Talking About Consent

Module 3 explores consent, including the importance of communication for navigating the complexities and nuances of consent. This module serves as a foundation for further training on sexualized violence by providing essential information about consent in the Canadian context.

After completing this module, you will be able to:

* Reflect on how your cultural contexts influence your understanding of consent
* Explore different ways to express consent (verbal, non-verbal, direct, indirect)

# **[slide 1]** Welcome to Module 3!

In this module, you will gain a deeper understanding of what consent means, and how it plays out in different contexts. You will look at some of the ways in which our cultural contexts influence our understanding of consent. And you’ll hear some examples of ways to give, receive, and refuse consent.

# **[slide 2]** A quick note

This module includes reflection questions on the topic of consent. You are encouraged to respond to them from your own experiences. There are no right or wrong answers.

As we consider consent, keep in mind that policies addressing power imbalances and consent can vary across institutions. We encourage you to learn more about these policies at your institution.

# **[slide 3]** Video

[Module 3: Talking about Consent](https://media.bccampus.ca/media/Module+3A+Let%27s+Talk+About+Consent/0_2621nan6)

**[person 1]**

You know, I’ve been reflecting lately about how we understand, navigate, and communicate consent. I find that these are questions we normally don’t ask of ourselves. We assume we have all the knowledge we need! What do you think about the way we use consent in our relationships?

**[person 2]**

I think consent is being practiced way more often than people might realize. While people often think about consent in the context of sexual interactions, we’re also practicing consent when we ask to borrow someone’s belongings, when we ask if they want to spend time together, and when we ask whether people are ok with physical closeness and touch.

Consent is mutually generated, meaning everyone involved must be in agreement about doing something. Consent is not won or earned. It is more than a simple yes or no. It is an ongoing opportunity to check in with yourself and with others if you feel comfortable in a situation or if something has changed.

It is also required in digital contexts, such as taking, sharing, or posting photos of others, and sending and sharing nude or other sexually explicit images.

Consent must be voluntary and freely given without pressure, guilt, or force. If someone uses their power or authority to pressure or manipulate a person into an activity, that is ***not*** consent.

**[person 1]**

Everyone must have the capacity to consent to any sexual activities. Using drugs and alcohol, for example, can create situations that impact a person’s capacity to consent and the way they interpret consent. And if a person is asleep or unconscious, they do not have the capacity to consent.

I think it’s also important to note that consent can be taken away at any time. We all have the right to change our minds, to not consent, and to have our needs respected.

Some examples of ways in which we give and receive consent verbally are:

* “That feels good”
* “Let’s keep doing this”
* “Yes”, or
* “I want to do this. Is that okay with you?”

On the other hand, we can refuse consent verbally by saying:

* “No”
* “I don’t know”
* “I need a break” or even a simple
* “I’m not feeling well today”

It’s also really important to understand that consent cannot be assumed just because someone is not verbally refusing or resisting sexual contact.

Consent is so complex and nuanced!

**[person 2]**

What do you mean when you say that it is complex and nuanced?

**[person 1]**

Well, we all communicate in different ways, right? Consent can also be given and received non-verbally, with cues like nodding your head, making direct eye contact, or initiating sexual activity. And it can be ***refused*** non-verbally by avoiding eye contact, pushing someone away, or using closed body language, like looking stiff or tense.

We send and receive messages differently, based on our upbringing, our cultural contexts, and our past experiences. Some of us are from groups or cultures that are more reserved or quiet, while others can be part of communities that are louder or more physically expressive. Some cultures might consider physical expressions of frustration, anger, or sadness inappropriate and uncomfortable, while others might value these responses.

For these reasons, it is important to have conversations with your partner or partners about personal and sexual boundaries, as well as about how you communicate consent in your relationships. And because this is so complex, it’s also important for you to reflect on these conversations, and to understand how ***you*** navigate consent.

**[person 2]**

It definitely is, and when in doubt, communicate with your partner or partners to make sure you understand each other. In the end, we must work towards building safer, healthier and more caring relationships, by having ongoing conversations with our partner or partners about what each other’s boundaries are and ensuring that consent is given in all our interactions.

# **[slide 4]** Question 1

Here are six questions to help guide you in reflecting on your understanding of consent and the different ways people can express consent.

