

- You can also find more using [Words Matter: Guidelines on Using Inclusive Language in the Workplace](#)
- Trans Care BC: The Provincial Health Services Authority, created [Gender Inclusive Language](#) to help identify language signals to help improve gender-affirming care within BC services.

## Topic: Consent

### Definition

Consent is an agreement to engage in an activity and occurs when you ask, or give, permission to do something. Consent is used and should be used within daily life interactions and/or activities – such as asking for food or drink, taking a picture and posting it on social media, physical touching, or participating in an activity.

For further information on what is and what is not consent, please visit our website:

[What is consent? - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#)

### Considerations

- Create a space where you model the language and attitude of consent and build a culture of consent in your classroom. This goes well beyond the PHE classroom and instead should be part of a whole school culture.
  - Fundamental in demonstrating consent is to ensure a **'yes means yes'** narrative – shifting away from the 'no means no' model. Granted there will be times you will need to speak and teach what "no" and "stop" means (i.e., resolving a situation or conflict after the fact), but the basis of our practice and how we model consent should be ensuring that an initiator needs to ask for permission first and obtain a verbal yes before proceeding in any action/activity.
- Consent does not need to be a taboo topic and is about more than sex. While issues of consent definitely exist in sexual relationships, consent issues exist throughout life and make for very interesting discussions with students. Consent issues could include a variety of examples, such as borrowing a friend's sweater without asking, sharing a photo of a friend without consent, or sharing a secret without permission. These are situations that have happened to every student and discussing them helps reinforce principles that apply to consent in intimate relationships. Normalize conversations in your class about respecting the bodily autonomy of other people. This starts with teacher leadership in the classroom. While it can potentially be slightly disruptive for students to be moving around during classes, denying a student the ability to go to the washroom or meet other bodily needs is an example of not respecting the bodily autonomy of students.
  - Have conversations with students about the importance of trust and how if you trust students and give them the freedom to meet their bodily needs, you expect that students won't abuse this right and will make good choices.

- Students should be aware that their bodies belong to them and that their bodies are not for others to use or exploit. Students also need to apply this to their interactions (sexual and/or otherwise) with others as well and acknowledge that other people are not for them to use or exploit.
- It is also important to acknowledge that not receiving consent can sometimes make people feel bad (e.g., being rejected), particularly when there is positive intent behind a request. For example, if a student wants to give a friend a hug and are told no, it's natural to feel sad. Encouraging empathy and understanding is important and can be introduced with many common examples. For example, a student might normally enjoy getting a hug from their friend but may not want to hug at a given moment because they are feeling sick or just want to be alone.
  - Regardless of the reason, boundaries should be respected, and people shouldn't be made to feel guilty for not giving someone consent to do anything. Practicing asking for consent as well as giving, receiving and accepting "no" as an important element of establishing and respecting boundaries.
  - The goal is for discussions of consent to be regular and for all people to get used to asking for consent and to be comfortable both saying no and accepting no as an answer.
- Take violations of consent seriously and use smaller examples as teaching opportunities. For example, something as simple as one student taking another student's pen is an example to reinforce acceptable and unacceptable behaviour regarding consent. In the example of taking another student's pen, the perpetrator will often say things like "what's the big deal?" but it is important to ensure that students understand that even seemingly small violations of consent are not acceptable and show a lack of respect for others.
  - While dealing with seemingly minor issues can feel frustrating, these small violations can reinforce that consent is optional.
  - Be aware that some students will try and excuse non-consensual behaviours, such as saying "it's ok, we were just joking around." While this is sometimes true, this is also sometimes done to try and save face or not look like they were "tattling" on a classmate. Don't contradict a student, but instead emphasize that while you appreciate that in this case it was just a joke, in your classroom you expect that students will ask for permission before touching another student or taking their property.
- Be aware of signs that indicate risk factors, such as a student who uses misogynist language in the class or "jokes" about violence. Students are exposed to a wide variety of messages related to relationships. Students may come from a household where they are exposed to gender-based violence or listen to media sources that objectify women or reinforce negative stereotypes.
- Remind them that just because someone doesn't actually say "stop" or "no" doesn't mean they mean "yes." This is applicable in many contexts and can be reinforced early and often (e.g., with "playful" teasing or pushing between friends, tapping someone on the head).

