



QUICK FACTS FOR PARENTS

Learning about **Healthy Relationships and Consent**

Consent: “To agree to do or allow something; to give permission for something to happen or be done.”

– Oxford Dictionaries, 2015.



From an early age, children start learning and negotiating what they can and cannot do within their families, at school and in the community. As children grow, their skills and knowledge about consent need to grow too. These skills help them handle different situations and relationships that can sometimes be complicated.

The health and physical education curriculum helps children and youth to understand what “consent” means and learn the skills they need to:

- Stand up for themselves
- Respect themselves and others.

LEARNING ABOUT CONSENT

- Better communication and respect lead to better relationships with friends, peers, family and romantic partners.
- Consent is about knowing and respecting your own boundaries and those of others. In any kind of relationship, recognizing what you and others are comfortable with can help keep relationships healthy and safe.
- Consent is about having the skills to avoid or leave a situation that feels uncomfortable and respecting when others want to do the same.
- Understanding and communicating about sexual consent is integral to healthy romantic relationships and sexual health.

WHAT DOES SEXUAL CONSENT MEAN?

- Sexual consent is about a person’s right to be able to choose “yes” or to choose “no.”
- Sexual consent involves clear and intentional agreement to participate in sexual activity, communicated either verbally or non-verbally between individuals. A person who is unconscious, not capable (i.e., intoxicated), or has been coerced or forced cannot give consent.
- Each person has the responsibility to freely give and get consent before participating in sexual activities.
- Asking for and giving consent is an ongoing process. Each person has the right to change their mind (e.g., say “no”) at any time.
- Sexual consent is recognizing that we each control our own body, sexuality and experiences.
- Sexual consent is something that people need to discuss, no matter how long they have been in a relationship or how much sexual experience they have had.

WHAT DO STUDENTS LEARN AT SCHOOL ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSENT?

Students learn basic skills about respecting their own and others’ boundaries as they collaborate with peers, problem solve and reflect on their experiences – things they do in all subjects throughout their studies – for example in the arts, mathematics, language/English, social studies, and social sciences and humanities. They can apply these skills as they learn about consent and learn to make healthy decisions about their relationships.

Consent is about communication and respect. Communication leads to better relationships with friends, peers, family and romantic partners.

Sexual assault is any sexual encounter that lacks freely given consent. Sexual assault most commonly happens with people who know each other.

What do younger students learn?

The curriculum helps students of all ages develop their ability to communicate with others about ideas, feelings, intentions and boundaries and to act respectfully in all types of relationships. The foundation for learning about consent starts to be established at a young age. Younger children learn, in ways appropriate to their age and stage of development, that people in all relationships have a responsibility to respect and get along with each other.

Younger students in grades 1, 2 and 3 learn about consent by:

- Listening and stopping if someone asks them to stop saying or doing something
- Sharing space in the classroom
- Showing respect for others through their words and actions
- Taking turns with equipment in physical education and in the classroom
- Asking someone to stop if the other person is talking or acting in a way that is bothering them.

Younger students learn about:

- Standing up for themselves
- Listening actively – paying attention not only to words but also to facial expressions, tone of voice and body language
- Behaving in ways that do not cause harm to others or themselves
- Showing respect for others.

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT CONSENT

Parents and schools can work together to help kids develop healthy relationships and understand consent. Consider these ideas:

With younger children:

- Encourage your children to listen and watch for “cues” about other people’s boundaries (e.g., when people stand a few steps apart to protect their personal space).
- Reinforce their understanding that their body is their own and that they have a right and a responsibility to make decisions about it and to take care of themselves.
- Help them practise what they could say and do if they were in a situation that made them uncomfortable.
- Encourage your children to listen to their feelings and to speak up if something does not feel right, and talk to them about how they can get help.

MORE INFORMATION

- » Sex and the Law from www.sexualityandu.ca
- » Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/page-535967
- » Alberta-based Research Group on encouraging education about consent and ending sexual violence www.consented.ca

What do older students learn?

Older students in grades 4 and beyond continue to learn, in ways appropriate to their age and stage of development, that consent is a shared responsibility. They:

- Continue to develop skills to:
 - Show respect, listen, respond to other people’s needs
 - Communicate, be assertive, say “no”
- Learn specifically about what respect, healthy relationships and sexual consent “look like”
- Learn about the legal, social and emotional consequences of not paying attention to consent
- Learn how to report issues and how to get help from a caring adult or through community resources (e.g., police, doctors, public health units, friendship centres).

Using case studies, scenarios and discussions, teachers help students learn that:

- Both people in a relationship need to be actively involved in giving consent in an ongoing way
- Consent to one sexual activity does not mean consent to all activities
- Only “yes” means “yes”
- Consent cannot be assumed.

With older children and youth:

- Have conversations with them about their boundaries, questions and values with respect to sexuality.
- Encourage them to consider different situations where they may need to be clear about their own boundaries.
- Talk about consent, pressure, coercion, manipulation, harassment, and sexual assault. Let your children know that they have a voice and that you will listen.
- Discuss the legal, social and emotional consequences of non-consensual sex.