



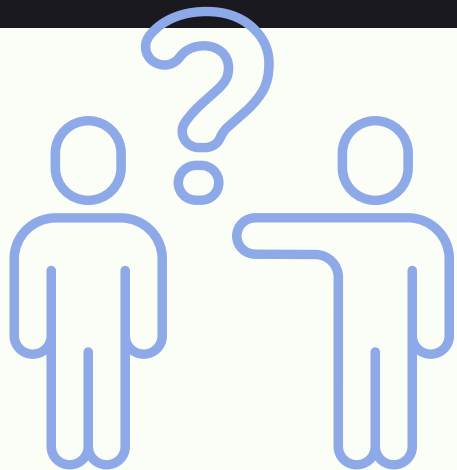
**Step 2: Talking consent with young people**

# **It's time to talk consent**



**Australian Government**

**Consent  
Can't Wait**



## Support is available

Talking about consent, or even reading through this guide, may be triggering for some people.

This includes those who have experienced, or are experiencing, sexual violence or other forms of trauma.

### Counselling and support services

1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732  
[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

Australian Sexual Assault  
Directory of Support Services  
[nasasv.org.au](http://nasasv.org.au)

MensLine – 1300 78 99 78  
[mensline.org.au](http://mensline.org.au)

13YARN – 13 92 76 | [13yarn.org.au](http://13yarn.org.au)

Lifeline – 13 11 14 | [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800  
[kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

Bravehearts – 1800 272 831  
[bravehearts.org.au](http://bravehearts.org.au)

If you are in immediate danger,  
please contact 000



## What is the best way to respond to someone who discloses their experiences with sexual violence or assault?

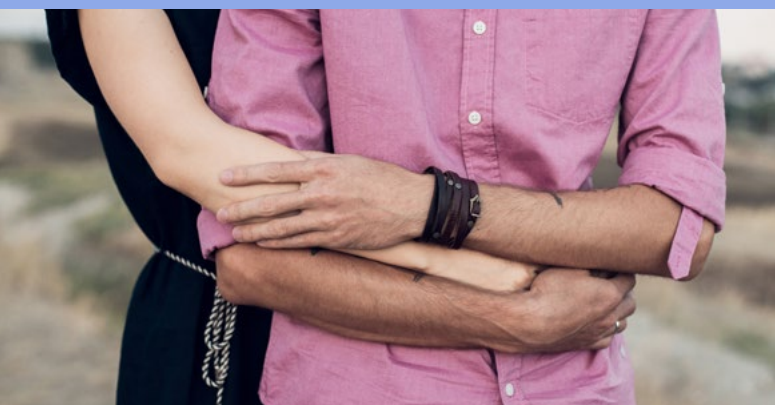
When a person who has experienced sexual violence or assault decides to disclose their experience, they usually confide in a person they trust. It could be a friend, family member, carer, colleague or educator. They will often be seeking guidance to help them decide the most appropriate course of action or what choices are available to them.

Providing a supportive and compassionate response is vital. It validates their experience, creates a safe and trusting environment and helps them to feel heard, understood and not alone. It can also have an impact on their decision to seek further help.

The most important things you can do are:

- Listen attentively, without interruption or judgement
- Demonstrate that you believe what they are telling you
- Let them know they have your support
- Provide relevant information that will help them to make their own informed choices about the next steps to take.

The timing of the person's disclosure will directly affect their immediate needs and the most suitable way to respond. For example, the person may need immediate protection if they are at risk of further violence or assault. There is a range of national, state and territory support services available that provide support, ensure safety and assist in the person's recovery from trauma.



# Before you get started, please make sure you have read *Step 1: Talking consent with other adults.*

Once you have engaged with other adults in your life – your partner, friends, other parents and carers, and older family members, it is time to talk consent with the young people in your life. Having open discussions will empower them with the knowledge they need to have healthy, respectful relationships and safe, fun sexual experiences.

Talking about consent is about much more than preventing violence. It is also setting our young people up for success. Research<sup>1</sup> tells us that education for children and teens about consent in an age-appropriate way is very good for them. It helps them to choose to have their first sexual experiences when they're ready. It also reduces the chances of bad sexual experiences or doing harm to others.

This guide provides information to support conversations about consent in your family so that everyone benefits.



