



## Neighbours, Friends & Families

Immigrant & Refugee Communities



# Understanding Enthusiastic and Ongoing Consent in a Healthy Romantic Relationship

**Statistics Canada reported that in 2019 around one in 10 female students (11%) were sexually assaulted while studying in colleges and universities. About one in five (19%) women were sexually assaulted by a person they were dating.**

In a healthy romantic relationship, consent is a fundamental aspect that ensures both partners are comfortable and willing participants in any form of intimacy or sexual activity.

Understanding the concept of enthusiastic, ongoing and coherent consent is essential to promote mutual respect, trust, and safety in relationships.



## What is Consent?

Consent during any form of intimacy or sexual activity means both partners agree to do something together, like hugging, kissing, or other activities.

It is important to know that consent should be given freely, without anyone feeling pressured or forced. Consent is about saying "yes" because you want to, not because you have to. It's a continuous process of communication and understanding. Consent can be withdrawn at any point if one or both partners feel uncomfortable.

## Enthusiastic Consent

Enthusiastic consent means that both partners openly express their desire to participate in an activity. It involves actively seeking and obtaining permission before engaging in any form of intimacy. Enthusiastic consent requires an affirmative and enthusiastic "yes." If someone seems unsure, stays silent, doesn't respond, or says "maybe," or "I'm tired", they aren't saying yes.

### Key Aspects of Enthusiastic Consent

1. **Active Communication:** Engage in open and honest communication with your partner to understand their desires and boundaries. Respect their choices, and be vocal about your own.
2. **No Assumptions:** Never assume that your partner is comfortable with an activity or that they will say "yes" just because they did before. Always seek consent for each new activity.
3. **Non-Verbal Cues:** Pay attention to non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions. If your partner seems uncomfortable or hesitant, stop and ask if everything is okay.
4. **Respecting Boundaries:** Respect your partner's boundaries, and be understanding if they do not wish to engage in a particular activity. Never pressure or guilt them into doing something they are uncomfortable with.

## Ongoing Consent

Ongoing consent means checking in with each other throughout your relationship and activities. Just because you agreed to do something once doesn't mean you have to do it again. It's important to keep talking and making sure you both still feel good about what you're doing.

### Establishing Ongoing Consent

1. **Keep Communicating:** Regularly talk about your feelings, boundaries, and what you both enjoy. Communication is the key to ongoing consent.
2. **Pay Attention:** Watch for any signs that your partner might not be comfortable. If you're not sure, ask them how they're feeling.
3. **Get Clear Confirmation:** Before and during any intimate activities, make sure you both give clear permission and show that you're happy to continue. **You can ask: Are you comfortable? | Is this okay? | Do you want to slow down? | Do you want to go any further?**
4. **Consent Can Change:** Understand that consent can change at any time, even during an activity. Agreeing once doesn't mean agreeing forever.

## Coherent Consent

Consent must be coherent. This means that the person giving consent must be aware of giving enthusiastic and ongoing consent to have sex. Consent cannot be given if someone is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Intoxication impairs judgment and the ability to give enthusiastic and ongoing consent. Engaging in sexual activities with someone who is intoxicated is a crime.



### What is NOT consent?

Coming from societies where gender roles are strict, some international students may misunderstand women who smoke, drink, or dress in a certain way, assuming that these actions are an invitation or signal that they are open to sexual advances. Doing things like dressing in a certain way, flirting, or accepting a ride, gift, or drink does not mean someone has given their permission or agreement to have sex.

### SEEK SUPPORT FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

While all students may have concerns about reporting sexual violence on campus, international students may have extra concerns. Language barriers, shame, stigma, and cultural concerns make reporting and accessing services more challenging. Some students may also fear that reporting a crime could affect their future immigration plans or even result in them being deported.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence, please seek help and support from organizations that specialize in assisting individuals who have been through this trauma.

### YOU MIGHT CONSIDER WHAT HELP OR RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE IN YOUR COLLEGE OR YOU CAN CALL:

- Good2Talk at 1-866-925-5454 or Text GOOD2TALKON to 686868. The helpline provides free, confidential support services for post-secondary students in Ontario.
- Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1-877-949-6051 or 1.833.286.9865 (TTY) for support available 24/7 in over 200 languages.
- FEM'AIDE at 1-877-336-2433 or 1-866-860-7082 (ATS) for services in French.

For more information, visit:  
[www.immigrantandrefugeenff.ca](http://www.immigrantandrefugeenff.ca)

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