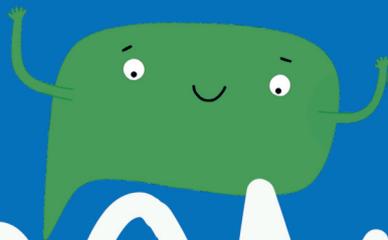


From the award-winning authors of *Welcome To Your Period*

YUMI STYNES & DR MELISSA KANG

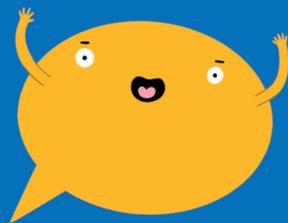
Art by Jenny Latham



WELCOME TO CONSENT!



HOW TO SAY NO,
WHEN TO SAY YES, AND
EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN.



Welcome TO Consent



We're so
glad you're
here.
WELCOME!



Guess what?

Consent is a concept
EVERYONE needs
to understand. It
applies to situations
that occur every
day, to everyone.



Consent means 'an agreement between people that they want to do something'. We tend to think that consent happens when people want to touch or get close or physically intimate with someone. But even when you're not doing those things, you **STILL** need to know about consent.

It matters when you agree to get a haircut, let the doctor check your blood pressure, hug your friend or lift up a child. And it isn't always communicated with a clear '**YES, YOU CAN**', '**NO, YOU CAN'T**'. There's a lot of body language, assumptions and other ways to communicate as well.

Giving consent means knowing what you're OK and not OK with – and being confident enough to communicate it clearly. It's making sure that any time anyone asks to do something with your body, you understand that you have the right to say yes or no. And it's equally important that you understand how to treat others – by asking for their consent, and listening to and respecting their answer.

So you'd think the rules for consent would be simple. 'Yes means yes' and 'no means no' – right? Well, not always. There are tons of things that make it confusing – inexperience, desire, power dynamics, poor communication skills, shyness, embarrassment and more. Even puberty can get in the way. It's hectic!



SO WE DECIDED TO WRITE A BOOK UNPACKING HOW ALL OF THESE THINGS AFFECT CONSENT, SO THAT YOU CAN FEEL MORE CONFIDENT NAVIGATING IT AS YOU GET OLDER.

Mostly this book focuses on how consent works in daily life, but there's a section at the end about alcohol, sharing stuff online and, of course, kissing and sex! You may not need that section just yet. That's totally OK. If you're like us, you might be **DYING TO KNOW** what it says about kissing and touching – and that's totally OK too! All parts of this book will be waiting for you when you're ready.

To be clear: there are many things beyond your control. A book CANNOT make you immune to the bad behaviour of other people. But it is going to help you set your OWN boundaries. You're the whole boss of your whole body ... and to be a boss, you need a user's manual. (Spoiler alert: this is it.)

So, how do you communicate about consent? Don't worry. We are going to help you understand this new language, give you some new ways of communicating, and open you up to how cool it can be to have the tools to say yes, no and everything in between. And we're going to start **REALLY** simple: with a T-shirt.



Let's go!

*Yumi and
Dr Melissa
xx*



In primary school, we were taught about stranger danger. I didn't know the word 'consent' until high school. It's about having permission, and I think that's important. Quite a lot of kids in my year are dating, but me and my mates are into footy so that's mainly what we talk about. But I think it would be good to know more about how consent works.

Alex. 13

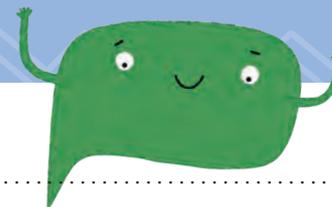
When we learned about consent in class, we all joked about the word for a while afterwards. We went around saying 'I consent to this', or 'I don't consent to that' about any silly thing. It's as though just saying the word was enough. I don't know how I would actually talk about consent in a real situation, though. *Moya. 13*



