

Elsewhere

Consent: Let's do it (better)!

Where

Else?

Please share this content as widely as possible!

Why are we talking about consent, again?

Consent is critical to how we interact with others, and how we manage risks of emotional and physical harm through those interactions.

It applies to all interactions we have, but the more intimate or socially charged, the greater the impact if something going wrong, and the more important consent is.

Consent is also a complex and evolving topic - ways we thought about it in the past were meant to address specific issues of the time, but also missed elements we think of as critical today.

How we talk about it here is meant to address some of the issues with earlier consent discussions, but is definitely not meant to be the last word. Human interactions are messy and organic, and the more we engage in them with curiosity and good intent, the more we will continue to develop how we talk about consent in the future.

Consent violations happen. Even when our community is caring and engaged.

Sometimes people aren't aware of good consent practices and make mistakes.
Sometimes there are misunderstandings or different interpretations of how consent practices were applied.
Sometimes people get caught up in the moment and don't check in with each other.
Rarely, there are malicious people who want to exploit the open, trusting culture we have.

What is consent? What is it not?

At its core, **consent is about harm reduction, and care for ourselves and others.**

It's not about legalistic agreements, covering our asses or checking a box so we can get what we want.

Consent values the **humanity and bodily autonomy** of each person. It's how we express our **respect**, and do our best **not to hurt each other or ourselves.**

There are lots of consent frameworks and acronyms in different communities, meant to focus on specific types of interactions. That's beyond the scope of what we're talking about here.

Here we'll focus on the most fundamental topics for interacting with others - especially where you don't know them that well, or you're not sure how familiar they are with consent principles.

We'll use a well-known acronym used in many consent discussions: FRIES.

**Wait! There's
food???**

Mmmmm, tasty FRIES!

Freely Given

Obvious, right? But it can be more complicated than you think... More on this in a minute!

Reversible

A “yes” isn’t a contract or an obligation. Anyone can change their mind, and shouldn’t feel like they have to do something they’re no longer into. And initiating something doesn’t mean you have to follow through if you realize you’re not actually into it. That wouldn’t be a free choice anymore, would it?

Informed

It’s not consent unless everyone involved has the information they need to make the right choice for themselves. This includes any risks others should be aware of (physical and/or emotional): Are you sick? Have STIs? Injuries or trauma that might be relevant? Other relationships that should be discussed? Could what you’re doing be dangerous or does it require a certain skill level? Talk about it!

Enthusiastic / Engaged

Hesitation or uncertainty can point to a problem: something the person is uncomfortable about but isn’t saying, or that they’re feeling pressured or unable to say “no” for some reason. But! Engaged communication about taking it slow or trying something new carefully can be a great part of consent.

Specific

Consent is given for a specific action or set of actions. A “yes” for one thing doesn’t imply a “yes” for anything else. Consent for a hug doesn’t mean a kiss is automatically ok. A “yes” for a sexy or kinky activity does not mean others are wanted. Someone agreeing to cover your shift for a few minutes while you run to the bathroom doesn’t mean you can go to a workshop or go dancing.

Consent is Freely Given

If someone CAN'T say no, there is no consent

There are obvious barriers to consent being possible:

- Not being (fully) conscious
- Being too drunk/high
- Language barrier or not understanding for other reasons (deaf/blind, neurodivergence)
- Lying or withholding important information
- Coercion or (perceived) threat of violence/harm

But there are a lot more factors that affect whether someone feels like they can say no:

- **Social conditioning/pressure** - especially about gender roles or identity
 - Also cultural expectations around saying no, comfort with intimacy, etc.
- **Power and privilege dynamics**
 - People can feel like they should say yes to camp leads, workshop facilitators, etc.
 - People who grow up with more privilege can be more comfortable asking for what they want; people from marginalized groups can feel like they have to do what others want to be accepted or to avoid harm
 - Reputation or social standing, size/strength, natural confidence, and more, can all affect whether someone feels they can say no

Cool, I get it - now nothing can go wrong, right?

Unfortunately not. Consent frameworks aren't a set of rigid rules, but a guide. Human relations can be complex. There are often mixed signals, doubts, or different interpretations, and consent guidelines need judgement, care and responsibility to work.

Just as we talk about "safer sex" and not "safe sex," something similar applies here:

Consent doesn't guarantee well-being or the absence of harm. But it remains the primary tool for reducing risk, including risks of trauma, distress, or regret.

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There is no perfect line that **always** indicates: here there is consent / here there is not.

Practical Risk Assessment - 3 Categories of Risk

Never OK *

At least one person:

- Is not (fully) conscious,
- Is too drunk/high, or
- Feels manipulated or coerced, or a (perceived) threat of violence/harm

- and/or -

Lying or withholding important information

There is no 100% clear rule about consent, except this one.

