

# Sexual consent



## Fast Facts

- Giving consent is when you agree to take part in any sexual activity.
- Consent is an ongoing process - you might agree to sex earlier on and then change your mind - everyone has the right to do this.
- Giving and getting consent may feel a bit awkward but ultimately sex is about communication and should be a positive and pleasurable experience.
- The legal age to have sex in your country may be different depending on your gender and/or your sexuality.
- Any sexual contact without consent is wrong and illegal whatever the age of the people involved.

## What is sexual consent?

Sexual consent means agreeing to take part in any kind of sexual activity. Having sex can and should be a positive and pleasurable experience when it's based on mutual respect and both partners have agreed to it.

Sexual consent applies every time you have sex, and to any type of sexual activity at any stage - not just penetrative vaginal or anal sex.

Talking about what you do or don't want to do means you'll both be able to share what you feel comfortable with and want from sex, which will make the whole experience more enjoyable.

## How does consent work 'in the moment'?

Whether you're getting closer and about to start having sex or you're already 'in the moment', consent is all about communication.

Consent can look like:

- Asking your partner by saying, "Is this okay?" and getting a clear and positive response.
- Clearly agreeing to certain activities, either by saying "yes" or something else positive like, "I'd like to try that."
- Using physical cues like letting out a sigh, reciprocating with a similar touch, looking your partner in the eye and smiling to let them know you're comfortable taking things to the next level.

You may feel nervous when talking about consent with your partner, or worry that it will 'kill the mood', but it doesn't have to be awkward. The more you practise, the easier it will get.

## Saying "yes" now doesn't mean "yes" in the future

You still need consent every time you are intimate with someone. Giving consent once doesn't mean giving consent for all future activities. For example, having sex with someone in the past doesn't mean you want to again.

Likewise, giving consent for one type of sexual activity doesn't mean giving consent for going further. Agreeing to kiss someone doesn't mean you've said "yes" to them taking your clothes off, for example.

Even with a regular partner, it's important to keep communicating every time you have sex instead of assuming they've agreed because they have in the past.

### You can change your mind!

Remember, you can say "no" (withdraw your consent) at any stage – you don't have to have a reason. Your partner should respect your decision and stop straight away.

### What if you're in a relationship or married?

Being in a [relationship](#) with or being married to someone does not give them the right to do what they want to you – or you to them. You must both consent, each time and to each type of activity.

## What if there is no consent?

Sexual contact without consent is wrong and illegal. If you don't give your consent and someone still forces you into having sex, it's never your fault and it's not okay. You should speak to someone you trust if this has happened so that you can get help and support.

Both partners should always give clear consent before taking part in any sexual activity. Be careful not to make any assumptions about what is okay for your partner or what they'll enjoy.

Giving consent is NOT:

- Ignoring when someone says “no” and carrying on.
- Assuming that wearing certain clothes, flirting, or kissing is an invitation for more.
- Someone being under the legal age of consent.
- Someone not being able to make a choice because of drugs or alcohol.
- Pressuring someone to have sex by intimidating them.
- Assuming you have consent because someone has given it in the past.

What if someone doesn't actually say the word “no”?

They may say it in other ways, like “not right now”, “I'm not sure”, or they might stay silent. Their body language might also signal “no” – for example, by turning away, by curling up, or by not responding positively to touching.

What if you think or can feel that your partner is turned on?

Sometimes our bodies will be turned on but we don't want to be touched. Even if a penis is erect or the vagina is wet – it's not an automatic invitation. Our minds may want the opposite of what our bodies are doing which can be confusing. If you're at all unsure, it's important to check that your partner is comfortable with what you're doing.

## What does 'age of consent' mean?

'Age of consent' is the legal age to have sex. This will depend on what country you live in as laws are different around the world. The age of consent may be different depending on your gender, and in some countries sex between people of the same gender is illegal. Avert does not agree with any laws that criminalise homosexuality, but you can find out the [situation in your country](#).

### Consensual underage sex – is it okay?

If you have sex with someone when either or both of you are under the age of consent (underage) then you're breaking the law – even if you're both consenting. This may seem unfair, but the [law is there to protect you](#). You can find out more about the age of consent laws in your country on your government's website.

### Sex between an underage person and an adult

If an adult has sex with someone under the age of consent, they're breaking the law. They could be charged with:

- Statutory rape which means having sex with a person who's under the age of consent.<sup>1</sup>
- Child sexual abuse which means that an adult has used their age and/or authority over a child (before puberty) to have sexual contact.

## What can you do before you are ready for sex?

Getting clued up about sex or starting to explore your sexual feelings can help you to feel ready before you have sex with someone else. You can find out a lot about sex by exploring your own body and what feels good to you.

Knowing your body and what you like will help you to feel more confident when it comes to consent, and talking to a partner about what you do or don't like.

It's also important to learn how to protect yourself from [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) including [HIV](#) and unwanted pregnancy, so you feel in control when the time is right to have sex.

## HELP US HELP OTHERS

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### [1. Find Law \(2021\) 'Statutory Rape'](#)

Last full review:

29 June 2021

Next full review:

29 June 2024



#### Sources:

[Planned Parenthood \(2021\) 'Sexual Consent'](#)

[Brook \(2021\) 'How to give and get consent'](#)

[UNICEF \(2021\) 'Convention on the Rights of the Child'](#)

✓ RAINN (2021) 'What is consent?'