# Understanding consent and keeping safe.

Would you like to learn about consent?





This resource is to help you understand consent about sex. It isn't going to teach you how to have sex but will talk to you about consent, boundaries, trust, and treating ourselves and others with respect.

If you don't feel ready to read about sexual consent, put this resource somewhere safe, and take it out when you feel ready.

# Consent is: freely choosing to engage in a particular activity.

Here are some examples

We consent every day to lots of activities, like playing a game or going to the movies. There are also many times we don't give consent when we don't want to do something or aren't sure, like choosing not to stay over at a friend's place or not giving someone a hug.



Sexual consent is: freely choosing to engage in any sexual activity for pleasure like kissing, touching, or having sex.



# Consent is always needed

Regardless of whether people are straight, lesbian, gay, queer, pansexual, monogamous or non-monogamous.

# Consent is never implied

Consent in any situation is never implied - it needs to be clearly and directly communicated verbally and non-verbally. It doesn't matter what someone is wearing, where you are, or if you have done something sexual together in the past. These things don't tell you anything about whether someone wants to do something sexual with you now.

Giving consent to one activity does not mean consent has been given for another activity.

# Consent is a process

Consent is ongoing. This means someone can change their mind at any time, and that's totally okay! Consent can change from moment to moment.

# Consent cannot legally be given if

- Someone is drunk or high and not sure what they're doing.
- Someone is asleep or unconscious.
- There is a power difference. For example, a young person cannot consent to sexual activity with a sports coach.
- The sexual activity is between an adult and a child (a person under 16 or 17 years old depending where you live).
- Sexual activity between two people in the same family. For example between a brother and sister, step-parent and child or parent and child.



# Consent can be tricky

There are some factors that can make it difficult for you or someone else to give consent. These can make consent tricky because they can feel intimidating but could also feel exciting. It's important that everyone is able to make decisions that are right for them and feel absolutely sure.

### **Power and status**

If we think someone is more popular or cooler than us, has a car, a good job, or more money, this can feel intimidating. These things can make us feel shy expressing how we feel. They could also feel exciting and make it hard to make decisions.

Your power or status could make others feel intimidated. It is important that everyone can freely consent and feels comfortable expressing how they feel.

#### Size and strength

Yours or someone else's size and strength can be intimidating!

#### Age and experience

If someone's older or has more experience, this can be intimidating too. We might feel that they know more or 'know better'. Remember, you know what's best for you.

If you're older or more experienced, this can be intimidating for others and make it difficult for them to consent.

## Gender stereotypes and sexuality

Gender stereotypes are general ideas about how we may expect people to behave based on their gender. When it comes to sex, there are stereotypes like men shouldn't talk about their feelings and that men always want to have sex. Men can also get pressure from their friends to have sex, and pressure others to have sex. Men may also believe that women enjoy when they are persistent or that women owe them sex.

Stereotypes like women are passive can mean that women can feel pressured to say 'yes'.

#### Past experiences

Just because people have done something sexual together before, doesn't mean they will again. Each experience is unique.

#### Expectations

Let's say someone has paid for a night out, there may be an expectation to make out or do something sexual together as a 'pay back'. Being physical with someone is never owed.

#### Culture

Understandings of consent can vary across cultures. For example in some cultures you need consent to shake someone's hand. If you're unsure it's always best to check. Regardless of culture everyone always has the right to decide what happens to their body.

#### Pornography

Porn can make consent tricky because it shows sex in very unrealistic ways. You'll never see anyone asking for consent, using condoms or having awkward moments. The people who appear in porn are actors and porn often shows people doing things that lots of people don't want to do in the real world. Porn is nothing like the real world.

Next we will look at boundaries. Boundaries help us make decisions about what's right for us.

Would you like to keep reading?



Boundaries are: limits we set around what feels good and safe for us.

Someone may feel comfortable kissing, but not comfortable touching. **This is a boundary.** 

People's boundaries can change from one moment to the next, or one activity to the next.

There are lots of reasons why someone may or may not give consent. People have different boundaries and everyone has the right to decide their own boundaries.

You decide what goes for your body. Just because your friends do something, doesn't mean you have to. Make sure you are ready.

Boundaries help keep us safe. Boundaries should always be respected.

# How do I know what my boundaries are?

To know what we want and are comfortable with, we need to **tune into ourselves**. This is a good skill to practise in different situations.

Break it down like this:

#### Head

Where's my head at?

#### Heart

How does this feel in my heart?

## Body

What is my body telling me?



When we consent to something, it should feel like a FULL head, heart, & body YES.



# How do I know what other people's boundaries are?

Everyone has their own head, heart, and body signs of how something feels for them and what they're comfortable with. To understand someone else's boundaries, we need to be aware of their words, actions and gestures, or their **verbal and non-verbal communication**.

This means listening to what others say and also paying attention to their body language.

# **Communicating boundaries**

Communicating about consent means we need to know our own boundaries, and how to communicate what we want, or don't want through verbal and nonverbal communication.

It can be hard to talk about boundaries but it gets easier with practise! If you don't feel comfortable enough to talk to someone or they don't respect your boundaries, it probably isn't a good idea to be physically close with them.

Remember that boundaries can change from moment to moment. **Keep checking in** with others about how they are feeling and **stop if you are unsure of your or someone else's boundaries**.

Consent needs to be clearly and directly communicated - both verbally and non-verbally.

# **Respecting boundaries**

The traffic light colours of green, orange, and red are a useful way to look at consent and boundaries.