* While there could be rare cases of consent negotiations among experienced people pushing some of these limits, the likelihood that something goes wrong is very, very high.

Heightened Risk

Partial intoxication (what's too much?)

Power/privilege imbalance

Emotional or economic dependence

Non-verbal consent negotiation

Communication barriers

Social/peer pressure

There is always uncertainty in this category.

That doesn't mean it's never ok - but it **requires active care and judgement throughout the whole interaction** - checking that everything feels right, and looking for signs that someone might not be 100% into it.

Low Risk

Clear, honest and sober communication about desires and boundaries.

Enthusiastic "yes!" or engaged conversation about starting slow, carefully trying something new, or alternatives to the original request.

This is how to ensure everyone is ok and into it as much as possible.

But, low risk doesn't mean no risk. We can realize something was off later - even if nobody did anything "wrong". These feelings are valid and real, and need to be treated with care and support.

The Limits of Consent

Consent frameworks assume that people always know what they want, feel, and need.

But in practice, someone might:

- Say yes without being sure
- Notice discomfort too late
- Freeze or shut down
- Want to please
- Fear conflict
- Not recognize their own boundaries

Therefore, a yes doesn't always guarantee well-being.

Just because something is consented to doesn't necessarily mean it's fully desired, emotionally safe, or a good experience.

Goodwill: Doing Consent Better

Consent asks: Is it allowed?

Goodwill adds: Is this a good idea? Am I considering the other person or just my own desire?

It involves:

- Slowing down and checking in when there are doubts
- Seeking clarity without pressure
- Not taking advantage of ambiguity
- Not taking advantage of someone else's vulnerability
- Accepting frustration
- Stopping if the risk feels too high

Goodwill means actively prioritizing the other person's well-being, not just avoiding problems.

The more uncertainty or risk, the higher your level of care should be.

When Something Goes Wrong

People make mistakes, and sometimes unexpected things happen. As long as you engage with goodwill, you can help minimize the harm.

De-Escalate

Stop what you're doing, and **disengage** to the level where both parties feel comfortable enough to talk about it.

If they are frozen or in "shutdown" mode, give them time and space to regulate.

Listen

This is about the well-being of the other person, not you.

Listen without being defensive, and focus on understanding and **acknowledging the impact** on the person in distress.

Take Responsibility

Something going wrong **doesn't necessarily mean you did anything wrong**.

But, understand that **your actions contributed to someone being hurt**, and **you need to own that** rather than trying to explain your intentions.

Ask

Ask what the other person needs, **without pressure to re-engage**.

If they're not able to say, **offer concrete, non-threatening ideas** like giving them space, finding their friends, or sitting quietly together.

New Boundaries

If the other person is ok to re-engage with new boundaries in place, **respect the new boundaries, and continue carefully**.

If they need space, or not to be around you anymore, **respect that too**.

Learn

Whether you didn't notice signs of discomfort from the other person, there was a miscommunication, or an unexpected trauma response, learn from it, and try to do better in the future.



Consent Incident Reporting

Support After a Consent Violation

Consent Violations Happen

Intentional or not, consent violations happen.

It doesn't matter if someone was acting without enough care, or if they were being actively malicious or predatory, **it can be traumatic**.

The most important thing is to **take it seriously** and **get the support you need**.

The Safer Space

People trained to support you are available to talk. They can **listen, give advice or feedback, and/or give you support in reporting** the violation, **depending on what you need and want**.

They are available in **The Safer Space, a secure, private cabin near Welfare/Malfare**. It is **staffed 16:30 - 18:30 (4:30pm - 6:30pm) every day Tuesday - Sunday**. Someone is on call via Malfare during other times.

Taking Steps to Reduce Trauma

If your consent was violated, **it is not your fault**. **Trusting someone else is not a flaw** or weakness: if they took advantage of your trust, that's on them.

Trauma is increased and is more likely to lead to PTSD **if you feel powerless**, or are **unable to process what happened** to you.

If you don't feel ok engaging with the person who violated your consent, **there are resources available to support you at Elsewhere**.

Reporting Consent Violations

Reporting consent violations, whether big or small, **helps you process what happened**, as well as helping **create a safer environment for all of us**.

Consent violation report forms are available at Welfare, and can be placed in the reporting boxes near Welfare, or the yellow reporting tent in the Freecamping area.

Or, report online via the QR code on this page.

Remember! There is no such thing as perfect consent.

But there are **more careful and less careful ways of relating**.

As long as we **engage with care and goodwill**, and support each other as best we can, we will continue to **make this a safer environment for everyone** to grow, explore their desires and boundaries, and connect deeply with each other.

Let's all do our part to make that happen!

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Consent is not only about avoiding harm, but also about actively reducing the likelihood of causing it.



THANK YOU!

If you have any feedback or ideas to make this presentation better, please feel free to reach out via email at participantwellness@nobodies.team.