

PREVENTION

INTERVENTION

RETENTION

CONSENT ON
COLLEGE CAMPUSES
TOOLKIT



CONSENT OVERVIEW

Consent is a necessary and critical discussion. Unfortunately, sexual violence is a prevalent problem in universities and colleges nationwide. **13% of students reported experiencing some degree of sexual assault in college** (Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN, n.d.).

Lack of education, resources, and respect all contribute to the issue. Learning about consent is the first step towards creating a safer environment on campuses.

WHAT IS CONSENT?

Consent is a voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity (What Is Consent?, n.d.). Consent can be verbal or non-verbal but must be undeniably affirmative. It is willing and offered voluntarily without guilt, coercion, threats, or intimidation. Body language can be misinterpreted, so it is always best to communicate clearly and state boundaries. Consent must be given by all parties involved.

Things that count as affirmative consent:

- “Yes.”
- “I want...”
- A thumbs up followed by verbal assent

Things that do not count as consent:

- Silence
- Non-committal body language like shrugs or smiles
- Verbal consent given under the influence of drugs or alcohol

CONSENT CAN CHANGE

Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Whether you just started or are in the middle of a sexual act, if someone says “no,” **everything stops**. In addition, agreeing to some physical touches does not give universal consent. For example, accepting a kiss does not translate to consent for intercourse.

WHY IS CONSENT **IMPORTANT IN COLLEGE?**

For many students, college opens a world of new experiences. The freedom and independence of living without parental supervision can be liberating and is an opportunity for young adults to learn and grow as a person. A common experience is exploring sexual identity.

One of the most important aspects of a safe and responsible sex life is consent. Learning how to respect your boundaries and the boundaries of others is essential. Since many young adults first experience sex in college, understanding what consent is, how to give it, how to decline it, and how to respond to it is a new concept. Feeling empowered and safe to communicate personal, physical, and emotional boundaries to others is the key principle of consent and a cornerstone of many institution's academic missions.

SIGNS SOMEONE IS UNABLE TO CONSENT

Even a verbal “yes” does not always equate to consent. There are several factors that prevent someone from being able to provide consent.

INTOXICATION

Overconsumption of alcohol or drugs impairs decision-making skills, lowers inhibitions, and distorts reality. As a result, it is not possible for someone to fully understand what is happening to or around them.

UNCONSCIOUS

Whether someone is passed out from drinking too much or just sleeping, an unconscious person cannot grant consent. It doesn't matter if an agreement was formed before the person fell asleep. Former consent immediately goes away in an unconscious state.

INCOHERENT

If someone struggles to speak clearly or seems confused about where they are, they cannot consent. Disorientation is a sign of mental confusion and shows that a person cannot think clearly or understand the consequences of their actions.

AGE

The legal age of consent varies by state. Anyone underage is not able to give consent, regardless of how sober or rational they are at the moment.

ENTHUSIASTIC CONSENT

VS. IMPLIED CONSENT

Enthusiastic consent is a positive, verbal confirmation and continued feedback before and during sex (What Consent Looks Like | RAINN, n.d.). For example, it could look like asking for permission, “Is it okay if I...” Enthusiastic consent involves frequent check-ins with your partner to ensure everyone is comfortable with each degree of sexual activity. Enthusiastic consent clearly expresses boundaries through open communication and creates a safe and trustworthy environment.

Implied consent is relying on body language or physical cues. This form of consent leaves too much room for interpretation, and unwanted advances can be misread as being accepted or wanted.

Physiological responses to physical touch are not a form of consent. Arousal, an erection, or lubrication are involuntary and do not equal consent.


HOW ALCOHOL OR DRUG ABUSE INFLUENCES CONSENT

Intoxication makes it difficult to make decisions. People who are drunk or high do not process the consequences or implications of situations (What Is Consent?, n.d.-b). Consent can only be granted when someone is of a clear mind, understands facts, and is in complete control of their body.

Signs that someone has had too much to drink to give consent include:

- Slurred speech or inability to hold a conversation
- General confusion
- Inability to walk or stand on their own
- Vomiting
- Unconscious

Consent works both ways. Even if you are drunk, physically touching or engaging in sexual activity with another drunk person is not an excuse for not getting consent.



NON-VERBAL CUES SOMEONE IS UNCOMFORTABLE



There are many reasons why someone doesn't verbally say "no" to physical advances. They might feel embarrassed or are afraid to insult the other person. If they are uncomfortable with a friend or partner, there could be a sense of misplaced obligation.

However, just because someone doesn't say "no" or "stop" doesn't mean they are consenting. Here are some non-verbal cues that someone is feeling uncomfortable:

- Turning their face to the side or angling their body away
- Not engaging in conversation or intentionally ignoring the person speaking to them
- Creating distance, even if that is just taking a step back or moving a seat over
- Pulling a friend into the conversation and trying to divert attention
- Non-committal body language like shrugs

Never be afraid to call the police or campus security.

WHAT TO DO IF CONSENT IS VIOLATED

All physical and sexual assaults should be reported to the police. If you don't know where to start, you can report instances to your Title IX coordinator or trusted faculty. Some institutions have dedicated sexual assault response teams within their campus police department.

Seeking medical attention is also strongly advised.

There are several support groups and resources available to help process and heal from trauma:

National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN) | 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or online chat

Crisis Text Line | Text "HELLO" to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis counseling

REFERENCES

Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics | RAINN. (n.d.). <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>

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