

CONSENT

Consent means giving permission for something to happen. Adults often think of sexual consent, but consent also applies to everyday interactions like physical touch, personal space, and sharing objects or experiences. At its core, consent involves asking before touching someone or before taking, using, or borrowing something that belongs to them. For example, you might ask, "Can I give you a hug?" or "Can I use your marker?" before doing either.

Why It Matters

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Supporting Children to Practice Consent

- Give processing time. Children who are under five years old require between 10 and 30 seconds to process a verbal question or statement. The younger the child, the more time they will need to process what you've said to them. This processing time can also vary depending on someone's cognitive abilities.

Example: "I have this warm cloth for you. I'm going to wipe your face." Offer a 10- to 30-second pause. Often, a child will then offer their face to be wiped, pushing their face towards the cloth or tissue.

- Watch for body language. When children are pre-verbal, they can still give consent with their body language, and it's your job as an adult to read these non-verbal cues.

You can also say what you see to help the child's own understanding and processing. For example: "I asked you for a hug and you turned your body away from me. I think you are showing me that you don't want a hug. Your body is saying 'No, I don't want a hug.' That's okay. Thanks for telling me."

- Give choices. When things must happen (like hygiene routines), giving choices can help avoid conflict because it empowers children, giving them a say in what happens in that moment.
 - Diaper or toileting: "Do you want to pull down your pants? Or do you want me to?", "Do you want to stomp like a dinosaur or tiptoe like a mouse to the bathroom?", or "Do you want to fly like a rocket up to the change table or zoom like a plane?"
 - Getting dressed: "Which socks do you want to wear? Blue or polka dot?", or "I hear you don't want to wear your hat. You can use one of the daycare's. Do you want this one or this one?"
- Model consent. Model consent in everyday interactions. Model your own boundaries, too.

Example: "I don't feel like holding anyone right now. Let's sit side by side instead." or "Do you want help with your shoe?"

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Supporting Children to Practice Consent Continued

- Respect children's boundaries. Children should never be forced to hug, kiss, snuggle, be tickled by, or touch another person, even their educators, parents, or grandparents.

Children of all ages want and deserve to be active participants in their lives. Adults often forget that we hold much more power than a child does in any given exchange. Let's use our power for good and empower the children in our lives.

Supporting Yourself

Use the acronym O FRIES to think more deeply about consent and all the rich nuance there is beyond "yes means yes and no means no." Not all of these will feel relevant to consent with children, but this is a great tool for reflection to consider interactions in your own life.

- Ongoing. Check in to make sure that everyone still wants to do what you've agreed to do.
- Freely given. No pressure, threats, or rewards. Consider power and whether someone really can give consent freely in this particular relationship dynamic.
- Reversible. Anyone is allowed to change their mind at any time, even if it's already started. No reason needed.
- Informed. All the important and relevant information has been shared.
- Enthusiastic. It's a "YES!", not a "Sure" or "I guess so."
- Specific. Consent applies to one thing or activity at a time. Consent for one activity does not automatically mean consent to another activity.

Some examples to use O FRIES with: A friend asks to borrow your favourite shirt, two teenagers decide to double on an e-bike together, someone offers you a cup of coffee, you're at an amusement park and your companion wants to ride the rollercoaster with you.

Further Actions

Reflect on how you learned (or didn't learn) about consent in your own life.

- Challenge old beliefs like "children should always obey" or "hugs are polite."
- Practice giving and asking for consent in your adult relationships.
- Use books, workshops, or therapy to explore any discomfort or trauma related to bodily autonomy (see resources below).
- Give yourself permission to make mistakes and model learning openly (e.g., "I forgot to ask first. I'll try again and do better next time.").



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Need More Support?

Local Resources:

- [Health and Relationship Educator](#)
- [Let's Talk about Touching](#) (Professional Development) – Connect with your local CCRR about local offerings
- Family Physicians, Pediatricians, or Nurse Practitioners
- Public Health Nurse
- Counsellors

Resources Found in the WKCCRR Library:

- Yes! No!: A First Conversation about Consent by Megan Madison
- My Body! What I Say Goes! by Jayneen Sanders
- Every Body: A First Conversation about Bodies by Megan Madison

Videos:

- [Consent for Kids Video](#)
- [The Boundaries Song](#)

Online Resources:

- [A Caregiver's Guide to Teaching ABCs of Consent](#)
- [Amaze Jr.: Age-Appropriate Videos for Talking to Kids Ages 4-9](#)
- [Sex Positive Families Resources](#)
- [Jayneen Sanders' Website - Free Resources for Printing, and Supports for Teaching Body Safety](#)
- [Additional List of Learning Resources to Explore](#)