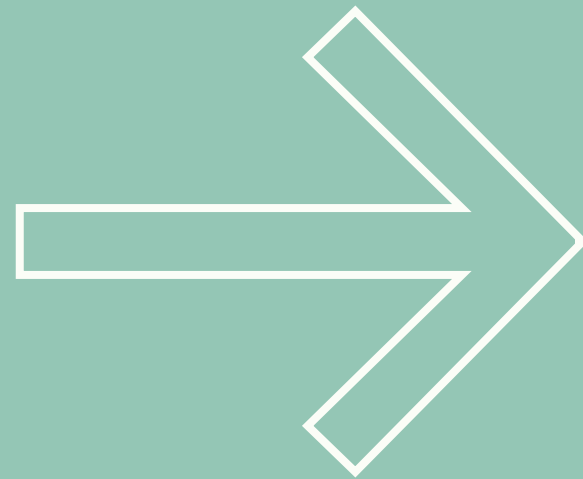
Today, young people have unprecedented access to sexual content online. The average age of first viewing pornography is 13 years old.<sup>2</sup>



Young men aged 15-19 have the highest offender rates of sexual violence.<sup>3</sup>



One in 5 women (22%) and one in 16 men (6.1%) have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.<sup>4</sup>



1. *Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education* – PubMed (nih.gov).
2. *The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021*
3. *ABS Recorded Crime Offenders 2-23*
4. *Personal Safety Survey, (2021-22) ABS*

## Benefits for primary school aged children

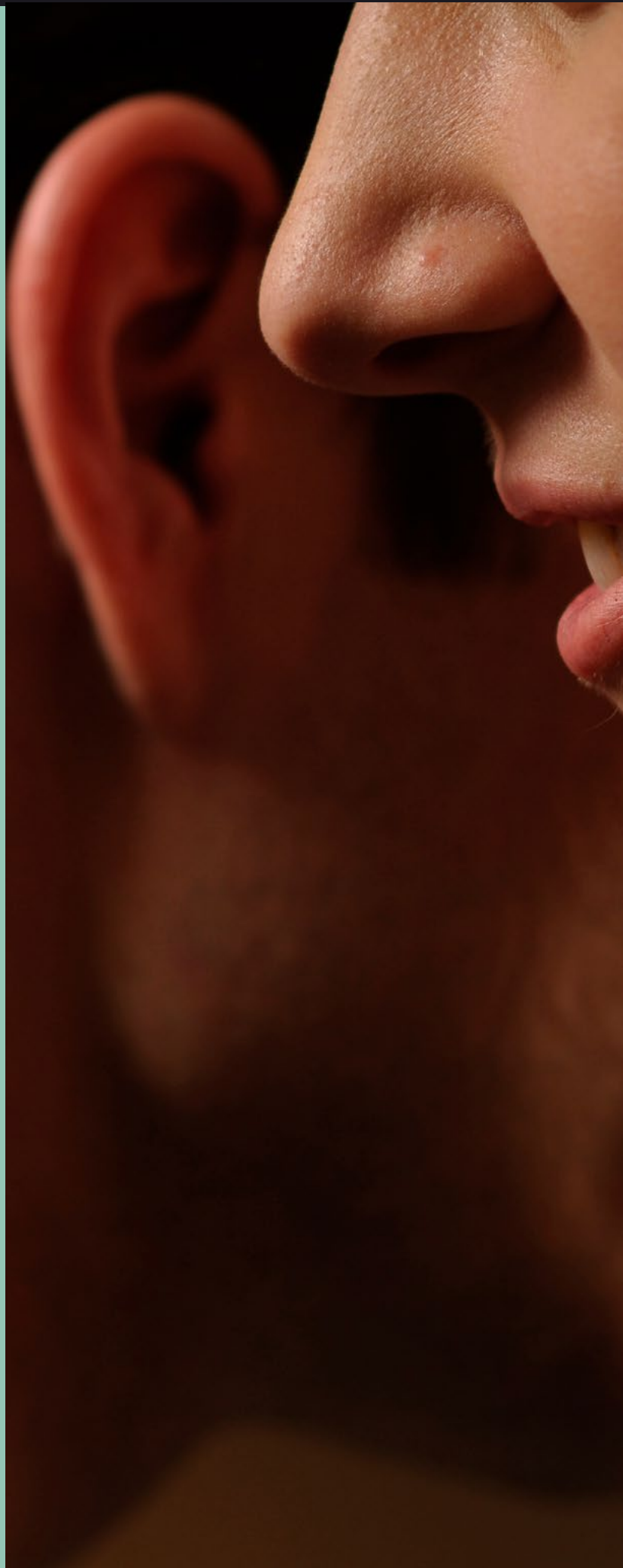
For children, conversations about body autonomy and safety have many benefits. These discussions can help children:

- Identify and communicate appropriate and inappropriate touch
- Learn to be more in tune with their body and emotions and how these are connected
- Learn how to get along with others
- Develop relationship skills
- Build self-confidence
- Set the scene for future learning about sexual health and consent into the teenage years and early adulthood.