- Showing respect to our elders is often a primary driving force/fear in students allowing unwanted contact to occur, especially when it comes to someone who is a close relative, family friend, teacher, coach, and so on. So make sure that students understand their right to say no to unwanted touch or interactions.
  - Talk to students about their control of their bodies. Students should not be forced to have unwanted physical contact. This can be difficult for adults, particularly for older relatives where social norms were different. However, these can be communicated in a positive way and lead to important conversations at home.
- Can use the FRIES acronym as a mnemonic device for key consent principles:
  - F – Freely Given. Decisions about sexual activities should be made without pressure, force, intimidation, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
  - R – Reversible. Even if you have agreed to do something, you can change your mind, even during sex. Consent is ongoing and not a one-time thing.
  - I – Informed. Consent includes honesty, such as using protection if you have agreed to do it.
  - E – Enthusiastic. Consent should be enthusiastic and stated using a verbal yes; your partner shouldn't look or sound unhappy about doing something.
  - S – Specific. Your partner agreeing to do one thing does not mean they have consented to other things, you need to check with your partner before going further.
- In Canada, the age of consent is 16, with exceptions for younger people if they are close in age to each other. For specific details, see the federal Department of Justice guidelines on consent at <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/clp/faq.html>.
- Consent can never be given, even by adults, if the person is in a position of trust or authority. For students, this would include a teacher or a coach. Also, for anyone under 18, consent can never be given if the sexual activity is exploitative (e.g., pornography or providing sexual services for payment or other consideration)
- Under the age of 18, consent can never be given if the person is in a position of authority (e.g., a teacher or coach) or if the sexual activity is exploitative (e.g., pornography or prostitution). It is important to be clear in your communication and to speak up and clearly say “no!” or “stop!” if you are uncomfortable with something. While consent should be enthusiastic, some people (especially people on the autism spectrum) may have difficulty reading body language.
- Use gender inclusive language, as anyone from any sex can be both the survivor(s)/victim(s) and perpetrator(s) of sexual assault.

## Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering this topic with your students could include the following:

- Refer to the elementary Supporting Student Health guide for additional ideas for teaching about consent and modify to make them more age-appropriate.

- Go through the FRIES mnemonic to help teach students key points.
- Discuss with students why consent is important and the potential consequences (legal trouble, relationships, etc.) of not engaging in activities with consent.
  - Important to cover how there are some situations where, for students under 18, consent can never be given.
  - It is also important not to exaggerate to scare students. For example, people can have an innocent misunderstanding (e.g., miscommunication about a particular activity) in a good relationship that can be discussed and solved.
  - Emphasize how being pressured or forced into non-consensual activities is not the survivor/victim's fault and encourage them to talk to the proper authorities.
  - Encourage people to support their friends and not be judgmental.
- Have students create scenarios where two people are discussing consent.
  - Have them use the FRIES principles and illustrate things like how to ask about doing something, how to say no, and how to negotiate consent (e.g., "I'm not ready to have sex but we can make out.")
  - Students could do this in a variety of forms, such as a roleplaying activity in pairs or an individual activity such as a story or comic strip.
- Discuss handling rejection in a healthy and positive way
  - Ask students what is the difference between rejection and refusal?
  - How does a refusal or rejection make you feel and how might people react in those situations? How do we react in healthy ways?
  - Rejection and refusal are very normal and common parts of life and in many situations are important parts in making sure everyone is safe and respected.
- Remind students that not all physical touches (hugging, handholding, etc.) are bad; in fact, they usually make us feel good!
  - When we have physical touch, our brains make something called dopamine that makes us feel happy and less stressed. This is why people usually like to receive and give physical touch. It's totally normal to want to hug someone!
  - As the person who wants to do the touching (which feels good), you need to look at the person you want to touch and see if they look like they want to receive physical touch. This can be hard, so it's a good idea to ask if you aren't sure.
- Run through some different scenarios with your class (adapting as necessary for age):
  - A friend wants to hold your hand, but you don't want to. Is it okay to say no? (Yes. It doesn't mean you don't like your friend. Discuss)
  - You are kissing someone, but then you decide you don't feel like it anymore. Is it okay to stop? (Yes, it's okay to change your mind. Discuss)

