

Dating and Sexual Consent : Advice for teens, young adults and YOU

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You have spent time, money and energy planning the perfect date. You are excited about getting to know your date and hope to make a good impression. You are hopeful about engaging in sexual activity if the moment arises.

What about establishing consent? If you are like most people, you probably have given more thought to the elements of the date itself than to the task of establishing consent if a sexual opportunity occurs. Now is the time to think about how, when and why you should have a plan to obtain consent in sexual situations.

Many people rely on non-verbal cues to establish sexual consent. You may have thoughts such as: "I'll know when she wants to have sex"; "I can tell if she is interested" or "There is no need to ask him if he wants to have sex". Unfortunately, it is quite easy to misinterpret people's thoughts and expectations within a situation. In a sexual situation, the consequences of misinterpretation can be significant.

Consent is established by asking a person whether or not they wish to engage in a sexual activity with you. It is always favourable to ask your partner clearly. You will not lose anything by asking for consent. Verifying consent is proof that you are truly being attentive and caring of the wishes and well being of your sexual partner.

Tips to remember:

1. Consent is not given until asked.
2. Consent for sexual intercourse cannot be assumed even if you have engaged in other sexual behaviors, for example, kissing or oral sex.
3. Consent cannot be given if your partner is intoxicated or drugged.
4. Consent cannot be given if your partner is asleep or unconscious.
5. Consent is limited by the age of your sexual partner. Ideally you should seek partners who are similar to you in age. The legal age of consent for heterosexual intercourse in Canada is 16 years old. For homosexual intercourse (male) it is 18 years old and it is 16 years old for homosexual (female) sexual activity.
6. Consent cannot be given in situations where there is a power imbalance between partners. This is particularly important when there is an age difference between sexual partners. Some examples include employer-employee and teacher-student relationships.

Take the time to get to know your partner. Ensure that your sexual partner is in agreement with the sexual activity that you are proposing. It is worth your time and energy to always verify consent within your sexual relationships.