Contents



THE GOLDEN RULES OF CONSENT	2
WHAT'S AWESOME ABOUT CONSENT	6
WHY IS IT HARD TO TALK ABOUT CONSENT?	8
HOW DO I ACTUALLY TALK ABOUT CONSENT?	14
WHAT DOES YES LOOK LIKE?	19
WHAT DOES NO LOOK LIKE?	24
WHY IS IT SOMETIMES HARD TO SAY NO?	27
CONSENT MANTRA: YOU ASKED, I ANSWERED	30
WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT?	31
CAN I CHANGE MY MIND?	34
PUBERTY CHANGES EVERYTHING	38
IF I'M THE BOSS OF MY BODY, WHY DO PEOPLE KEEP TELLING ME WHAT TO DO WITH IT?	45
PUBERTY, BODILY AUTONOMY AND TOUCH	54
UNEQUAL TREATMENT	58
DIFFERENT CULTURES, DIFFERENT MEANINGS	62



HOW TO SET YOUR BOUNDARIES	64
EXPLAIN YOURSELF – OR DON'T!	70
SELF-AWARENESS = FEELING + THINKING BEFORE ACTING	72
WHAT IT MEANS TO FEEL SAFE	80
PRIVACY SETTINGS	88
HOW POWER DYNAMICS AFFECT CONSENT	96
CONSENT CHALLENGES AND YOUR FRIENDS	106
CONSENT CHALLENGES AND ADULTS	114

FOR WHEN YOU ARE READY:

FROM CRUSHES TO KISSES	128
FEELING HORNY	136
THE RIGHT TO EXPECT PLEASURE	153
CONSENT IN RELATIONSHIPS	166
HOOK-UPS: RESPECT IN THE MOMENT	172
CONSENT CHALLENGES	174
CALLING OUT THE ADULTS	190
FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, APPEASE	192

WHEN THINGS DON'T FEEL RIGHT

IF YOU NEED HELP

FINDING YOUR PEOPLE	206
EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY	208
MORE RESOURCES	210



THE GOLDEN RULES OF CONSENT



Consent CAN be very simple: it's an agreement between people, or permission for something to happen.

'Yes, you can borrow my T-shirt!' you say to a friend.

That sounds pretty straightforward, right? But what if you didn't know that your friend was planning to take your T-shirt to school camp – dirty, gross school camp? What if you said your brother could borrow it that one time, but now he thinks it's OK to borrow your T-shirt ANYTIME – without asking first? And wait, what if the person asking is a **teacher**?!

Consent is about more than just saying yes or no. So here are some *golden rules about consent* – using a T-shirt as an example – that are good for keeps!

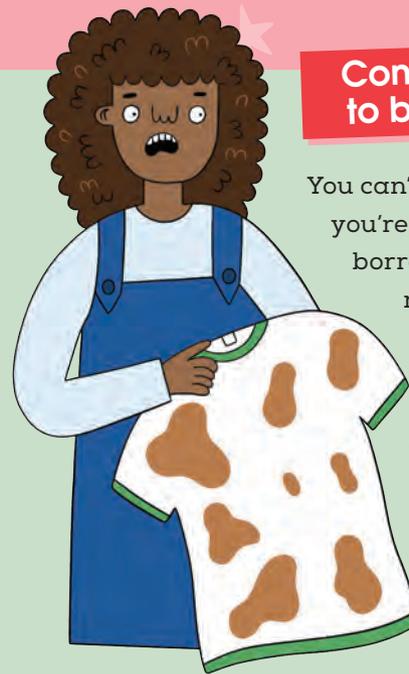
Consent needs to be COMMUNICATED

You've got to SAY it, to the best of your ability. Communicate! 'Yes, you can borrow my T-shirt!' Out loud is best, with a clear yes or no, but there are also other ways to make yourself clear.



Consent needs to be SPECIFIC

You can't consent unless you know what you're consenting TO. 'Yes, you can borrow my T-shirt tomorrow' doesn't mean you're lending it forever. If you didn't know about the dirty school camp, then you didn't have enough information to fully consent. And saying yes doesn't mean you're lending your favourite pair of shorts at the same time. Unless you specifically say so!



