anyone providing legal representation or advice to young people including lawyers and police officers.

## Getting support

**For more information on healthy relationships, check out our website.**

If reading this resource has raised any concerns for you in relation to your own experiences, help is available:

**Sexual assault information, support and helplines**  
[healthdirect.gov.au/sexual-assault-and-rape](http://healthdirect.gov.au/sexual-assault-and-rape)

**24-hour sexual assault counselling –**  
[fullstop.org.au](http://fullstop.org.au)

**Relationship resources and counselling**  
1800RESPECT  
[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)



**If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)**

**If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.**

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