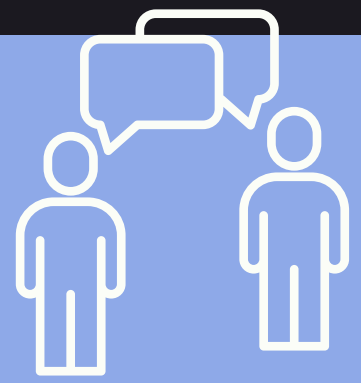
## Benefits of talking to teens

For adolescents, a comprehensive sexual education that involves respect, equality and personal rights can help to:

- Increase their knowledge and help them build healthy relationship skills
- Reduce dating and intimate partner violence
- Delay the first sexual experience until they're ready
- Support positive mental health, social interactions, positive attitudes and behaviours
- Provide them with skills and awareness before they encounter sexual content online



# Preparing for the conversation



**We know from research that open and direct conversations that are positive, rather than negative, are best when talking to young people about healthy sexual relationships and consent. This way, you will create a space where the young person feels comfortable and safe to talk to you about anything.**



## Some tips for having conversations with young people

- Plan for the conversation – what do you want to say? How do you want to say it?
- Check that the time is right – do you or they have to be anywhere? Is anyone tired or distracted?
- Ensure you have privacy – can you be overheard or interrupted?
- Some kids prefer not to be looking at you, so going for a drive, sitting side by side on the couch, or taking a walk may be appropriate. Some might feel more comfortable texting rather than having a face-to-face conversation.
- Approach without judgment and ask questions – the discussion will be more successful if you listen, show empathy, and relate to what they are saying.
- Ask your child questions – what do they already know about consent? How do they feel about it? What happens at school?
- Provide feedback – gently correct any misinformation and pose alternative views.
- Answer their questions as best you can and get back to them if you don't know something.
- Use books, movies and TV shows as examples. It can be easier for teens to talk about their favourite character than themselves. For example:
  - Do you think that person looked comfortable being touched? I liked the way he respected her decision when she said she changed her mind about having sex. Why is that important?
- Keep discussions short and frequent rather than one or two long sessions.



# Talking about consent at different ages

As we know, there are many differences in the thoughts, emotions, and social abilities of a 10-year old as opposed to a 16-year old, so it's a good idea to tailor conversations about consent in a way that suits the child's stage of life.



Bear in mind some children may be 'young' or 'more mature' for their age, too. Tackling consent early with children, before you relate the issue to sex, paves the way for ongoing conversations during the teenage years. As children get older, you can start talking more openly and directly about sexual consent.

## Primary school age

For children under the age of 12, adults can talk about how children's bodies belong to them, how to understand their feelings (happy, scared, excited, worried), when something 'feels right' or 'feels wrong' or 'feels confusing'. This helps teach children about their personal boundaries and how they might recognise what seems fine and what doesn't. It can also help children understand that their bodies belong to them and they have control over who touches them.

For example, you can teach children they have the right to say no to hugs or kisses from relatives or friends if they don't feel comfortable. By respecting their decisions regarding physical contact, you can set a good example and teach them the foundations of consent from an early age.

## Teenagers

Be aware that teenagers may not be comfortable speaking about their bodies, sex and consent at first. Build their trust by exploring ideas without jumping to suggestions and listen without judgement. Try and create an environment where they can be increasingly honest with their questions, beliefs and feelings. These discussions will get easier over time.

Conversations at this age start with understanding their feelings – including excitement, disappointment, crushes and romantic and sexual attraction. Helping adolescents recognise emotions leads to knowing what feels safe and what doesn't.



# Five things to remember when it comes to consent

There are 5 main ideas that help define sexual consent:



## 1. Free and voluntary

Consent is always a free choice. There is no consent if any person involved:

- experiences violence
- is forced or pressured to do something
- feels intimidated or threatened
- feels humiliated
- has something taken away
- is being spied on or tracked
- is being controlled.

Consent doesn't come with conditions. Consent is only present when all people genuinely, enthusiastically, and without hesitation, want to engage in the sexual activity.