Consent can CHANGE

You can change your mind! And it doesn't matter WHY you change your mind – you might have no reason, you might get new information (like they're taking it mud-wrestling – nooooo!), or you might see your friend treating your T-shirt in a way you don't like.

And even if you agreed to lend your T-shirt once, you can still change your mind.



Actually, no!

I suppose
so ...

Consent should be ENTHUSIASTIC and FREELY GIVEN

You should feel happy and comfortable lending someone your T-shirt, and not like you've been coerced or tricked into doing it against your will. You can't give consent when you're half-asleep, for example! If you're clutching your T-shirt to your chest with big scared eyes and shaking your head while saying 'yes' in a tiny voice, then your consent has not been enthusiastic or freely given.

POWER matters

We'll go into this more on p. 96, but it's much harder to give real consent if the person wanting to borrow your T-shirt is in a position of authority over you – whether that's official authority (like a teacher, doctor or police officer) or social authority (the most popular person in your class).

Ideally they would recognise that their position makes it harder for you to give real consent, but sometimes they won't. So you need to know how to protect yourself – and your T-shirt – in a situation like this!



Consent can be easy ... or not

Consent happens in everyday situations where you might not even think about it – like when a friend suggests you both go hang out at their house after school and you agree. Or – yes! – when someone is borrowing a T-shirt.

But at other times, it can be more confronting, like: 'Ooooh. They want my consent for a kiss. This feels so serious.' Or 'Eek! I don't know how to say **no** to this! I need to **withhold** consent.'

Sometimes it will feel weird to be so upfront about consent, especially if a situation is unfamiliar or new. But that **doesn't** mean you have to do whatever is asked of you.

Sometimes your body gives out signals that things feel weird. You might breathe a bit faster or have a tiny, uncomfortable knot in your stomach. This book will help you learn to pay attention to those signals, and trust in them – because they're telling you something important!

Sticking up for yourself is important, too. So we'll help you learn to step through the weird feeling and connect with your true wants and needs. We'll talk a lot more about listening to that inner voice and looking out for those signs.

Remember, when it comes to your own body, you are always in charge.

Consent is a two-way street

Sometimes you're the one asking to borrow a T-shirt and other times you're the one lending it. The rules are the same regardless!



WHAT'S AWESOME ABOUT CONSENT?

The best thing about **making an effort to discuss** consent with someone is that you both know what's going on! You leave the guesswork behind. If you are clear about what you're allowing someone to do – or what they're allowing you to do – then no-one has to wonder anymore.

You ask. And they answer!

They ask. And you answer!

When you say yes – or someone says yes to you – it should feel **GOOD**. It means you both want to share an experience, experiment together, or do something fun together. It means you know **FOR SURE** the other person is into the same thing you are – whether it's ordering hot chips with gravy or kissing!

When it's right you just kind of feel warm and comforted.
Mel Kettle

It's kind of like driving. You never want to be in autopilot mode. You want to be in active mode – looking for those tells. Actively asking if that person is comfortable.

Luke, 17



Sometimes 'no' is even more beautiful than 'yes', even though we tend to think we should always be aiming to hear a 'yes' answer.

No – or non-consent – is beautiful because it means the person communicating this has *successfully* shown you where their boundaries are. They have done it in such a clear way that **they trust you can understand** and accept their refusal.

By saying no, they have created an understanding between you that maybe wasn't there before.

It's one thing to ask a question and then act like either answer to the question (yes or no) would be OK – it's another thing to be able to enthusiastically hear the word no. We don't lean into rejection very often. *Neva Zabin*

I respect it when people offer to help and also are respectful of my choice to decline their offer of help. The key here is to offer the disabled person a choice instead of telling them you are doing it. *Nicole Lee*



WHY IS IT HARD TO TALK ABOUT CONSENT?

Gulp! Good question. Here are some of the reasons it's hard to talk about consent:

Because society and culture

A lot of people – across cultures and nationalities – equate the topic of consent solely with the topic of sex, without realising consent applies to many other situations as well. They may feel shame around sex and intimacy, and therefore feel awkward when it comes to talking about consent. When enough people feel this way, the society we grow up in can give off the vibe that we are supposed to feel awkward about it too.

