



**Developmental
Disabilities
Planning Council**

Easy Read Edition

A Self-Advocate's Guide to Safer Sex

Part 8: What is consent?

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Consent is about saying yes to something.



Consent can happen in a lot of cases.



For example, if you were to get surgery, you might have to sign a form saying that you want to have the surgery.



When you sign that form, you are giving consent to have the surgery.

Consent is really important when you have sex with someone. You need to make sure of two things:



- That the person is able to give consent



- That the person does give consent freely



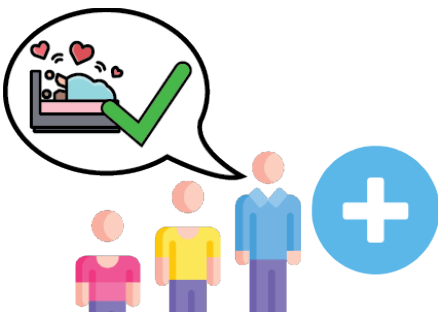
These things are both really important to give consent. We will go over each of them separately.

Ability to give consent



Before you ask someone if they want to have sex, you need to make sure they can consent to sex.

In order to be able to consent, the person needs to be:



1. Older than the age of consent.



The **age of consent** is the youngest a person can be and still consent to sex.



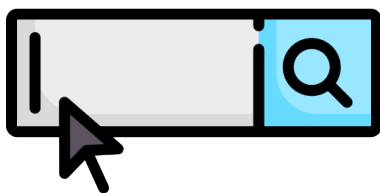
People who are younger than the age of consent cannot consent to sex.



In some states, the age of consent is 16 years old.

In some states, the age of consent is 17 years old.

In some states, the age of consent is 18 years old.



People who have young sexual partners need to know the age of consent where they live, where their partners live, and where they want to have sex.



If someone has sex with a person who is younger than the age of consent in any of these places, there can be serious legal problems.



2. Awake and alert.



People who are asleep or drowsy cannot consent to sex.



3. Sober (not drunk or high).



People who are drunk or high from using drugs cannot consent to sex.



4. Able to communicate what they want and do not want to happen during sex.



People who cannot communicate what they want during sex cannot consent to sex.



This does not mean a person who cannot speak is always unable to consent to sex.



That person could consent by nodding their head, pointing to what they want, or by using an AAC system.



But in order to consent, a person needs to be able to communicate what they do and do not want.



If the person meets all four of these points, they may be able to consent to sex.

Power and consent



Sometimes, a person might meet all four of these points.



But they still might not be able to consent because of a power imbalance.



A **power imbalance** is when one person has a lot more power than the other.



When one person has a lot more power than the other person, the person without much power might feel like they must say yes to the person who has a lot of power.



They might feel like if they do not say yes, they will get in trouble.

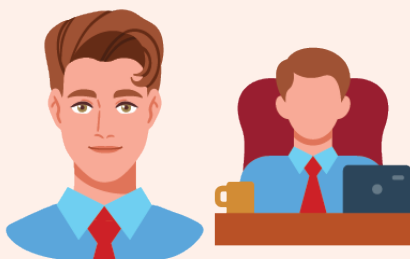


In these cases, the power imbalance means that the person without as much power cannot freely say no.

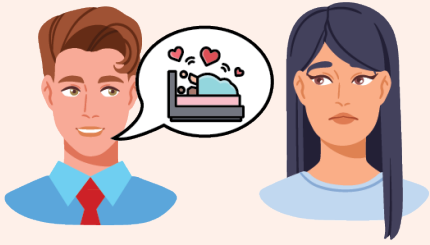
For example:



Jessica works in an office.



Lukas is her boss.



Lukas asks Jessica if she will have sex with him.



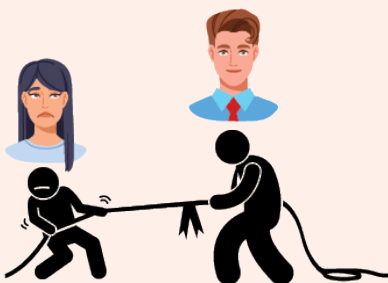
Jessica does not want to have sex with Lukas.



But Jessica feels like if she says no, Lukas will make her lose her job.



In this situation, Jessica cannot freely say no to sex with Lukas.



Lukas has too much power over Jessica.

Here is another example:



Manuel has a disability.



He goes to physical therapy.



Manuel's physical therapist, Laura, asks if Manuel will go on a date with her.



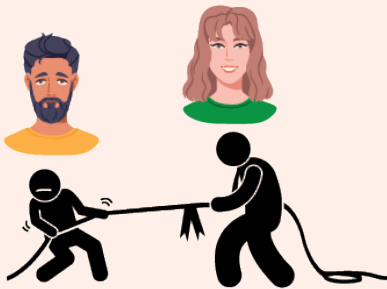
Manuel does not want to go on a date with Laura.