#### Green = Yes

Like with driving a car or cycling a bike, green tells us it's safe to continue. With consent, we still need to pay attention to ourselves and others - things can change from moment to moment.

## Orange = Unsure

Like with driving or cycling, orange tells us to prepare to stop. With consent this is because we're not sure if we or others want to stop or continue.

#### Red = No

Like with driving or cycling, red means it isn't safe to continue. With consent, everyone must stop.



Everyone wants to continue - FULL head, heart & body YES



Consent can change at any time

# Orange = **Unsure**



Anyone is not sure

- If you or anyone else is unsure, you should ask e.g. 'shall we stop?' 'do we both want to do this?'
- If you're not sure it's a FULL head, heart & body YES, the answer is no
- -----> Everyone must stop

Anyone doesn't want to continue



# Examples

Here are some head, heart, and body examples to help you recognise the difference between a yes, being unsure, and a no.

Green = Yes Orange = Unsure Red = No

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Remember when you consent to something, it should feel like a **FULL head, heart, & body YES.** 

# head thinks:

'I'm really into this'

'I feel safe to have fun and explore'

# heart feels:

Free, light, joy, confident, present in the moment, connected

body feels:

Warm sensation, 'butterflies' in stomach/ excited, relaxed



## 'I'm not sure about this'

'I'm finding it hard to decide' or 'I'm distracted'



'This doesn't seem like a good idea'

'I don't want this'



Stressed, uncomfortable, doesn't feel right



Awkward, confused, shy

body feels: Unsteady, tense



Tense, heavy, wants to stop or pull away, frozen

Every experience needs to feel like a

#### FULL head, heart, & body YES. If it's not, everyone needs to STOP.

This could be before anything has started, or at any stage of any sexual activity.

It may feel awkward to say 'no', or stop, or ask if another person wants to keep going or stop. But this is how we stay safe, respect everyone's boundaries and practise consent.

To know what we want and are comfortable with, everyone needs to tune into their head, heart and body. If your partner isn't sure or hasn't given consent then you must **stop**. This can feel frustrating but you have to **stop**.

Let's have a look in more detail.

Are you good to continue?





Green = Yes	Orange = Unsure	Red = No
Everyone	Anyone	Anyone
Wants to continue	ls uncertain if they want to continue	Doesn't want to continue
Is able to think clearly	ls unsure if they are thinking clearly	Is unable to think clearly
Is certain	ls hesitant or has doubts	Has changed their mind
ls sure	Thinks things are moving too fast	ls not happy with what is happening



## How does this feel in my heart? How does this feel in their heart?

Green = Yes	Orange = Unsure	Red = No
Everyone	Anyone	Anyone
Feels happy	Feels confused or conflicted	Doesn't feel happy
Feels safe and comfortable	lsn't sure if they feel safe or comfortable	Feels unsafe or uncomfortable
Feels good about what's happening	lsn't sure if what's happening feels good	Doesn't feel good about what's happening
Feels relaxed	Feels the vibe or energy has changed	Feels stressed or scared

body physical

What is my body telling me? What is their body telling them?

Red = No

Green	= Yes	
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Everyone	Anyone	Anyone
Has open body language	Has closed or still body language	Has closed or still body language
ls making eye contact	lsn't making eye contact	lsn't making eye contact
Is freely participating	ls giving mixed signals	Is hesitating
Feels the experience is pleasurable and enjoyable	lsn't sure if the experience is pleasurable and enjoyable	Doesn't feel the experience is pleasurable and enjoyable
Feels warm, comfortable	Feels tense	Feels tense

Note: Wetness or an erection are not body language for consent. Only yes means yes.

# Over to you

It's important to know what a FULL YES, unsure and a no feel like in your head, heart and body.

Think about a time when you've felt really good about an activity with others, a time when you've felt unsure, and also a time when you've felt uncomfortable, or it felt like a no.

What thoughts did you have in your head? How did your heart feel?

What was your body telling you?

You can jot down some notes in the boxes on the right.







Remember to check in to make sure everyone's giving consent and boundaries are respected. Consent is an ongoing process.







# If boundaries are not respected, this is sexual assault.

This is what it can feel like when boundaries are not respected.

**head** thinks: 'I don't want this' 'I want to stop'



feels: Isolated, numb, stressed, fearful, overwhelmed



feels:

Frozen, pounding heart, tense, pit in stomach

Oh come on, you said you liked it before

> I'm not really into it

I'm not sure

Do you like this?

You can't hold back on me now

Oh no, what do I do now?

# You <u>always</u> have the right to say no:

'l've changed my mind' 'l don't want to do this' 'l need you to stop' 'l'm going home' 'l don't want to go any further'

## If saying no in the moment feels too difficult, you can say you:

Need to go to the toilet Need to make a call Feel sick

If you're feeling uncomfortable and someone's close by, try to signal to them for help.

# Sexual assault is a serious crime

If your boundaries are not respected think about the safest way to get out of the situation. Leave if you're able to or message a friend or trusted adult and tell them you need help.

If you have been sexually assaulted, you can tell someone and get support: from a friend, a teacher, a police officer or a doctor. You can call your local sexual assault service. They will support you to find out your rights and options, get a health check, get information to make a report, or just talk about your experience.

## If you think you've been sexually assaulted seek help.

- Hospital emergency, doctor or counsellor
- Kids helpline 1800 55 1800
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Queensland Sexual Assault Network qsan.org.au
- Report to the police or call 000
- Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline 1800 010 120
- 1800RESPECT 1800 737 732

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