This is not everybody, but it could be your parents, your grandparents or your peers. They might feel embarrassed. They might assume everyone has the same beliefs as they do. Or, importantly, they may find it hard to talk about consent because **THEY DON'T KNOW THE ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS**. Perhaps they weren't really taught about consent, making it hard for them to teach you!



My parents never talked to me about consent. They didn't really model consent conversations. I felt like they ASSUMED all people were pretty much the same and if we were any different – if, say, we hated our neck being touched – we'd slap the hand away, and that's how we'd communicate non-consent! *Yumi*

When it comes to conversations about boundaries, consent and sex, there can be a lot of fear. Some adults worry that talking about sex will make teenagers go out and do it! (This is a myth, BTW – research shows the opposite to be true.) Being open about intimacy might not sit comfortably with your family's beliefs or religion.

But just because clear consent communication makes **them** feel weird, doesn't mean **you** need to feel weird about it too. After all, consent isn't just about sex – it's part of daily life! If you've never discussed consent before, it might feel confronting because it's a new (and sometimes tricky) topic. That's OK – we're here to help!



It can be confusing

There's a bit of a sense that 'you should just know' what people want. Or that 'you'll figure it out' when you're trying to understand the boundaries of someone you care about.

The problem with this is that when you guess, you sometimes guess wrong.

You might be used to putting YOUR needs first, and not have much practice at putting someone else's needs first. (*Can't you just assume that it's the same as what YOU want? Um ... No! Because they might want something different.*)

And here's where it gets really confusing: sometimes, we're not actually sure what WE want, either! So how are we meant to figure it out, let alone talk about it, if we're unsure?

Some of us need help figuring out what we want and don't want. For instance: do you WANT to watch that scary movie with all your friends, even though you know it will keep you awake all night? Should you go on a date with someone who likes you, even if you're unsure of your feelings for them? We need to be able to say 'I'm not sure.' A lot of us need to learn new ways to say no. A lot of us need to learn how to *hear* the word 'no' – and respect it. We also need to learn how to understand what 'yes' means in different situations. And – this is really important – we also need to learn that it's OK to change our minds. We'll cover all of that in this book.



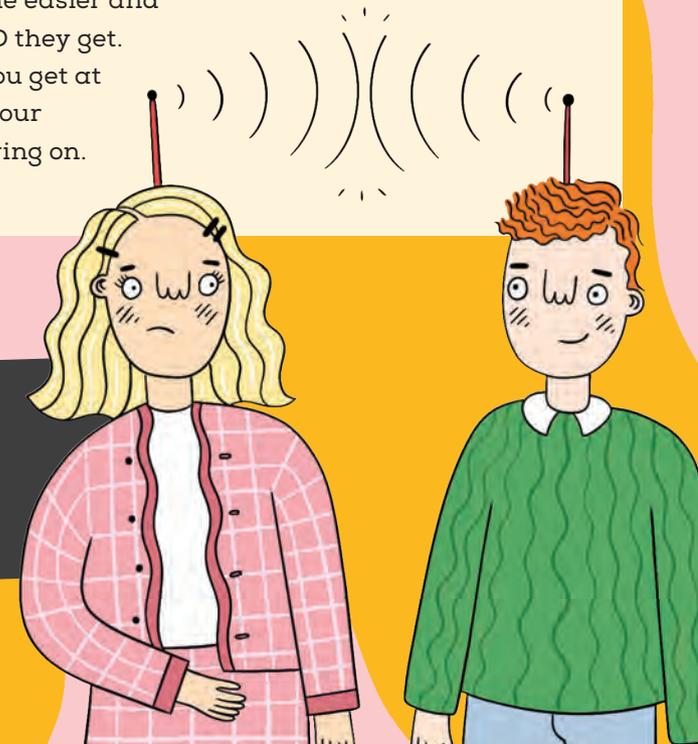
The feels are distracting me!

Consent can be hard to talk about because it involves ideas that make us **feel awkward, embarrassed, confronted or exposed**. For instance, someone might say, 'I'm having pretty strong feelings for you, can we talk about it?' They have asked for your consent to have a personal conversation, but you may still FEEL like you want to run screaming!

