



HEALTH EDUCATION  
AND WELLNESS

**START THE CONVERSATION:  
DISCUSSING CONSENT  
WITH YOUR STUDENT**

Developed for you by the

**Center for Health  
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College is a time for your student to gain new experiences, build new friendships, and make new memories that will last a lifetime. As you prepare your student for this transition, there are a lot of good reasons to include a conversation about consent.


This resource will provide you with tools to help you prepare for an open dialogue with your student about consent. It includes important information on UT policies and procedures, the importance of discussing consent, and how consent is affected by substance use.

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is committed to a safe environment for all students.

As a parent, you are and will continue to be the primary influence in your student's life.



# Why You Need to Have This Conversation



Understanding how to gain  
and give consent can  
empower your student to  
speak assertively about  
what they do or do not want  
from an interaction.

When students arrive at college, they will likely find dating and relationship choices that are new or intensified. These issues can become even more complex when alcohol is involved. Relationships are an important component of college and young adulthood, but the issues of communication and choice can be complicated. Students must be guided to develop skills such as assertive communication and speaking up for their safety, as well as supporting the choices of others.

By following the suggestions provided here, you can help equip your student for the next steps in decision making. The time you spend will help strengthen the lines of communication within your family as you prepare for your student's years at UT and beyond.

**As you plan a conversation with your student about consent, it is important to incorporate two elements: the meaning of consent and how alcohol can affect an individual's ability to gain or give consent.**

#### **CONSENT DEFINED**

Consent is defined as an affirmative and voluntary agreement by a person to engage in a specific sexual act. Consent must be Voluntary, Obtained, Continual, and Affirmative (VOCA).

#### **CONSENT AND ALCOHOL**


Consent is a complex topic that can be difficult to talk about, especially when alcohol is involved. The University of Tennessee addresses alcohol and other factors in terms of incapacitation, a temporary or permanent physical or mental state in which a person cannot make informed, rational judgments.

**Alcohol can impair your student's ability to judge whether consent has been gained as well as impair their ability to give consent. The overwhelming majority of sexual assaults reported by college-age students involve alcohol.**

These conversations help students to recognize how they may impact others.

For full definitions and additional clarification on incapacitation and consent as defined by the University of Tennessee Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Relationship Violence, Stalking, and Retaliation, see the university's sexual misconduct and relationship violence web resource at [sexualassault.utk.edu](http://sexualassault.utk.edu).

# The Conversation



The consent conversation is not focused solely on empowering your student to say what they do or don't want; it must also empower them to know how to approach asking for consent.

## PLAN THE CONVERSATION

As with anything important, taking some time to set the stage and plan the details of this conversation will help it go more smoothly. Think about when and where you and your student can best talk. This is not a conversation to have over the phone, in a crowded public place, early in the morning, or as your student is heading out the door. You may want to talk at home, or consider going out to dinner or to a coffee shop. Wherever you choose, make sure it's a place where you both can be comfortable having a one-on-one conversation.

## GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED

With important conversations, sometimes the hardest part can be knowing how to begin. Here are a couple of ideas to help you get started:

*“You’ll be leaving for college soon. I’m excited for you, and I also want to prepare you for some critical decision making. I would like to talk to you about consent, and I want to make sure you are aware of your options. I know it might be hard to talk to me about it, but discussing difficult things is important. Would you mind giving me a few minutes to chat?”*

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*“You’ve probably heard about consent from your friends or other people, and I would like to talk with you about it as well. I feel like it’s one of the most important things I can do to prepare you for the choices you may face while at school. Do you mind talking with me for a few minutes about this?”*

### Keep These Pointers in Mind

- Ask your student about their views on consent.
- Listen to your student. Listening is the most important part of good communication. Be attentive and try not to be critical of your student.

- Give constructive feedback, share the facts, and debunk myths.
- Refrain from blanket statements like “Don’t get yourself in a bad situation.”
- Be wary of using such scare tactics as “If you drink, then . . .” to influence your student; this approach is inaccurate and ineffective. Although a majority of sexual assaults that occur involve alcohol, many do not.
- Collaborate with your student about ways they can articulate their boundaries. Empowering your student to state what they do and do not want can play a critical role in their safety.

Help plan ways for your student to ask for consent. The consent conversation is not solely focused on empowering your student to say what they do or don’t want; it must also empower them to know how to approach asking for consent. The process can break down into four easy steps:

1. **STOP**
2. **Ask for consent**
3. **LISTEN**
4. **Get consent**

If they have any doubt, they should consider the answer to the question

***“Did I get consent?”***

## KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

It is common for conversations about relationships to happen at more than just one sitting and for the depth of the conversation to evolve over time. Keeping the communication lines open can let your student know that you are there to discuss their safety and that you’ll continue to support them in making informed choices at UT.

**Big Orange. Big Ideas.®**

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