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# What Consent Looks Like

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While the legal definitions of consent may vary by location and circumstance, the general concept is always the same: Consent is an ongoing process of discussing boundaries and what you're comfortable with. Let's get specific about how consent plays out in real life.

## What is consent?

Consent is an agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. Consent should be clearly and freely communicated. A verbal and affirmative expression of consent can help both you and your partner to understand and respect each other's boundaries.

Consent cannot be given by individuals who are underage, intoxicated or incapacitated by drugs or alcohol, or asleep or unconscious. If someone agrees to an activity under pressure of intimidation or threat, that isn't considered consent because it was not given freely. Unequal power dynamics, such as engaging in sexual activity with an employee or student, also mean that consent cannot be freely given.

## How does consent work?

When you're engaging in sexual activity, **consent is about communication**. And it should happen every time for every type of activity. Consenting to one activity, one time, does not mean someone gives consent for other activities or for the same activity on other occasions. For example, agreeing to kiss someone doesn't give that person permission to remove your clothes. Having sex with someone in the past doesn't give that person permission to have sex with you again in the future. It's important to discuss boundaries and expectations with your partner prior to engaging in any sexual behavior.

## You can change your mind at any time.

You can withdraw consent at any point if you feel uncomfortable. One way to do this is to clearly communicate to your partner that you are no longer comfortable with this activity and wish to stop. Withdrawing consent can sometimes be challenging or difficult to do verbally, so non-verbal cues can also be used to convey this. The best way to ensure that all parties are comfortable with any sexual activity is to talk about it, check in periodically, and make sure everyone involved consents before escalating or changing activities.

## What is enthusiastic consent?

Enthusiastic consent is a newer model for understanding consent that focuses on a positive expression of consent. Simply put, enthusiastic consent means looking for the presence of a "yes" rather than the absence of a "no." Enthusiastic consent can be expressed verbally or through nonverbal cues, such as positive body language like smiling, maintaining eye contact, and nodding. These cues alone do not necessarily represent consent, but they are additional details that may reflect consent. It is necessary, however, to still seek verbal confirmation. The important part of consent, enthusiastic or otherwise, is checking in with your partner regularly to make sure that they are still on the same page.

## Enthusiastic consent can look like this:

- Asking permission before you change the type or degree of sexual activity with phrases like "Is this OK?"
- Confirming that there is reciprocal interest before initiating any physical touch.
- Letting your partner know that you can stop at any time.
- Periodically checking in with your partner such as asking "Is this still okay?"