We suggest you put up a little antenna for feelings such as shame or fear – try to notice when you're feeling them, and think about why. Feelings like embarrassment can be contagious – and transmitted from friend to friend or from parent to child! The good news is, the more you have these conversations, the easier and

LESS AWKWARD they get. And the better you get at acknowledging your feelings and moving on.

Being blunt can be scary. But it's better than avoiding the truth! *Yum!*



Because teenager!



Consent can be tricky when you're young because there are rules and expectations around what we do with our bodies – BUT we aren't full adults yet. People expect us to fit in and do the right thing without granting us the same power that a grown-up has.



At my school there's a boy who doesn't want to do swimming because he's embarrassed about his body. So he lies and says he forgets his swimmers and every week the teacher gives him a detention and calls his parents. And it's always this big drama. Everyone in the class feels sorry for him because it's a situation that can't be stopped, nor can we help him. *Dee Dee, 16*



12

Worrying about what your friends are thinking or doing can nudge you towards making choices that you might not like. And being inexperienced may make you a little scared and overwhelmed when it comes to sticking up for yourself.

It can also push you towards pressuring someone else into doing something they don't really want to do, just because you want to try it. Consent works both ways.



REMEMBER!

YES, IT'S NOT JUST YOU!
TALKING ABOUT CONSENT
IS TRICKY FOR EVERYONE.
IN THIS BOOK WE'LL RUN
THROUGH LOTS OF SCENARIOS
WHERE CONSENT CAN BE
COMMUNICATED, AND
GIVE YOU LOTS
OF TOOLS AND
EXAMPLES.



13

HOW DO I ACTUALLY TALK ABOUT CONSENT?

GOOD QUESTION! THE BEST WAY TO GIVE AND RECEIVE CONSENT IS TO JUST START TALKING ABOUT IT - EVEN IF YOU'RE NERVOUS ABOUT THE EXACT WORDS TO USE.



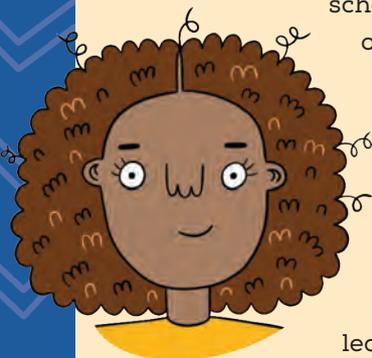
We communicate so often in day-to-day life that we take it for granted. Whether it's asking to borrow a pen at school, glaring at your brother for being rude, or choosing lunch at the canteen, we're pretty good at talking and using body language to make ourselves clear. In fact, we're giving and receiving consent all the time and we don't even think about it!

But when it comes to our bodies and intimacy, learning to communicate around consent can take practice:

learning how to ask. Being ready to hear the answer - whatever it is.

Saying yes or no yourself. These are all big skills.

So if thinking about this is all new to you, where do you start? Whether it's in person, over text or online, you start here: **Ask. Listen. Observe.**



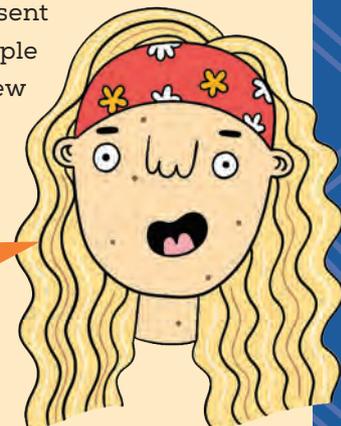
Ask

Regardless of whether it's the first time or the eightieth time, anything that involves sharing an intimate physical experience **in person or online** needs consent. And the quickest way to figure out if you have consent is to actually ask. The other person or people involved should ask you, too. Here are a few ways to ask for consent:

Hey, is this OK?

Do you want to keep doing this?

Shall we stop?



When you ask, make sure the other person feels safe. Be aware of your body language, and how you're asking. And remember that giving someone the space to exit a situation by asking is a very cool thing to do. Don't forget to allow them the time to **make their own decision** once you've asked.

