

Parent/ Carer's Guide to Consent and Harmful Sexual Behaviour¹

Guidelines for Young People (ages 13-19)

1. Build young people's self-esteem.

We tend to build up our younger children by telling them how great they are. We stop telling children all the wonderful aspects of who they are when they reach secondary school. Sometimes they are pushing the boundaries while exploring their independence which makes conflict more prevalent in the teen years. This a very crucial time to be building up our child's self-esteem, and not just about physical attributes. Remark to them regularly about their talents, kindness, work ethic as well as how good a friend they are to others.

Even if they shrug you off with a, "Dad! I know!", it's always good to hear the things that make you great.

3. Continue having talks with young people about relationships and sex, but start incorporating information about consent. We're often good at talking about waiting to have sex, or about sexually transmitted infections, or about practicing safer sex. We don't usually talk about consent. Encourage them to expect their "No" to be respected, and how to hear "No" without it being a devastating rejection.

Ask questions like, "How do you know whether your partner is ready to kiss you?" and "How do you think you can tell if a someone is interested in you?"

This is a great time to explain enthusiastic consent and about asking permission to kiss or touch a partner. Explain that only "yes" means "yes." Don't wait for your partner to say "no" to look for consent. Even if the words coming out of their mouth are "Yes" if their body language is telling you "No" or "I'm not sure". Stop and check in with your partner.

3. Nip sexual bullying in the bud. Secondary school is the age where sex-talk begins in gender-segregated environments. Their crushes and desire are normal and healthy, but we need to do more than just stop young people from talking about others like they're objects. We also need to model how to talk about our crushes as whole people.

If you overhear a young person say, "I'd tap that" you could say, "I think she's more than just someone with an attractive body!" You can keep it jokey, and they'll roll their eyes at you, but it sinks in. They need a model for grown-ups who are doing things right. Even saying something like, "How about that she's kind and a proper laugh?"

4. Explain that part of growing up is having big emotions, and that sometimes they make it hard to think clearly. Sometimes that means our desire feels overwhelming, or that we're angry, confused or sad. It's common, and perfectly okay, to be overwhelmed or confused by these new feelings.

Tell your children that no matter what they're feeling, they can talk to you about it. However, their feelings, desires and needs are no one's responsibility but their own.

¹ Adapted from <https://goodmenproject.com/families/the-healthy-sex-talk-teaching-kids-consent-ages-1-21/> accessed on 15.12.2021

They still need to practice kindness and respect for everyone around them. Just because they are feeling turned on, it's not their partner's job to meet those needs.

5. Support boys and young men to explore what masculinity is. Men need to talk to boys about what's good about masculinity. Ask what hasn't been so good about our culture of masculinity in the past. How can we build a more inclusive form of masculinity that embraces all types of lads: from athlete to theatre geeks to LGBT+ people? These conversations can encourage a non-violent form of masculinity for the future.

Boys need to start talking about building a healthy masculinity starting in secondary and continue through college, because transforming masculinity is vital to transforming a culture that doesn't always call out harmful sexual behaviour. Encourage them to call out their friends that make sexist comments that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way. Teach them to stand up for, and seek help for, a fellow partygoer who has been using substances and they are drunk or high.

6. Talk honestly with children about safer partying. Make it clear that you don't want them drinking or using drugs, but that you know young people party and you want your children to be informed. Ask them questions about how they are going to keep themselves and others safe when they're partying. Questions such as:

- How will you know when you've had too much to drink?
- How does your behaviour change when you've had too much drink or drugs? How can you protect others from yourself in that situation if, perhaps, you become an angry drunk or start violating people's space or safety?
- How will you know whether it's okay to kiss someone, touch someone, or have sex with someone when you've had a lot to drink or used drugs?

Explain that decisions sometimes become cloudy, and signals become unclear when we are impaired. A person cannot give consent when they are drunk, high, sleeping or unconscious. Even if their partner is saying "yes", they cannot give consent because they aren't thinking clearly. To have clear communication about consent, both people should be sober and alert. It's better to just stop and wait until you both no longer have drugs or alcohol in your system.

7. Help them to consider online and offline relationships equally. If your child gets a social media account, talk with them about sharing images. If your child wants to share images of other people, they always need to ask first. Likewise, your child can expect other people to ask for permission before sharing your child's image. Your child should feel free to say no. If they receive a request for naked images of themselves from a partner, classmate or a stranger, they need to know if they create an indecent image/ video of a child (themselves), send the image/video or keep the image/video they are breaking the law and they need and they need to get help from a trusted adult. Anyone under the age of 18 cannot create, distribute or possess indecent images of a child even if they are the child themselves or if the other person is under 18 and they create it or send it consensually.

8. Use everyday moments or examples from shows, movies, books and media stories to get the consent conversations started.

• 'I liked the way he accepted her decision when she changed her mind about having sex in *Scott Pilgrim vs the World*. Why is that important?'

- ‘Does that person look comfortable being touched?’
- ‘I never saw the character ask for consent. How would a person have asked for consent?’
- ‘Do you think the character was able to give proper consent if they were drunk?’
- ‘I really like that scene in *Frozen* where Kristoff asks Anna whether it’s OK for them to kiss. That’s a good example of asking for consent. What do you know about consent?’
- ‘What do you think about the way Han Solo backs Princess Leia into a corner and kisses her?’

9. Consent is important when in longer term relationships too. You can’t assume consent because people are in a relationship. You can’t assume consent just because it was given for the same activity yesterday, the day before or on 100 previous occasions. Permission must be asked for and given each time an activity begins, changes, or continues. Consent can’t be assumed or implied. Flirting, clothing, sexual texts or social media communication is not consent.

10. An enthusiastic Yes is what we are looking for. A ‘yes’ is not consent if someone feels pressured, forced, threatened, guilty, blackmailed, intimidated, bullied or harassed. Silence, not answering, or not resisting physically is not consent. ‘No’ always means ‘no’, whether given verbally or non-verbally: A ‘yes’ that’s not enthusiastic or freely given is also a ‘no’.

Consent videos

Consent for Kids (pre-adolescent) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9UIJc>

Consent videos for Secondary School Children

Ping Pong consent on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/178529042?ref=em-share>

Enthusiastic Consent <https://youtu.be/AqBQH1e7XwQ>

Screwball <https://truetube.co.uk/film/screwball>