

Consent & Other Things to Talk about Before Having Sex Brainstorm

Recommended Age: 12+

Goals

- To explore the negotiations that can happen when people have decided to have sex.
- To highlight the rights, responsibilities, and risks involved with having sex.
- To discuss consent:
 - Explain consent.
 - Explore coercion, and how alcohol/drugs impact consent.
 - Emphasize support after a sexual assault and offer resources.

Have Ready

- Write on a flipchart/whiteboard: Things to talk about before having sex.

Instructions

- Ask the group, “**What are some things to talk about with a partner before having sex?**” Validate their answers and add the following points if not mentioned by youth.

Sample Flipchart

Things to Talk about Before Sex

- **Comfort and Boundaries**
Normalize that there may be sexual activities youth want to try or like doing, and other activities they are not comfortable with.

- **Pleasure**
Sex should feel good for everyone. Checking in before and during sex (consent) is also part of pleasure and making sure that everyone is having a good time.
- **Expectations**
Encourage youth to ask themselves what dating and sex means to them and their partner(s). For some people, sex means being in a committed relationship together, while for other people it is a more casual thing. For example, dating does not automatically equal sex and vice versa. It might be helpful for youth to ask questions like, “How will this affect our relationship?”, “Would we have different expectations after sex/making out?”, etc.
- **Birth Control (if having penis-vagina sex)**
Highlight the importance of using birth control with penis-vagina sex if trying to avoid pregnancy. Ask youth, **“Where can you get birth control supplies?”** Mention also if someone is drinking and having sex, it is important to use birth control because alcohol can harm the fetus. Note: Project Choices is a free program in Winnipeg that explores alcohol, sex, and birth control. It is a brief service that offers information and individualized feedback to help girls and women make healthy decisions for themselves about alcohol use and contraception. For more info, call 204.784.4072.
- **Pregnancy Options (if having penis-vagina sex)**
No birth control is 100% effective and the 3 legal options in Canada are abortion, adoption, and parenting. People may have different values about which is the right pregnancy option, but the person who is carrying the pregnancy should make the final decision, as their body and life are most affected.
- **STIs, HIV, and Getting Tested**
STIs can be passed on with any type of sex. Let youth know, **“Many STIs/HIV show no signs, which means getting tested is the most accurate way to know if someone has an STI.”** Asking someone when the last time they were tested was and offering to go together can be a great way to talk about STIs without sounding judgmental.
- **Condoms and Sex Dams**
Highlight that condoms/sex dams protect us and our partners from STIs/HIV.

- **Consent** (short version if covered beforehand)
“Ask first, and only yes means yes. Consent is ongoing, which means you can change your mind anytime, and is also why it’s important to check in with your partner during sexual activity to make sure they are into what’s happening. It’s about asking, looking, listening, and respect.”

Debrief Consent

- When it comes to sexual situations, **“Does anyone know what the word consent means?”** Consent is clear permission, which means that only yes means yes. It’s a voluntary agreement, which means it’s not something that one person does to another, but rather it’s something that people decide to do together.
- **“Consent is about looking, asking, listening, and respecting. For example, let’s say that you want to kiss someone. What would consent sound like? What would you say?”** Can I kiss you? I’d really like to kiss you. (Anything they say that is respectful.) You might be thinking this is kind of weird or hard or seems really awkward, but the more we do it, the more natural it becomes.
- **Let’s practice asking for consent about something non-sexual.** Look to the person next to you and ask them about one activity you want to do this weekend. For example, “Do you want to go have lunch/play video games/go swimming, etc. with me?” **Truth is, we are using consent all the time.** “Did any of you hear a yes?” Great. “Did anyone hear a no?” That is going to happen sometimes.
- **Part of asking for consent is listening to the response and respecting what they say/want. It’s also important to pay attention to what they’re doing non-verbally.**
- “If you ask if you can touch someone’s bum and they say yes, it’s bum touching time! If they say maybe later, I’m not sure, or nothing at all, what does that all mean?” No. **Sometimes hearing a no can feel hard or we might feel kind of rejected. Even though those feelings are normal, it’s our responsibility to deal with our feelings and respect the person who is saying no.**

- **Consent is also ongoing. This means that you have a right to say no at any time.** Doing check-ins during an activity is important. Check-ins sound like, “Is this okay?” or “Do you like it when I...” Check-ins are part of pleasure; they let us know what feels good for the other person, but they also let us know if someone wants to stop. **If someone ever looks uncomfortable, then it’s a good time to stop and check in.** So, if in the middle of bum touching, someone wanted it to stop, what would have to happen? Stop. If someone says “stop”, or “wait”, looks uncomfortable, or is pulling away, stop and check in with them. This could sound like, “You don’t seem really into this.” **If you are unsure, always stop and ask.**
- Asking for consent can be fun and sexy, and figuring out ways to talk about consent that feels comfortable for you can help. We know that it can be more complicated than just asking or saying ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ People don’t always talk about touching/sex before it happens; sometimes people communicate non-verbally, through eye contact and body language. **Ultimately, consent gives both people a chance to say whether they are into something and is part of creating trust and respect in our relationships.**
- So, we just talked a lot about what consent is, now we’re going to share some things that consent is not. **Consent is not coercive, which means trying to change someone’s no into a yes by pressuring, nagging, or using guilt.** It’s also not okay to try to change someone’s no into a yes through alcohol or drugs, or to wait until someone is drunk or high to ask them for consent. What’s the most respectful thing to do if people are drunk or high? Wait until they are sober, bring them water, help them get home, or watch over them, etc. **Ultimately, consent doesn’t count when people are drunk or high.** That doesn’t mean that every time there is drinking and sex it’s a sexual assault, but we do know that it happens. **What’s important to know is that any unwanted sexual attention or contact is not okay.**
- **If you have ever experienced sexual assault, it is never your fault.** It doesn’t matter where you were, who you were with, what you were wearing, or if you were drunk or high. If someone chooses to assault another person, it’s always the fault of the person who is choosing to use violence.

- **People have a right to be believed and get support. No one must go through recovering from that experience alone.** It can help to talk to someone you trust. You can access support for you or a friend. If you know someone or have a friend who has experienced a sexual assault, a couple of good things you can say are: “It’s not your fault,” and “I’m sorry this happened.” You can ask them how you can support them, and you can also give them information about the Sexual Assault Crisis Program (SACP). **The Klinik Sexual Assault Crisis Line is a great resource that people can call if they need to talk. You can also call the line if you’re feeling upset or unsure about a sexual experience. It is open 24/7 and free to call from anywhere in Manitoba. Their phone number is 1.888.292.7565 or 204.786.8631. If someone needs to go to the hospital or a clinic after an assault, a counsellor from SACP can be there to support them.**

Debrief

- These conversations may feel a little awkward at first, but the more we try to have them with our partner(s), the more open and honest relationships can be. It doesn’t guarantee that our partners will always be a perfect match, but it can help us decide if we want to be sexually active with someone.