If they do want to leave, or take a breath, or just sit and chill for a minute, they can. If they don't, you can continue and you will both feel valued and respected.

Asking is just one piece of the puzzle. But it's really important, because if there's no asking, there's no answer - just guesswork - and you (or the other people involved) might guess wrong.

Listen

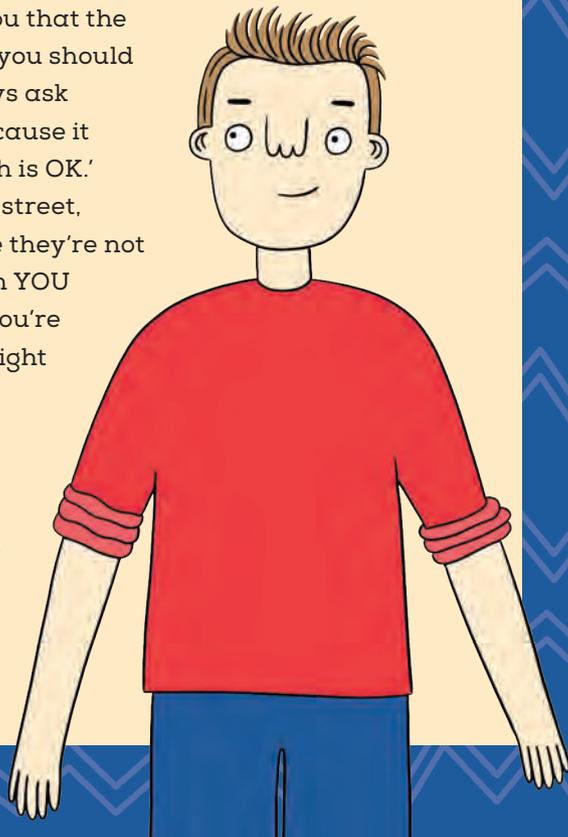
Once you've asked, you have to STOP and listen. REALLY listen. Don't leave it up to them to tell you to stop after you've asked. ACTUALLY pause, and make sure the answer you hear isn't just the answer you *want* to hear. If it's unclear, ask again.

What you're listening for is **ENTHUSIASTIC CONSENT**. You want the other person to be really into it, or at least genuinely willing to give it a try. If they say, 'Yeah yeah, just hurry up' or 'fine, whatever, I don't care', that ... doesn't sound very enthusiastic, does it?

If your gut is telling you that the other person isn't into it, you should trust that. You can always ask again: 'Are you sure? Because it doesn't seem like it, which is OK.'

Consent is a two-way street, remember. If you feel like they're not telling you the truth, then YOU can decide to stop until you're sure going ahead is the right thing to do.

MORE ON p. 21



Observe

Observing means tuning in to the other person's body language and the way they say something.

Observing should happen the whole time during **ASK, LISTEN, OBSERVE**.

You can observe to see whether someone might be up for something, or whether they feel comfortable when they give you an answer.

If someone is shy or afraid in a situation, they might still say they are fine to keep going. It could actually be the opposite of what they want deep down. This is where observing body language is super important to help you figure out whether someone's 'yes' really is enthusiastic and freely given.

If you're in a situation where someone's 'yes' doesn't sound right - it sounds forced or fake, scared or untrue - then it is a good idea to check by asking again, and paying close attention to their body language. A person who looks nervous, unsure, tearful, miserable, scared or like they are saying 'no' with their body while saying 'yes' with words - this person clearly needs to stop and have time out. See also 'What does yes look like', and 'What does no look like'.

MORE ON p. 19 + 24

THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN ISN'T THAT YOU STOP - IT'S THAT YOU KEEP GOING AGAINST SOMEONE'S WISHES.

