

# CONSENT & SEX

F A C T S H E E T

Going out with someone or being in a relationship can make you feel many different things - happiness, nervousness, excitement, and love. Sometimes it can also be confusing, especially when it comes to intimacy and sex. Intimacy is when two people become physically, sexually and/or emotionally close.

It can be hard to know if the person you're with wants to be more intimate with you or not. Sometimes it's hard to ask or find out how the other person is feeling. It's important that the person you're with gives their consent to the level of intimacy you have with them.

## What does consent mean in intimate relationships?

Consent is when one person agrees to or gives permission to another person to do something. It means agreeing to an action based on your knowledge of what that action involves, its likely consequences and having the option of saying no. When it comes to sex in your relationship consent is really important. It's important to remember that both of you have a responsibility to make sure that you both feel safe and comfortable every step along the way. Remember, your actions towards the person you're with can greatly affect the way they feel about you, themselves, the relationship and sex in general.

## Why is it important to make sure that the person you're with has given consent?

It's important that you are sure that the person you're with is happy and comfortable because non-consensual sexual activity (anything from touching and kissing to penetration) is against the law. The punishments for sexual assault are severe. Not only is it a crime but also the emotional consequences of rape and sexual assault can last a lifetime.

See the fact sheets about sexual assault at <http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=1510>

There are many legal issues around sex and consent. The laws in some states may differ. To find out more about the laws in your state visit [www.lawstuff.org.au](http://www.lawstuff.org.au)

## How do you know if the person you're with has given their consent? Things you can ask to find out.

The only way to know for sure if someone has given consent is if they tell you. It's not always easy to let people know that you are not happy about something. Sometimes the person you're with might look like they're happy doing something but on the inside they're not. They might not know what to say or how to tell you that they are uncomfortable. One of the best ways to determine if someone is uncomfortable with any situation, especially with a sexual one, is to simply ask. Here are some examples of the questions you might ask:

- Is there anything that you don't want to do?
- Are you happy with this?
- Are you comfortable?
- Do you want to stop?
- Do you want to go further?

## Recognising non-verbal communication

There are many ways of communicating. The look on someone's face and their body language is also a way of communicating and often has more meaning than the words that come out of their mouth. Here are some ways body language can let you know if the person you're with is not comfortable with what is happening:

- Pushing you away
- Holding their arms tightly around their bodies
- Turning away from you or hiding their face
- Stiffening muscles
- Not responding to your touch

For more information on body language see the fact sheet at <http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=333>

Asking questions and being aware of body language helps you to figure out if the person you're with is consenting and feeling comfortable or not consenting and feeling uncomfortable. If you get a negative or non-committal answer to any of these questions or if your partner's body language is like any of the above examples then you should stop what you are doing and talk to them about it.

## Kissing doesn't always need to lead to sex

There are different types of intimacy, like holding hands, writing love notes, kissing, hugging, massage and actually having sex. Different people will be willing to go to different types and try different things. You might enjoy kissing, but not feel ready to have sex. Or you might have had sex before and not feel like it every time you kiss. Kissing and getting intimate does not need to lead to sex. That's why it's important to communicate how you are feeling. Every time you engage in intimate or sexual activity it is really important that you and the person you're with is comfortable with what's happening.

Everyone has the right to say 'no' and everyone has the right to change their mind at any time regardless of their past experiences with other people or the person they are with.

## Slowing things down

Taking your time, making sure you are both comfortable and talking about how far you want to go will make the time you spend together a lot more satisfying and enjoyable for both of you.

PTO

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FAMILY PLANNING NSW

328-336 Liverpool Road Ashfield NSW 2131

Ph 02 8752 4300 • Fax 02 8752 4392

[www.fpnsw.org.au](http://www.fpnsw.org.au)

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Sometimes things move very quickly. Below are some things you can say to slow things down if you feel that things are going too quickly.

- I don't want to go any further than kissing, hugging, touching
- Can we stay like this for while?
- Can we slow down?

This may also be a good opportunity to bring up contraception and safe sex with the person you are with. See the fact sheets on safe sex and relationships at <http://www.reachout.com.au/index.asp?mci=3&mwi=2&tii=19>

## Stopping

You always have the right to say 'no' and you always have the right to change your mind at any time regardless of your past experiences with other people or the person you are with. Below are some things you can say or do if you want to stop:

- No
- Say 'I want to stop'
- Say 'I need to go to the toilet'
- In a situation where the other person isn't listening to you and you feel unsafe, you could pretend you are going to vomit (it's amazing how quickly someone moves away from you if they think you are going to be sick)

## What if the person you're with is too out of it to give consent?

Drugs and alcohol can affect a person's ability to make decisions, including whether or not they want to be sexual with someone else. This means that if someone is really out of it they cannot give consent. Being with them in a sexual way when they don't know what's going on is the same as rape.

If you see a friend who is out of it and is being intimate with someone then you should pull them aside and try your best to make sure that the person is safe and knows what they are doing. If it's the opposite situation and your friend is the one who is with

the out of it person then you should try to pull them aside and stop them from getting themselves into trouble. For more information on drugs and alcohol see the fact sheets at <http://www.reachout.com.au/index.asp?mci=3&mwi=2&tii=28>.

## You decide

Your experiences are what shape you and your actions can have either positive or negative consequences on your life and the lives of others. The keys to having good relationships are trust, good communication, understanding and honesty. Finding out more about relationships and friendships is an excellent way to make sure that you have good ones. A good place to start to have a look is the fact sheet Thinking About First Time Sex <http://www.reachout.com.au/default.asp?ti=1412>. A lot of the stuff in that fact sheet is relevant throughout your relationship.

If you have any questions or you just need to talk then check out the links below. They are all confidential - that means you don't have to tell anyone who you are and they won't tell anyone that you have contacted them.

**Kids Help Line 1800 551 800**

**Lifeline 13 1114**

**Men and Boys support - Men's Line Australia**  
<http://www.menslineaus.org.au>

**Youth support - Make a noise project SWSAHS**  
<http://www.makeanoise.ypsp.org.au>

**Sexual assault support - NSW Rape Crisis Centre**  
<http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au/>

**Relationships Australia**  
<http://www.relationships.com.au/>

**For further information**  
**Contact the Healthline on 1300 658 886**  
**TTY (for deaf) 02 8752 4360**

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