**What this could sound like at each age:**

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For children aged 5-9</b>	<p>When you ask to touch someone, if they say, 'I'm not sure' or they don't say anything, it means they don't want you to. It's important to listen.</p> <p><b>That's okay, you don't have to hold my hand.</b></p> <p>Can you think of more ways someone could show that they don't want to be touched?</p>	<p>You are the boss of your body and you get to choose when you want to be touched. When grandma asks for a hug, you don't have to give her one. It's okay to say 'no'.</p> <p><b>How about a high-five today?</b></p> <p>When else are you the boss of your body?</p>
<b>For early teens 10-13</b>	<p>We don't all have the same body boundaries. For example, if you are taking photos with a friend and want to put them on Snapchat but they don't want to, it is important to respect that and not to make them feel like they're spoiling the fun.</p> <p><b>Do you want me to delete it?</b></p> <p>How can we have fun while respecting everyone's boundaries?</p>	<p>Some touch might make you feel good. Some touch might make you feel funny or bad. You get to decide what's okay.</p> <p><b>I don't want to be tickled any more.</b></p> <p>How else can you express that you want to stop?</p>

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For middle teens</b> <b>14-16</b>	<p>When asking for consent, it isn't as simple as someone saying 'yes.' It's important that they feel safe and aren't feeling pressured in any way. You can always check in with an open-ended question.</p> <p><b>How are you feeling?</b></p> <p>What other open-ended questions could you use?</p>	<p>You get to choose what you feel okay doing with your body. When everyone feels comfortable with the situation, it will be much more fun. For example it doesn't have to be a formal, 'Yes, I consent to this.' You can make it flirty or fun.</p> <p><b>I like that, let's keep going!</b></p> <p>What are some other ways people show consent?</p>
<b>For late teens</b> <b>17+</b>	<p>When a person doesn't say no or doesn't resist, it doesn't mean they consent. People can feel pressured not to speak up for many reasons. They may worry you'll stop liking them, feel guilty or be scared that something bad will happen if they don't say yes. It's always better to slow down and check in.</p> <p><b>That's completely fine if you want to stop.</b></p> <p>What else can you do to make sure no one is feeling pressured?</p>	<p>Consent is about the right to say yes or no to any sexual interaction. It is also about respecting other people's rights over the choices they make with their body. Begging someone, niggling at them, or asking over and over until they say yes is not consensual.</p> <p><b>No, I don't want to have sex.</b></p> <p>What does respect look like to you?</p>

*The scenarios for children come from Safe 4 Kids, 'Let's talk body boundaries' by Jayneen Sanders, Bravehearts and Body Safety Australia*



## 2. Clear and informed

Everyone feels genuinely sure or enthusiastic and knows what they're agreeing to. Consent is when everyone:

- wants to take part in the sexual activity
- understands what that sexual activity is.

Agreeing to one sexual activity, like kissing or touching, doesn't mean agreeing to other sexual activities. Everyone must also agree on how the activity will happen. Partners must check about the use of condoms and contraception.

### What this could sound like at each age:

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For children aged 5-9</b>	<p>Everyone is different. Some people don't like to be touched so it's always good to ask.</p> <p><b>Can I hold your hand?</b></p> <p>What are some of the ways you are different?</p>	<p>The parts of your body under your swimsuit are your private parts. Unless there is a health reason, and a safe adult is with you, nobody should touch your private parts.</p> <p><b>My private parts are private.</b></p> <p>Who are the safe adults in your life?</p>
<b>For early teens 10-13</b>	<p>If someone has kissed you before, it doesn't mean they are agreeing to a kiss every time. You have to ask.</p> <p><b>Is it okay if I kiss you?</b></p> <p>Why do you think the other person could change their mind?</p>	<p>If you thought you were just hanging out with friends but you get there and the situation isn't what you expected, it's okay to leave. For example if there are lots of people there you don't know, or no adults around, you don't have to go along with it.</p> <p><b>I'm not keen on staying here, I'm going home.</b></p> <p>How else can you leave an unexpected situation?</p>
<b>For middle teens 14-16</b>	<p>If you're kissing someone, check in before doing something else sexual with them. It doesn't have to be formal, it can be fun.</p> <p><b>Do you like this?</b></p> <p>How else could you make consent fun?</p>	<p>You may feel lots of things when you're about to do something sexual. You may feel excited, loving, happy or maybe a bit nervous, shy or curious. But if you're feeling worried, unsure or uncomfortable, it's okay to ask to stop.</p> <p><b>I need to take a break.</b></p> <p>What else could you do if you're not sure how you feel?</p>
<b>For late teens 17+</b>	<p>Even if you thought you were clear about the purpose of meeting up, it's important you're all on the same page. The best thing you can do is communicate.</p> <p><b>Do you want to take this further or stay here and keep kissing?</b></p> <p>How can you make sure you're both on the same page?</p>	<p>Saying yes to doing something sexual doesn't mean you're saying yes to everything. If you're doing something sexual and the other person tries to take it further or does something else without asking, you don't have to go along with it.</p> <p><b>I don't want to do that. How about we keep doing what we started to do.</b></p> <p>How else could you express how you are feeling?</p>

### 3. Active and communicated

Consent is all about communication. Sexual partners need to actively say or do something to check if their partner wants to take part in a sexual activity.