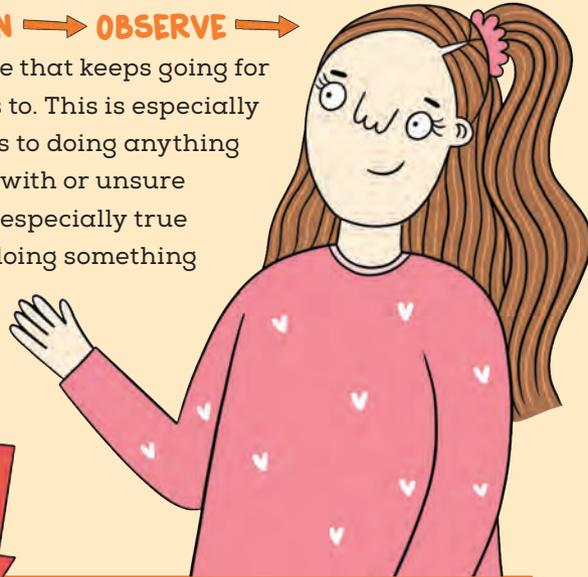
17



Sometimes people say one thing and do the opposite. For example, I hated being tickled as a kid, and always tried to push the tickler away. But because I was laughing at the same time, it didn't sound like I wanted it to stop! *Marissa, 36*

ASK → LISTEN → OBSERVE →

are parts of a cycle that keeps going for as long as it needs to. This is especially true when it comes to doing anything you're unfamiliar with or unsure about. And this is especially true when it comes to doing something intimate with someone for the first time... And every time!



REMEMBER

In your life, you will be on both sides of this consent conversation. Sometimes you will be saying no, and sometimes you will be the one hoping to hear a yes. Hearing or saying no doesn't make you a baddie. Both are perfectly normal exchanges when we are seeking, giving and withholding consent.

WHAT DOES *yes* LOOK LIKE?

Yes!

A yes is a magical thing. Saying or hearing yes, knowing fully what's being agreed to, can make 'yes' one of the most exciting words in the world.

Verbal consent is the best way to be sure you're getting a yes. Here are some of the ways people can say yes:



Would you please ...

That is great

It feels really good when you ...

Let's do this

This is awesome, I like it

I'd like to ...

There are also non-verbal ways to signal a yes. If someone is enjoying themselves, you can usually tell. They are engaged and making eye contact, maybe laughing, smiling, chatting and being present. They are enthusiastic and they seem like they want to be there!

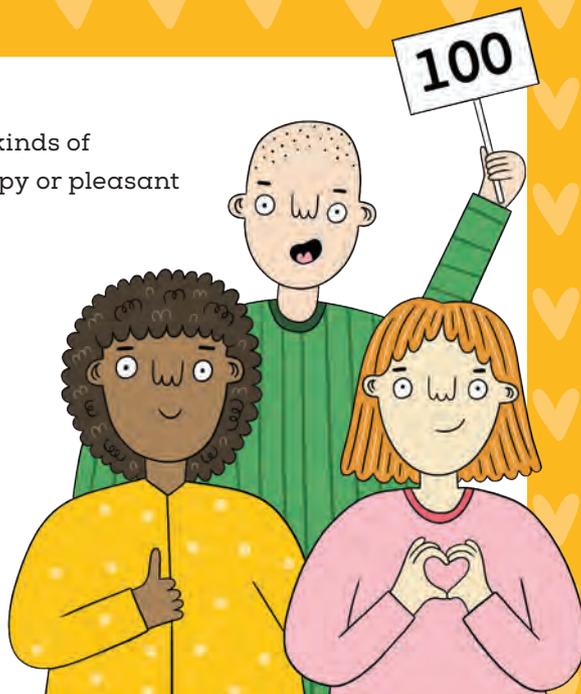
'Yes' can look like all kinds of behaviours, usually happy or pleasant ones:

- ★ Nodding yes
- ★ Making direct eye contact
- ★ Looking pleased
- ★ Actively touching you back
- ★ Pulling you closer
- ★ 👍 😊 ❤️ 🤗 🗨️

If you're ever unsure whether the other person is happy to be doing something or whether they're definitely saying yes, the best thing to do is ask.

'Yes' means 'I agree to what has been proposed'. It doesn't mean 'I agree to what has been proposed and anything else that might follow.'

