

# QUICKIES: sexual consent basics a sex ed summary from scarleteen.com

Sexual consent is an active, mutual process of deciding and negotiating how and if we're being sexual with each other. Sexual consent is about everyone having and making a real choice. Consent is a shared responsibility: everyone needs to ask for consent when they want to do something, and not one should have anything done to or with them without their consent.

If someone is freely choosing to say yes to something they understand and want to do, they are giving consent. If someone is saying no, isn't giving a clear yes, or isn't asked, they are *not* giving consent. Someone who is consenting usually sounds happy and certain, even if they're nervous.

Consent is usually easiest to do well with words; by asking each other for permission, before we do anything sexual, in a language or form everyone involved can use and understand. There are other ways than words — like eye contact or other body gestures — but they're much trickier. When those ways work well, it's usually because the people involved already use words for consent and have had lots of practice communicating together.

**When we're seeking consent, we ask questions like:** "Can I kiss you?" Or, "Do you like it when I hold you tightly? Is it okay if I do?" Or, "I want to do something sexual with you: do you want to do something sexual with me? What do you like and want to try?" Or, "I'd like to try oral sex: is that something you want to try, too?" Consent should be specific. Everyone should be deciding what exactly they will do together (not just "whatever"), and when, where, and how. For example, giving specific consent to someone asking to be naked with you might sound like, "Yes, but I still need you to ask if you can touch me, and I'll probably say no, because I'm not sure I'm ready for that. I'm also shy about this, so please be sensitive to that." Consent isn't something we only need to do or give once. We should always be checking in with each other often during sexual activities as we go, making sure our partners want to be doing anything we're doing, and are okay with the way we're doing it. Sometimes people still want to do something, but want or need to change how they're doing it in some way.

If someone consents to one thing, that doesn't mean they consent to everything: just to that one thing. Consent can also ALWAYS be withdrawn. Even if someone says yes to something once, they're always allowed to change their mind and say no.

**For something to be consensual, there can't be any force, coercion or manipulation** — anyone talking or tricking someone into something. Full consent just isn't possible in some situations, like if anyone is drunk or high, asleep, very upset, sick, grieving or scared, or if anyone is unable to fully understand what's being asked of them, including possible risks or consequences that can be part of what they're being asked to be part of.

**A lack of no is not yes.** Doing consent right means we are asking each other questions. If we don't ask, and no one says anything, that doesn't mean there was consent. If we ask and the other person doesn't respond or doesn't clearly tell us yes, that also isn't consent: we should only move forward with anything we do to or with someone else if they are very clearly telling us yes. If we're ever not sure, we should ask. If someone says yes, but doesn't *look* like they really want to say yes, we should check in.

**Nothing makes consent a given or automatic.** Being someone's spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend doesn't give anyone consent. Someone loving you or saying they love you doesn't mean they have your sexual consent or you have theirs. No one kind of sex means consent to another, or that anyone is "owed" any sex. Because someone has had any kind of sex in the past does not mean they will have sex or consent to sex again with that same person or anyone else nor that they are obligated in any way to do so.

**Nonconsent means STOP:** If someone does not give consent or says no, the other person **MUST** not do that thing, or, if they are already doing something a person says no to, they must stop, immediately. If they do not stop, or exert emotional or other pressure so that person gives in to them, they are abusing or assaulting that person.

One way to think about consenting is like a stoplight, the way Columbia University Health Service's Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Program did:

**Red Light: Signs You Should Stop**

- You or a partner are too intoxicated to gauge or give consent.
- Your partner is asleep or passed out.
- You hope your partner will say nothing and go with the flow.
- You intend to have sex by any means necessary.

**Yellow Light: Signs You Should Pause and Talk**

- You are not sure what the other person wants.
- You feel like you are getting mixed signals.
- You have not talked about what you want to do.
- You assume that you will do the same thing as before.
- Your partner stops or is not responsive.

**Green Light: Go, but Keep Communicating**

- Partners come to a mutual decision about how far they want to go.
- Partners clearly express their comfort with the situation.
- You feel comfortable and safe stopping at any time.
- Partners are excited!

**This handout was prepared by Heather Corinna and is a summary of Driver's Ed for the Sexual Superhighway: Navigating Consent ([https://www.scarleteen.com/article/abuse\\_assault/drivers\\_ed\\_for\\_the\\_sexual\\_superhighway\\_navigating\\_consent](https://www.scarleteen.com/article/abuse_assault/drivers_ed_for_the_sexual_superhighway_navigating_consent)) by Heather Corinna. © 2010 - 2019 Scarleteen/Heather Corinna. All Rights Reserved.**