People can communicate consent by:

- speaking
- showing without words – e.g. enthusiastic body language like smiling, nodding or maintaining eye contact, active participation, pulling closer
- writing it down – e.g. in the case of online sexual activity

People must check if their sexual partner wants to take part in a sexual activity. Not saying 'no' doesn't mean that someone agrees; they must communicate that they agree. If there are any signs of hesitation or uncertainty, like freezing, it means the person does not consent.

Physical arousal also does not mean there is consent. There aren't different levels or degrees of consent. There is either consent or no consent.

#### What this could sound like at each age:

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For children aged 5-9</b>	<p>It's important that everyone is feeling happy and safe. If you're not sure, you can ask.</p> <p><b>Do you want to stop the game?</b></p> <p>Can you think of another way to see that everyone is okay?</p>	<p>There are lots of ways to say yes without talking. You can nod and smile, you can give a thumbs up or open your arms up for a hug. If it isn't clear you can use your words.</p> <p><b>Yes! You can hold my hand.</b></p> <p>How else can you say 'yes?'</p>
<b>For early teens 10-13</b>	<p>Sometimes people say 'yes' even though they want to say 'no'. To make sure they really do consent, look at their body language. Signs they want to stop include pausing, looking away, looking worried, bored or sometimes giggling. If you notice this or you're unsure you can always ask them.</p> <p><b>Do you want to do something else?</b></p> <p>What does a 'yes' look like?</p>	<p>You get to decide if you want your photo or video taken and/or shared.</p> <p><b>I don't want you to take a photo of me.</b></p> <p>What else can you do?</p>
<b>For middle teens 14-16</b>	<p>Consent needs to be agreed every time for any behaviour or interaction with someone.</p> <p><b>Is it okay if I kiss you?</b></p> <p>What else could a 'yes' look like?</p>	<p>Uninvited physical attention, in person or online, is not consensual.</p> <p><b>Can you please leave me alone. I'm not interested.</b></p> <p>Can you think of some ways to get support if you need it?</p>
<b>For late teens 17+</b>	<p>Consent is more than 'yes' or 'no'. While it is important to hear somebody's words, it is also important to read their body language. Genuine and enthusiastic body language could look like actively participating, seeming flirty or happy, being playful, nodding and looking into your eyes. If you're not sure, it's better to check in.</p> <p><b>Do you want to slow down?</b></p> <p>How can you be sure you're reading someone right?</p>	<p>You can use words and/or actions and body language to communicate consent. Actions need to be positive and show that you want to participate.</p> <p><b>This could look like leaning in closer, maintaining eye contact and nodding.</b></p> <p>What does positive body language mean to you? How can you know when you're sure?</p>

## 4. Ongoing and mutual

Consent is an ongoing and shared process. It's the responsibility of everyone involved to make sure there is consent at all times. You don't just communicate it once before starting the sexual activity, and anyone can withdraw consent at any time during the sexual activity.

If one person consents but another doesn't, there is no consent. All people must want to take part in the sexual activity.

### What this could sound like at each age:

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For children aged 5-9</b>	<p>Even if your friends said yes to the wrestling game, if someone says 'stop', you have to stop straight away.</p> <p><b>That's okay. We can stop.</b></p> <p>Can you think of a time you needed to stop a game?</p>	<p>Just because you said yes to being tickled, it doesn't mean you've said 'yes' to tickling forever. If you want to stop, you can ask to stop at any time.</p> <p><b>That's enough tickling, I don't want you to do it anymore.</b></p> <p>Has anyone kept going when you said stop? What did you do?</p>
<b>For early teens 10-13</b>	<p>Even if you ask for consent at the beginning, you still have to keep checking that the other person is comfortable.</p> <p><b>Is my arm around you okay?</b></p> <p>How else can you make sure its ongoing consent?</p>	<p>You can tell someone to stop touching you at any time.</p> <p><b>Please stop touching me.</b></p> <p>What else could you say?</p>
<b>For middle teens 14-16</b>	<p>Sometimes people change their mind. You may have been kissing and touching and then when you want to take it further, the other person hesitates. It's never okay to put pressure on someone or make them feel guilty.</p> <p><b>You don't have to do anything you don't want to do.</b></p> <p>Can you think of a time when you hesitated for something?</p>	<p>It's okay to change your mind at any time. Even if it was you who initiated it. Even if you felt okay up until now. Even if you didn't speak up at the beginning. Consent can always be withdrawn. You don't need a reason.</p> <p><b>I want to stop.</b></p> <p>Do you think you would feel comfortable to say it that way? How would you say it?</p>
<b>For late teens 17+</b>	<p>If you are really into a sexual experience but a partner changes their mind, it can feel like rejection. There are lots of reasons why someone might want to stop. It's okay to feel disappointed or a bit awkward but it isn't okay to make your partner feel bad or to pressure them. You can get some space or you can suggest to do something else.</p> <p><b>That's completely fine if you want to stop. How about we watch a show for a while?</b></p> <p>How could you take care of yourself and the other person?</p>	<p>Sometimes things can sound great in theory but they don't feel nice in practice. If you're no longer having fun, ask to stop or suggest trying something different.</p> <p><b>This isn't comfortable for me. Let's try something else.</b></p> <p>Why else might someone want to stop?</p>