And 'yes' also means 'I can change my mind anytime I want to.'



I once had a sexual partner say, 'You don't have to keep checking, just see how happy I am' ... I just replied with, 'Yeah, uh, I can't ... I'm blind, remember?' *Hayden Moon*

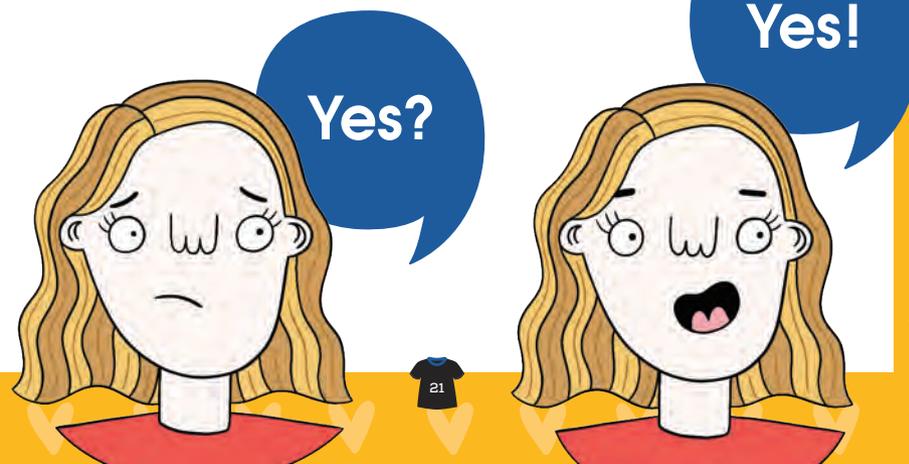
It can be harder to read visual cues because of Asperger's. I need a lot of confirmation that I'm understanding correctly. I ask a few questions. I'm, like, gullible, so I'm not very sure. *Chloe, 17*

Enthusiastic consent

You have to take ACTIVE STEPS to make sure that the other person is consenting. You can't assume that they are doing what you want them to do because they came over to your house, or they slept over or whatever ... You have to be SURE. *Saxon Mullins*

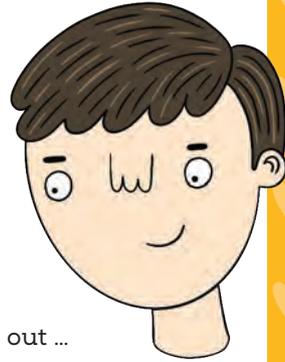
Why does consent need to be enthusiastic? What does that even mean? Why isn't plain old consent enough?

Enthusiastic consent looks beyond words and takes into account how someone really feels about a situation, even if they're not comfortable expressing it.



For example, maybe you love having soy sauce on your scrambled eggs. But when you try to convince your friend to have some and he says, 'Um, maybe,' but looks all grossed out – that's not enthusiastic at all!

If you're the person asking for someone's consent, then look for **enthusiastic** consent. Their words and body language, and your listening and observing will help you figure it out ... and if you're unsure, then ask again!



And what about if someone asks to kiss you, and you feel incredibly awkward about rejecting them?

Maybe you've never had to reject someone before, and you don't want to hurt their feelings? Your instincts might lead you to say reluctantly, 'Uhhhhh, sure, why not ... I guess?' even though your whole body is screaming, 'Ew, no thanks!' That is not enthusiastic consent.



Intimate activities and sex are not something that you do 'to' someone or 'for' someone. They should be something you do 'with' someone – where both of you are interacting as equals and both of you are enthusiastic about it. *Dr Jacqu Hendriks*

Mutual yes!

There's an idea we love about consent called **mutuality**. Instead of consent being about one person asking for something and the other holding the 'keys' to permission, **mutuality** is two people having a dialogue about what they want to do and adventuring down the path together, as equals.

We adore this idea. It could be something like, 'We both decided we wanted to do more than just hold hands.' Decisions are made through discussion, mutual desire and mutual respect. This is the best situation in our opinion!



Sexual intimacy is most powerful when both people feel safe, when both people really CARE that the other person is OK. *Mel Ree*