But Manuel feels like if he says no to Laura, he will not be able to come back to physical therapy.



In this situation, Manuel cannot freely say no to going on a date with Laura.

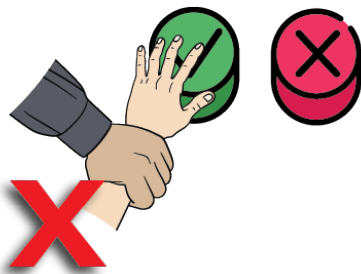


Laura has too much power over Manuel.

Giving consent freely



People have the right to choose whether they have sex. They have to be able to choose for themselves whether they say yes or no.



No one should try to make another person say yes to sex.



No one should try to stop consenting adults who want to have sex.



The legal definition of consent will be different from state-to-state.



It is important for people to know what the legal definition of consent is in their state.



But consent should not just be about what is legal to do.



Consent should also be about what is moral and right to do.



Consent should be about respecting yourself and your partner or partners.



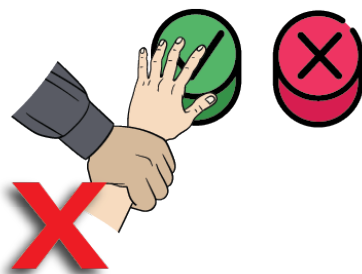
One way to make sure you are respecting your partner or partners is to follow the FRIES acronym.

FRIES stands for:

Freely given



When you give consent, you choose for yourself whether you want to consent.

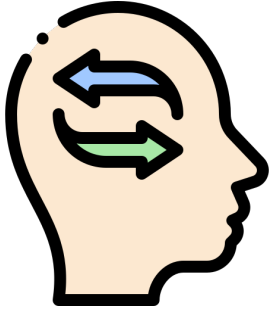


Nobody else should choose for you.



Nobody else should pressure you into making a choice.

Reversible



You can always change your mind about consent.

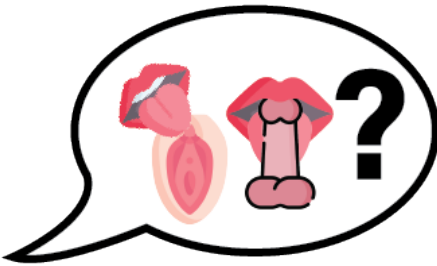


If someone has already said yes, they can always say no and stop whatever they are doing.

Informed



You have to know what you are consenting to.



For example, if your partner wants to have oral sex, they should ask you if you want to do oral sex.



Informed also means knowing the risks of having sex and how to make those risks smaller.



For example, if pregnancy is a risk of having sex and you do not want to get pregnant, you could use condoms or birth control to make the risk smaller.

Enthusiastic



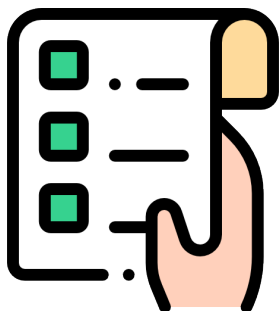
You should only consent to things you really want to do.



If you do not want to do something or are not sure you want to do it, you do not have to consent.



Someone not saying "no" with mouth words does not mean they say "yes."



People can say or mean "no" in a lot of different ways.

Some ways a person could say or show that they do not consent are:



- Saying “no” or “I do not want to” with their mouth or with AAC.



- Signing or gesturing “no,” like shaking their head.



- Freezing up or going quiet if they had been talking before



- Saying or signing “I am uncomfortable.”



Only “yes” means “yes” when it comes to consent.

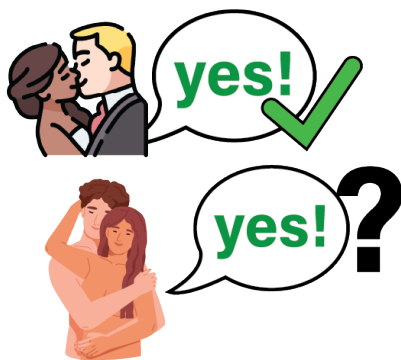
Specific



You should give (and get) consent for each specific sexual act that you do.



For example, your partner might give consent to kiss you.



But if you want to move on to touching each other naked, you need to ask for consent again.



The FRIES model of consent was adapted from [Planned Parenthood](#).



Consent is not only asking yes or no questions.



Consent is making sure you know your partner's needs and they know yours.



For example, while you are touching your partner's genitals, you might ask them if they want you to go faster or slower.



Think of consent as a conversation between the people having sex.



A conversation does not have to just be yes or no questions.



A conversation can also have other kinds of questions and other details.



You can also use nonverbal signals to tell your partners your needs.



For example, before you start having sex you might agree that squeezing each other's hand is a signal to stop and check in with each other.