- You run up to an adult in the school and want to give them a hug. Is this okay? (No, you have to ask permission to give hugs. Discuss how this applies to all people.)
- If you are hugging someone, can you give them a kiss? (No, just because someone is OK with one thing doesn't mean you don't need permission to go further.)
- Explain to students that it is important to practice asking for consent, giving consent, and saying no. This helps students build resilience when asking for a hug and being told no or being the one saying "no, thank you." However, it is important to distinguish inappropriate touch, which is never okay.
  - Have students practice asking for consent (high-fives, hugs, handshakes), giving consent if they are comfortable), and saying no.
  - Ensure that all students practice saying no in a strong voice. If students feel shy or uncomfortable saying no to their friends, offer them strategies like smiling and saying "no, thank you" or doing something different with their hands, like waving or giving a thumbs-up.
- Explain to students that they will never be in trouble for saying no to an adult or friend. The student decides what happens with their body and no one else gets to decide.
  - If someone is making them feel bad because they are choosing not to give consent, then that person is not being a good friend.
- Remind students that when someone is not giving them consent, it's not fair or right to get mad or upset. Treat others how you would like to be treated!
  - It's acceptable and normal to not give consent. You can just respond by saying "that's cool!" or "no worries."
- Explain what "bribes" and "threats" mean and that they are never acceptable. Here are some examples:
  - "I won't be your friend if you don't hold my hand."
  - "If you like me, then you will let me kiss you."
  - "I will give you something if you let me touch you."
- Unpack common scenarios that can happen in a student's life and how they factor into building a culture of consent.
  - Discuss other forms of pressure and manipulation, including guilt or frequent asking/begging for example:
    - "aw, come on, please ... everyone else is doing it";
    - "but we have been going out for so long";
    - "if you loved me you would";
    - "but it feels so much better without a condom"; and
    - emphasize that it is not okay to feel the need to agree to sexual activity in order to avoid the other person's stated anger or disappointment.

- What happens when students are at a party? How do they know if they or someone else has had too much to drink? What can students do to create safety for those who are intoxicated?
- People need to be aware of predators who will “spike” drinks and to be extremely vigilant about what they consume.
- Reinforce that consent can never be given if someone is intoxicated, incapacitated, asleep, or unconscious. Even if a person decided beforehand that they would engage in sexual activity, once they become in one of the above states, that person’s consent is revoked and cannot be obtained.
- Discuss the importance of advocating for people and to seek help if someone is being taken advantage of.
- Using a trauma-informed approach, roleplay a situation and practice ways they could advocate for someone who may have personal boundaries violated.
- Unpack examples of scenarios in popular culture and/or social media which contribute to the normalization of coercion and how the scenario could have unfolded differently if consent had been obtained.
- While talking about safe and unsafe touches, either consensual or nonconsensual, may seem like an elementary school topic, these issues remain relevant throughout a student’s life. Beyond more typical roughhousing and horseplay, people will do more sexually charged things like hit someone in the genitals or smack someone’s buttocks.
  - Often, people are not fully aware of the impact that these “games” can have. Encourage empathy and emphasize that setting boundaries is important. How would they feel if someone did these things to someone close to them?
  - Discuss personal boundaries with students: what are they, why are they important, how do boundaries keep us safe, how can we communicate boundaries (verbal and non-verbal), and how can we respect boundaries?
  - Remind students that these types of games are potentially assault or sexual harassment and that violating someone’s boundaries can have very serious consequences.
  - Examples of sexual harassment include: being touched, grabbed or pinched in a sexual way, sexual gestures, sexual jokes, being catcalled, insults with sexualized words, being the target of sexual rumours or of lewd or prolonged staring, unwanted sharing/display of pornography, requests/demands for sexual images/videos or being shown or sent sexual images/videos.
  - Addressing sexual harassment in the classroom and the school generally is also key to promoting a consent culture (and reducing sexual assault)
  - Even when students say they don’t mind and it’s just a game, power dynamics within peer groups mean that people who are being bullied would rather put up with abuse than be seen as having “tattled” on someone.
  - Have students brainstorm alternative outlets for these types of behaviours, such as intramural sports versus unstructured roughhousing.