1. What are some ways you can ask for consent?
   * Does this (activity) feel good for you?
   * Do you want to go further?
   * I’d really like to do this (activity). What do you think? Would you be into that?
   * I’m really in the mood tonight. Are you?
   * What do you want to do next?
   * Will you show me where and how you want me to touch you?

# **[slide 5]** Question 1: Feedback

We’re often taught that the only way to ask for consent is to say, “Do you want to have sex? Yes or no?” But there are many ways in which people can ask for consent. It’s important to consider both verbal and non-verbal approaches.

# **[slide 6]** Question 2

1. What are some signs that consent is being given and is ongoing?
   * “Yes”
   * “That feels so good”
   * “I want to keep doing this”
   * “It feels good when you…”
   * Pulling a person in closer
   * Making direct eye contact

# **[slide 7]** Question 2: Feedback

Of course, this is not a complete list of signs that consent is being given and is ongoing. When in doubt, communicate with your partner or partners to make sure you understand each other better.

**Remember:** Consent is an ongoing process and needs to be discussed often!

Want to learn more? You can check out learning opportunities on campus or in your community.

# **[slide 8]** Question 3

1. What kinds of conversations or body language let you know that someone may not be comfortable?
   * “I’m not really in the mood anymore”
   * Pushing you away
   * Turning their head or body away from you
   * Not participating or as engaged
   * “That makes me feel uncomfortable”
   * “I’m not comfortable doing that”

# **[slide 9]** Question 3: Feedback

These are all signs that someone has changed their mind. It's important to keep in mind that saying no is only one of many ways in which people can show they are no longer interested or comfortable.

**Reminder:** Consent can be taken away at any time, and everyone has the right to change their mind, to take away their consent, and to have their needs respected.

# **[slide 10]** Question 4

**Consider the Following**

For the next question, you might want to use a journal or notepad to capture your ideas and reflections.

1. How has your upbringing influenced your views on sex and consent?

# **[slide 11]** Question 4: Feedback

Our upbringing makes us unique, so we all have different understandings of what defines sex or sexual activity and how we view consent.

What we understand and believe about sex and consent can depend a lot on our culture, our gender expectations, our lived experiences, and our community’s influences.

Being clear about our understandings and how they have been shaped will help us establish our boundaries and comfort levels in different activities.

# **[slide 12]** Question 5

1. Who in this list is considered to be in a position of power?
   * Roommate
   * Classmate
   * Sports coach
   * Mentor
   * Employer
   * Instructor or professor
   * Teaching assistant (TA)

# **[slide 13]** Question 5: Feedback

There’s no “right” answer to this question, as all of these people could be in a position of power in relation to you. Power is directly influenced by identity, including race, gender, ability, age, and class, as well as by other factors including a person’s reputation and their seniority at work.

Consent can be especially complex when there is a power imbalance. The more power someone has, the more they have the ability to influence the actions and choices of others, and the more responsibilities they have to ensure that interactions they are having are consensual.

# **[slide 14]** Question 6

**Consider the Following**

For the next question, you might want to use a journal or notepad to capture your ideas and reflections.

1. How do alcohol and drugs influence your capacity to consent to any sexual activities?

# **[slide 15]** Question 6: Feedback

Again, there are no right or wrong answers to this question. However, keep in mind that these substances lower our inhibition and our ability to give, ask for, and interpret consent for sexual activities. Having a good understanding of ourselves and our sexual partner or partners is essential, especially when we are using alcohol and drugs, which can make these interactions even more difficult to navigate.

Clear signs that a person does not have the capacity to consent include:

* Slurred speech
* Vomiting
* Loss of coordination
* Stumbling
* Being unable to hold their head up
* Unconsciousness

# **[slide 16]** Question 6: Feedback continued

We all respond differently to alcohol and drug consumption, and not all of us have the same ways of showing intoxication. If you’re unsure about whether someone has the capacity to consent, hold off on engaging in any sexual activities and wait until the person clearly has the capacity to consent.

# **[slide 17]** Takeaways from Module 3

In learning about healthy and safe relationships we must continue engaging in opportunities to expand our knowledge. When we learn more about these topics, we are working toward creating safer communities for all. Here are a few things to take away from this module:

1. The need for consent is not limited to sexual activity! It is also needed for any form of physical contact, in digital contexts, and for respecting personal boundaries.
2. Consent can be taken away at any time. We all have the right to change our minds and have our decision be respected.
3. We all communicate differently, so the ways in which we give or ask for consent will be different too. If you are in doubt, talk it out!