

# Consent Skills

This toolkit is not a check list or an exhaustive list of skills. Consent is **not** a once off agreement or a box to tick. Consent involves ongoing communication, these skills are to be used together and will need to be revisited many times, even within an individual encounter. These skills work together and are present at different times in different consensual

experiences, in different relationships. Everyone has their own boundaries and personal agency. Each individual owns their own consent. No one can tell someone else what is consensual or not consensual for them. This resource is a helpful suggestion, not a one size fits all.

Consent is often considered to be an intimidating and confusing topic. At worst, it's associated with sexual violence and the law; at best, it's thought of as a bit awkward. It is absolutely true that the absence of consent is a dangerous and harmful crime and this should not be taken lightly. But when consent is present, it empowers us to have fun together and to figure out what we like.

Consent communication is like any other skill – it takes practice. It's like a muscle, we have to use it in order to build it up and make it strong. The more we practice it and make room for potential awkwardness and checking in with people in our lives, the more we can get confident with ensuring that everyone is happy and comfortable in their sexual activity.

Consent needs to be present for **all** people, in **all** situations and in **all** relationships.

## Recognising and understanding a yes, a no and everything in-between

Consent doesn't need to be verbal; we communicate nonverbally in our day to day lives. It's always important to check in with your partner verbally, but sometimes we give signals about how we are, or are not, comfortable with something through our body language. It's important to remember that not everyone can communicate verbally, so we need to check in with them as to how they are doing and whether they are comfortable.

### Some examples of nonverbal consent communication

Here is a list of ways someone might give signals with their body that they are not comfortable or enjoying themselves. Body language can look different for different people. If there is any doubt then check in, it's always okay to slow down and take a break. If you are feeling unsure about what you want, then it's okay to stop or take a break.

Body language can look different depending on different people

### Verbal

#### Positive

"Keep doing that!"  
"That feels good."

#### Negative

"No."  
"I'm not ready."  
"I don't feel comfortable doing that."

#### Not sure

"I'm not sure about this."  
"I don't know."  
"I have never done this before, but I'm open to trying as long as we can stop."

### Nonverbal

#### Positive

- Smiling
- Nodding enthusiastically
- Pulling you closer
- Maintaining eye contact
- Actively engaging

#### Not sure

- Hesitancy or freezing

#### Negative

- Shaking their head
- Silence
- Pulling away
- Crying
- Looking sad or scared
- Pushing you away or pushing your hand away

## Asking for what you want and saying when you don't

Practising asking for what you want and also saying no is a fantastic way to get better at asserting boundaries in all areas of your life. The first step is knowing how to listen to your body and to know what you like and what you're comfortable with.

Remember it's not always possible to say no but that doesn't mean consent - an absence of a no is NOT consent. It is always the responsibility of the other person to observe your body language and to listen to your no.

It is never your fault if you're not listened to or if your boundaries are not respected. This section focuses on communication within consensual encounters only.

"Thanks for letting me know, I can do that differently."

"We don't ever have to do anything you don't want to do."

"I only want to do what you feel comfortable with."

"Your comfort is my priority."

"You can always tell me what you want and don't want."

## Slowing everything down and grounding yourself

It is normal and human to rush into things and get caught up in the moment. However, when we're rushing, we can miss important signals from ourselves and other people.

If we're not paying attention to how we feel and how the other person is feeling, we could misinterpret or ignore signs that something isn't right. It can feel difficult or strange to interrupt the flow, or to slow down and check in with yourself and your partner, but the more you try it, the easier it will be.

"I don't like that."

"I would like to try this new thing; how would you feel about that?"

"I would prefer to do something else."

"That's not something I enjoy."

"I don't want to do that."

"I like the sound of this, what do you think?"

## Hearing & respecting a boundary

Consent is something we do together. It is about respect and creating an environment where ongoing communication, feedback, redirection and establishing boundaries are respected, welcomed, listened to and celebrated.

**Consent is not about pushing to get what you want. Refusing to accept a "No" or trying to convince someone to do what you want is coercion and is dangerous.**

Hearing or sensing a no or redirection can feel difficult, but from a consenting partner it can be a positive. Someone is trusting you to respect their boundaries and that is something to be heard and valued.

"Am I okay with this?"

"Are you feeling okay?"

"I'm not sure how I feel about this, I need a few minutes to figure it out."

"I'm enjoying this but I need a break."

"Can we take a few mins?"

"Can we figure this out?"

Call the National 24 Hour  
Freephone Helpline at

**1800 778888**

for support and information on options.



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
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