- Encourage students to take action within the school related to building a culture of consent.
  - Students could discuss ways to educate themselves and their peers, such as a poster campaign, weekly announcements, inviting guest speakers, or other strategies.
- Ensure that students know that anyone who is being touched in an inappropriate manner is allowed to do whatever they need to do to get away.
  - Remind them that violence like this is usually not okay, but if it's a matter of protecting yourself, it is allowed and encouraged.
  - Emphasize that they will never be in trouble for protecting themselves from unsafe touch. The person doing or trying to do the touching is always in the wrong.

## Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions. Here are some suggestions for responding to difficult questions or situations.

- If a student discusses a relationship issue, such as abuse, in their own life, it's important to show that you believe them. Don't minimize their concerns.
- It is also important not to jump to conclusions, as the other person in the relationship may have a very different perspective. This is especially important if both people involved are students whom you may interact with.
- While students may want to discuss more ordinary relationship problems, if a student tells you about a relationship issue that seems abusive, be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure. (See General Suggestions for Teaching Health Topics.)
- Victims/ survivors of sexual assault may not directly disclose the event, but may demonstrate the following behaviours after experiencing a traumatic sexual incident:
  - compromised feelings of safety/well-being
  - heightened feelings of fear & hyper-vigilance
  - decrease/loss of confidence and low self-esteem
  - anxiety, depression, shame, guilt, and/or anger
  - difficulties concentrating
  - difficulties with memory
  - sleeping disorders or difficulty sleeping
  - suicidal ideation, self-mutilation and/or suicide attempts
  - alcoholism and/or drug abuse and/or other high-risk behaviours
  - symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder
  - and difficulties with emotional/intimate/sexual relationships

## Resources to Consider

For information to help educators feel informed, confident in their knowledge and understand the criminal law components regarding sexual assault and abuse, the following resources are recommended:

- [Legislation & Policy Related to Victims in the Criminal Justice System - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal/victim.htm)
- [Crime Examples - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal/crime.htm)
- [Help starts here - Sexual Assault \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal/sexualassault.htm)

# Topic: Healthy Sexual Decision Making

## Considerations

- Don't impose your beliefs or values on the topics covered.

## Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering these topics with your students could include the following:

- Abortion and contraception
- Review how different contraceptive options are used and how they work.
- Provide information about local resources where students can go to get more information, help, and/or contraceptive devices.
  - Try to provide as much detail as possible: For example, which contraceptive devices are available? What services are provided? Are they free? Where is it located? What are its hours? How can students get there? (Provide walking and bus routes, as many students don't drive.)

## Legalities

- Age difference is determined by birthday, month, and year. So if a 12-year-old is dating someone who is two years and one day older than them, it would be illegal for them to engage in sexual activity.
- Consent can never be given if someone is intoxicated, incapacitated, asleep, or unconscious. Even if a person said beforehand that they would engage in sexual activity, if they are intoxicated, they may not be able to consent and the sexual activity should not proceed.

## Sexually transmitted infections

- Note: Graphic photos are unnecessary.