To make sure a person consents, you need to make sure of two things:



- That the person said “yes”

F ☒
R ☒
I ☒
E ☒
S ☒

- That the person’s “yes” followed all the parts of the FRIES acronym. The person’s “yes” must be freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific.

Things you should never do to get consent



There are some things you should never do to get consent from someone.



The next examples in this section can be really hard to read.



They can especially be hard to read if you have been sexually assaulted (forced to have sex without consent) in the past.



We are including these examples because we want people to know what they should never do to get consent.



But you do not have to read these examples if you do not want to.



You can always skip the examples.



You can always take a break and come back to this section.

You should never lie to someone to get their consent

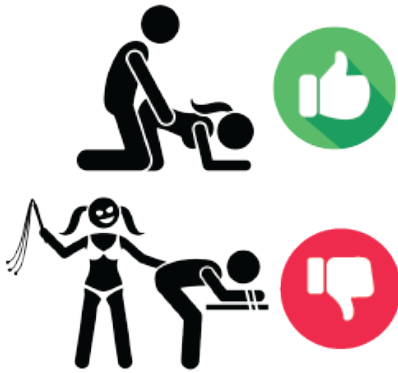


You need to tell the truth about what kinds of sex you want to have with the other person or people.

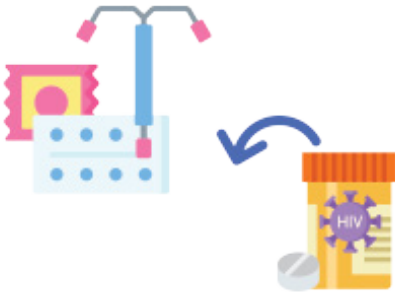


You need to make sure the other person or people know what kinds of sex they are agreeing to have.

You and your sexual partner or partners need to tell the truth about things like:



- What kinds of sex you want to have



- What kinds of things you will do to have safer sex, like whether you are on birth control or PrEP.
Or, whether you will wear a condom during sex.

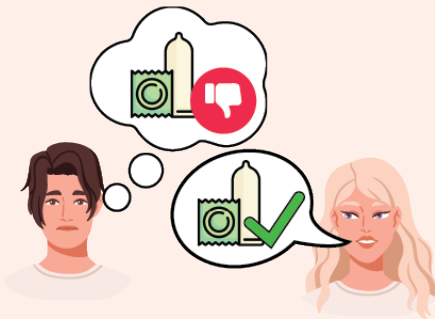


- Whether you have any STIs that you could give to your partner or partners through sex.

For example:



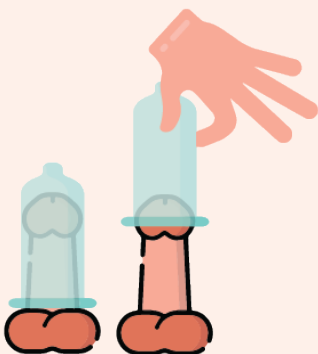
James wants to have sex with his girlfriend, Matilda.



James does not like wearing condoms while they have sex, but Matilda wants him to.



So James lies and says he will wear a condom.



Then, while they are having sex, he takes the condom off.



This is not okay!



James lied to get Matilda's consent.



Matilda thought she was consenting to having sex with James wearing a condom.

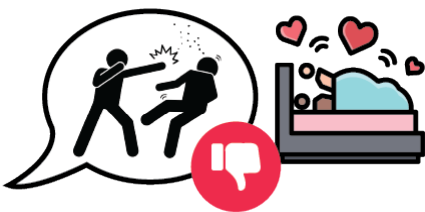
You should never threaten someone to get them to have sex with you



Threatening someone means telling them you will hurt them if they do not do something.

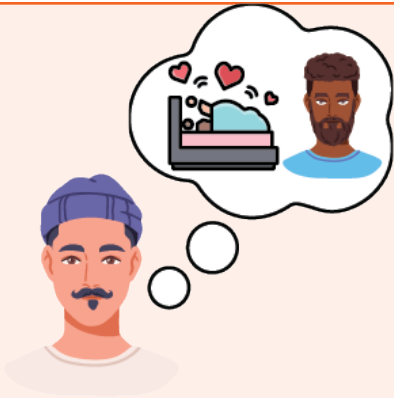


It is not okay to threaten people ever.



But it is especially not okay to threaten someone to get them to have sex with you.

For example:



Larry wants to have sex with his boyfriend, Sal.



But Sal does not want to have sex.



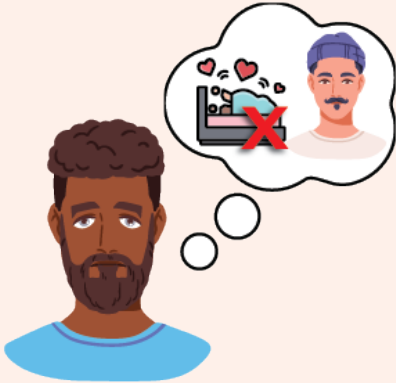
So Larry says, "If you do not have sex with me, I will hit you."