## 5. Able and capable

Everyone involved in a sexual activity needs to be able to consent, or communicate that they don't. People can't consent if they are:

- under the age of consent (either 16 or 17) – this varies in different parts of Australia and there are exceptions for people consensually having sex who are close in age.

- drunk, high or heavily affected by drugs or alcohol
- unconscious—not awake and alert.

Sexual partners need to actively say or do something to check if their partner is capable and wants to take part in a sexual activity.

### What this could sound like at each age:

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For children aged 5-9</b>	<p>It isn't okay to take photos of someone when they are sleeping. If they aren't awake, they can't say 'yes'.</p> <p><b>This isn't being a good friend.</b></p> <p>How else can we look after our friends when they can't</p>	<p>You are the boss of your body. That goes for when you are awake and when you are asleep.</p> <p><b>My body is mine, even when I'm asleep.</b></p> <p>What things can you do if you don't feel safe?</p>
<b>For early teens 10-13</b>	<p>Sleepovers should be fun. It isn't respectful to touch, draw on or play tricks on someone when they are sleeping. Even if it seems like a joke, it can feel really bad for the person waking up if they've been touched without their permission.</p> <p><b>Nah, that's not funny. Let's leave them alone.</b></p> <p>If you're in a group, how could you look out for one another?</p>	<p>Sleepovers should be fun. If anyone touches you while you are sleeping, you can ask them to stop. You are always free to call a trusted adult to come and take you home.</p> <p><b>Please stop touching me.</b></p> <p>What is our plan for coming home if you ever need to?</p>
<b>For middle teens 14-16</b>	<p>If someone is too drunk or high they may be acting differently to their normal selves. They may be much more outgoing or relaxed. They may be slurring their words, falling over, or taking more risks. Or they may be sleepy or even unconscious. These are all signs they can't consent to any sexual touch or act. If they are very sick or unconscious it could be an emergency. It's best to check their breathing, move them into the recovery position and depending on how sick they seem, call a trusted adult or an ambulance.</p> <p><b>This isn't a safe situation so I'm going to call someone.</b></p> <p>How can you make sure someone isn't too drunk to consent?</p>	<p>When you're a teen, age differences matter. When you're under the age of consent, it's not legal to do something sexual with someone if they're a lot older than you, even if you feel mature for your age.</p> <p><b>I don't want to do this. It isn't legal.</b></p> <p>Why do you think there is a legal age of consent?</p>

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<p><b>For late teens 17+</b></p>	<p>If someone really likes you and they are enthusiastically showing you that they want to kiss and hook up but they are really drunk or high, it's not consent. Alcohol and drugs can affect your ability to make good choices. You can ask again another time when everyone is free to consent.</p> <p><b>I don't want to right now. How about we do this when we haven't been drinking so much?</b></p> <p>What can you say if the drunk person is insistent?</p>	<p>If you are doing something sexual with someone and having a good time, but you realise you're beginning to feel too drunk, you can ask to stop. You're always allowed to stop, even if up until now you were saying 'yes.'</p> <p><b>I'm feeling too drunk now. I want to stop.</b></p> <p>How can you tell if you're too drunk?</p>





# What to do when someone says no

## Sexual consent and the law

It's important to understand the laws that apply in Australia about sexual consent and sexual assault. These laws are different depending on where you are in Australia.

But sexual consent isn't just about knowing the laws and changing behaviours only enough to not break the law. It's about making sure sexual activity is positive and pleasurable for everyone, and reducing the potential for harm to sexual partners.

