

GUIDE TO TALKING ABOUT CONSENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DIFFERING ABILITIES

When someone gives consent, they're saying it is OK for something to happen or agreeing to do something. It can be agreed to by talking or by behavior, but it must be clear and ongoing. The key to consent is talking about your feelings. Talk with others about your boundaries, and respect the boundaries of others.

Ask first for consent before any type of physical contact including touching, kissing, and any form of sexual activity. Any kind of touching must be talked about and agreed to each time, even if your partner has said OK in the past. You should talk about changing the kinds of touching activity in a non-forceful way so that there is no pressure. Use your words or simple actions to make sure you have consent. The following examples are just a few different opportunities that you could use to begin – or continue – talking about consent.



♥ OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONVERSATION ♥

Remember: Talking about what you wish to do is not just a one-time event. Use this guide to help you find different ways to talk about how you are feeling and express the kinds of relationships you would like to have.

♥ OPPORTUNITY #1 YOUR FRIEND NO LONGER WANTS TO VISIT

Your friend agreed to come over to your house to visit you today. But they changed their mind and no longer want to come over. You might say something like this in the moment:

- ♥ "I understand that you do not want to visit today. It's okay to change your mind even though we made plans."
- ♥ "I know we had plans to meet today, but it's okay if you don't want to. Just because I want to see you doesn't mean I can force you to see me. You can visit me when you want to."



OPPORTUNITY #2 A FRIEND IS TAKING YOUR BELONGINGS

You notice that your friend has been using your belongings without asking. You might address their actions by talking about consent:

- “You are my friend. We show respect and care for each other. So, when we want to use something that doesn’t belong to us, it is important to ask first.”
- “If I say no, it means no. It might make you sad or mad, and I understand that, but you cannot take or use things that are mine unless I say it is OK.”



OPPORTUNITY #3 YOUR FRIEND IS PLANNING A SURPRISE PARTY

You have been asked to keep the surprise a secret. The words we use to talk about surprises and secrets can be tricky. Secrets are not something to keep if you or someone you know are being hurt in any way. Here’s a way to help tell the difference between surprises and secrets:

- “Surprises are happy things that everyone will know about sooner or later. I don’t keep secrets because they can hurt other people.”



OPPORTUNITY #4 YOUR CRUSH DOES NOT WANT TO GO ON A DATE WITH YOU

You are feeling sad that your crush does not want to go on a date with you. No is always an OK answer, but we can also understand the sad or upset feelings that might come along with hearing “no.” It’s important to deal with these feelings in a positive way. Here is a way to understand why consent is important:

- “Allowing someone to say no is one way to show respect. You should never force someone to do something they do not want to do.”
- “If you are unsure if it’s okay to do something or how someone is feeling, ask first.”



OPPORTUNITY #5 SOMEONE IS ASKING YOUR FRIEND FOR A HUG GOODBYE

Your friend is avoiding giving this person a hug and is hiding behind you. Being quiet, or not saying no, is not giving permission. This is something you might want to talk about with others in your life so they understand how to respect your boundaries. You could say something like:

- To the person who wants a hug: “It looks like someone doesn’t feel like giving hugs today. Some days we like hugs and other days we don’t, and that’s okay. We never have to give hugs to anyone.”
- To your friend: We all show our respect and love in different ways. How would you like to say good-bye today?

Remember, it’s OK if you don’t have all the answers! Take some time, talk to other people, and ask for help. You can call the STTARS Program at 724-229-5007 or visit www.pcar.org