Sal has sex with Larry even though he does not want to because Sal is afraid of being hit.



This is not okay! Larry threatened Sal into having sex.



Sal did not want to have sex with Larry.

You should never pressure someone into having sex



Pressuring someone means annoying or bothering them until they do what you want.



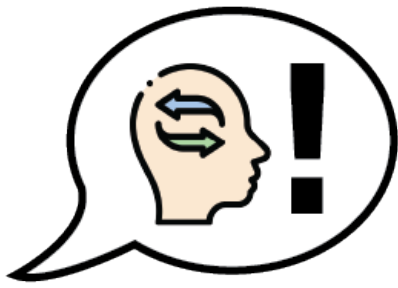
Sometimes, people will pressure their partners to say "yes" to sex after the partner has said "no."



This is not okay.



If someone says no to sex, you need to respect that.



You should not try to get them to change their mind.

For example:



Lucia wants to have sex with her girlfriend, Isabel.



But Isabel does not want to have sex with Lucia.



So Lucia tries to pressure Isabel into having sex by saying "Come on, please, just this once, it will be okay."



Isabel gets tired of hearing Lucia pressure her, so she agrees to have sex with Lucia.



This is not okay!



Lucia was pressuring and bothering Isabel until she said yes to having sex.



Even though Isabel said yes to having sex, it was not really consent.

You should never insult or call someone names to get them to have sex with you



Insulting someone means making mean comments about who they are.



You should not insult people in general.



Insulting people is mean and rude.



But it is especially not okay to insult someone to get them to have sex with you.

For example:



Kai wants to have sex with their partner, Taylor.



But Taylor does not want to have sex with Kai.



So Kai makes fun of Taylor by calling Taylor a “big baby who needs to grow up.”



Taylor gets tired of Kai calling them names, so they agree to have sex with Kai.



This is not okay!



Kai was insulting Taylor and calling them names until they said yes to having sex.



Even though Taylor said yes to having sex, it was not really consent.

You should never bribe someone into having sex with you.



Bribing someone means offering them a reward to get them to do something they do not want to do.



Bribing someone is generally a bad thing.

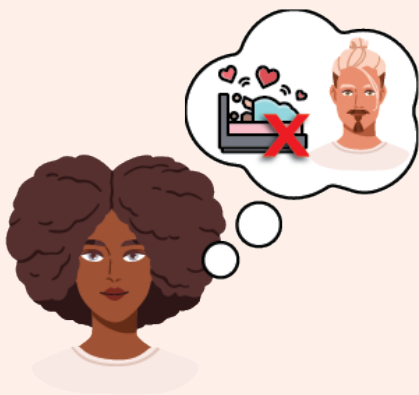


But bribing someone to have sex with you is always a bad thing.

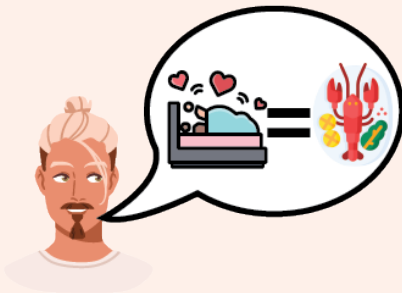
For example:



Noah wants to have sex with his girlfriend, Pricilla.



But Pricilla does not want to have sex with Noah.



So Noah says "if you have sex with me, I will buy you a nice dinner tonight."



Pricilla agrees to have sex with Noah because she wants the dinner, even though she does not really want to have sex.



This is not okay!



Noah bribed Pricilla into having sex by offering her dinner.



Even though Pricilla said yes to having sex, it was not really consent.

You should never force someone to have sex with you



You should never use physical force to make someone have sex with you.

Physical force can be things like:



- Pushing someone down



- Holding someone down



- Hitting or kicking someone if they try to get away from you

For example:



Norman wants to have sex with his partner, Sarah.



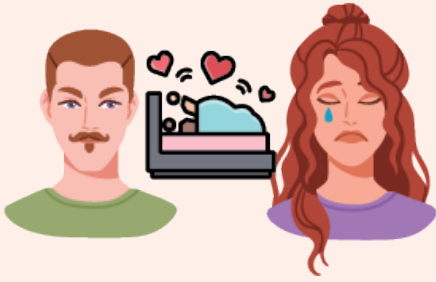
But Sarah does not want to have sex with Norman.



So Norman pushes Sarah down on the bed.



He takes her clothes off.



Then he has sex with her.



This is not okay!



Sarah did not consent to having sex with Norman.



Norman forced Sarah to have sex with him.



If you do any of these things to get someone to have sex with you, it is not consent.



Sex without consent is called sexual assault.