[Youth Law Australia | Legal Services For All Young People \(yula.org.au\)](http://youthlaw.org.au) – For more information on sexual consent and the law for each Australian state.

## How to deal with consent being withdrawn

Hearing that someone doesn't consent can be hard. It can feel like rejection which brings up a lot of feelings. Everybody deals with rejection sometimes. It is okay to feel upset but it is never okay to make the other person feel bad, pressured or guilty about it.

If you're feeling upset you could:

- talk to a friend or family member
- get some exercise
- kick a ball
- take some deep breaths
- get some sunshine
- have a cry
- do something you love.

## What this could sound like at each age:

### For children aged 5-9

Situation – Kids may be told 'no' when they try to hug, hold hands, or tickle or play wrestle.

It can feel bad to hear 'no'. But we have to listen to other people's choices about their body. If you feel upset, you can go to another room, play a new game or talk to someone about your feelings.

**Okay. I think I might play over there instead.**

### For early teens 10-13

Situation – kids may be told 'no' when asking to touch or hug, kiss or dance with someone.

It can feel painful to hear 'no'. You might feel rejected, embarrassed, sad or angry. You are not alone. Everyone feels rejection from time to time. But while we can't choose our feelings, we can choose our actions. It's never okay to take it out on the other person. Take some time to yourself, talk to a friend about it or move your body.

**That's alright, thanks for the chat. I can see my friend over there, I might go and say hello.**



## For middle teens 14-16

Situation – you started to kiss and make out with someone and it was consensual. But as you are about to do something else sexual, they tell you they want to stop.

If your partner wants to stop or isn't interested, that's okay. It isn't necessarily a reflection on you. It can help to put yourself in their shoes. There are so many reasons why someone might not want to do something sexual. What is most important is that everyone feels comfortable with the situation. It's much more fun if everyone feels safe to enjoy themselves and to stop when they want to.

**You don't have to do anything you don't want to. I'm just getting a glass of water, would you like one?**

## For late teens 17+

Situation – you're with someone you are dating and you've had sex a few times. Today you begin to do something sexual and your partner changes their mind.

When you think about consent as part of sex and relationships, it is easier to cope when someone changes their mind. Having empathy for the other person is an important part of sex. It's easier for you to understand why they want to stop. It's normal to feel awkward or rejected. Some ways to deal with it could be starting a conversation, changing the activity or taking some time for yourself.

**Yes, we can stop. Would you like to watch a show together?**

*Scenarios sourced from [theline.org.au](http://theline.org.au)*



# Consent in a digital age

Thanks to new technologies, our young people have access to more sexually explicit content than ever before. Teenagers may watch pornography, send and receive sexually explicit messages, images and videos, and are sometimes involved in cyberbullying or harassment.



It is more important than ever for parents, teachers and caregivers to address these issues openly and provide adolescents with guidance and support to navigate the digital world. Teaching them responsible digital behaviour and the ability to question what they are viewing, will help them make wise decisions online.

## Representations of consent in entertainment

The way consent is portrayed in movies, TV shows, music and other entertainment can play a big role in how young people understand consent in real life. When non-consensual acts are normalised on screen, it can have concerning outcomes for young people and add to the confusion about what consent means. Research by [Classify Consent](#) reveals that 3 in 5 Australians are unable to recognise non-consensual acts when depicted in popular TV series and films.

It is essential to help teenagers develop the skills and knowledge to recognise instances of lack of consent on screen, so they can apply it to real-life situations.

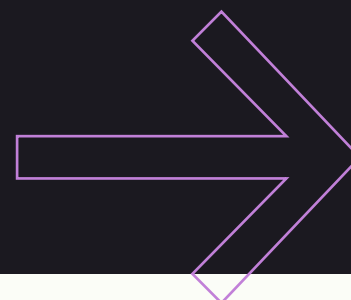


## Representation of consent in pornography

It is critical to be aware of the impact of pornography on young people, as it is one of the many influences on how they perceive a healthy sexual relationship.

According to The Line, in Australia:

- nearly half (48%) of young men have seen pornography by the age of 13, and 56% of young men watch pornography at least once a week
- nearly half (48%) of women have seen pornography by the age of 15, and 15% of young girls watch it at least once a week
- 60% of young men and 41% of young women are using pornography for sex education, even though many don't think it's a good way to learn about sex.



It's common for children to view pornography before they engage in any type of sexual activity. If kids don't understand that pornography is created as entertainment, and not a depiction of real life, this could be risky for a child's understanding of sexual relationships. Some common misunderstandings include:

- Misrepresentations of consent: Pornography frequently depicts non-consensual or coercive situations, where boundaries are blurred and ignored. Frequently in these depictions, mutual consent and safe sex aren't present. This has the capacity to distort a young person's understanding of consent and healthy sexual behaviours.
- Misinformation: Violent sexual acts can be conveyed as normal and appealing. Aggressive behaviour can be depicted as normal and okay.
- Distorted views of relationships: Pornography can depict unrealistic expectations of sexual relationships. For example, porn makes it seem normal for women to have no power in relationships or that loving relationships aren't important.





## Discussing consent in the digital world

Adults should encourage open communication, discussion and critical thinking with young people about online interactions so they can develop healthy online habits, understand digital consent, protect their personal privacy and make informed choices online.



You can talk to them about things like:

- what to do if someone sends them sexually explicit content
- the consequences of sending unsolicited sexually explicit content to others
- encouraging them to talk to you if they have seen something inappropriate online
- pointing out non-consensual situations in TV shows, films and in music and explaining the reasons why
- helping them develop critical thinking and to understand that pornography is not real life
- sharing a person's image, sexual or otherwise, without their permission
- sending pornography or sexual images without permission
- what to do if they or someone else is being bullied online
- how to respond to unwanted contact
- responsible online behaviours and etiquette, including how to protect their personal privacy.

**For in-depth information and resources, go to [eSafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au). If used safely, digital technologies can help spread positive messages about gender and relationships for adolescents to learn from as they grow.**



## What this could sound like at each age:

AGE	HEARING CONSENT	EXPRESSING CONSENT
<b>For children aged 5-9</b>	<p>If you want to share a photo, but your friend is in it too, you have to ask them first.</p> <p><b>I want to show our friends this photo, but only if it's okay with you.</b></p> <p>When is another time you need to check with your friend before sharing?</p>	<p>You get to decide if you want your photo or video taken and/or shared.</p> <p><b>Yes, you can take a photo of me.</b></p> <p>What do you know about sharing information online?</p>
<b>For early teens 10-13</b>	<p>The same rules apply in the real world and online. It isn't okay to make comments about other people's bodies online behind their back or to their face. It can make them feel uncomfortable.</p> <p><b>I'm just going to keep scrolling.</b></p> <p>Have you ever seen rude comments online?</p>	<p>A real friend would never pressure you into sharing where you live, photos or anything else online. If someone makes you feel pressured to share something online, you can say no. If they continue to pressure you, tell a trusted adult.</p> <p><b>No, that is private. I'm not going to share it.</b></p> <p>What do you do if a stranger tries to talk to you online?</p>
<b>For middle teens 14-16</b>	<p>It is never okay to share a nude or intimate photo of someone with others without their consent. It can have serious long-term consequences. It is illegal and very disrespectful to the other person's privacy.</p> <p><b>Thank you for sharing this. It is safe with me.</b></p> <p>What would you do if someone shared a nude with you without the sender's permission?</p>	<p>Just because someone has sent you an intimate photo of themselves, it doesn't mean you have to send one back.</p> <p><b>I've changed my mind. I'm not comfortable sending you a photo.</b></p> <p>What can people do if they get an unwanted sexual photo?</p>
<b>For late teens 17+</b>	<p>Sending a picture of your penis, vulva, breasts or anus without consent is not okay. Before sending sexually intimate texts make sure the context is right. For example, have you checked that it is okay with them? Is it a mutual situation where you are both sexting? Do you know that it's something they'd like? If you aren't sure, don't send it.</p> <p><b>What kind of sexy texts are you into?</b></p> <p>Why do you think people send unwanted nudes?</p>	<p>If you agree to meet up with someone you met online but when you get there, they aren't who they say they are, it's okay to leave. You are never obliged to stay or follow through on something you aren't comfortable with.</p> <p><b>I'm not feeling comfortable with this. I'm going to leave.</b></p> <p>How else can you stay safe if you meet up with someone you know online?</p>

Scenarios sourced from eSafety.gov.au



## Next steps

Now that consent is on the table with the children and teenagers in your life, you can keep the conversations going as they mature.



**Remember that we have additional resources and tools available to help:**

[Consent website](#)

[Guide for having conversations with other adults – including FAQs about consent](#)

[Conversation icebreakers – Q&As to prompt effective discussion](#)

[Consent kit – downloads and tools to use at home and in your community](#)

[The Line – what’s ok and what’s not when it comes to sex, dating and relationships.](#) Young people can follow [@theline\\_au](#) on socials.

[Teach Us Consent – consent education for young people](#)





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