



HEALTH EDUCATION
AND WELLNESS



START THE CONVERSATION:
DISCUSSING CONSENT
WITH YOUR STUDENT

Developed for you by the

**Center for Health
Education & Wellness**
1800 Volunteer Blvd., Suite 201
Knoxville, TN 37996-3104
865-974-5725
wellness.utk.edu

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is committed to a safe environment for all students. While we have a duty to provide education to students, we recognize that as a parent or caregiver, you are and will continue to be the primary influence in your student's life.

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.

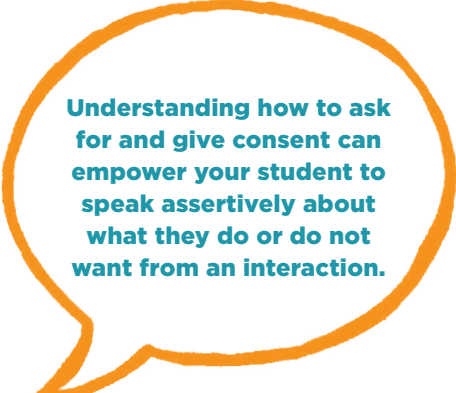
College is a time for your student to gain new experiences, build new friendships, and make new memories that will last a lifetime. As you prepare your student for this transition, there are a lot of good reasons to include a conversation about consent.



Why You Need to Have This Conversation

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.



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

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

Like many universities across the country, [UT's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Relationship Violence, Stalking, and Retaliation](#) applies to students, faculty and staff. For the purpose of this guide, basic definitions and information from this policy are provided. For full definitions and additional clarification, visit the university's sexual misconduct and relationship violence website titleix.utk.edu where you can review the policy and related resources.

CONSENT DEFINED

"Consent" means an active agreement to participate. Here are some topics to discuss around consent:

- It includes verbal and non-verbal communication. What does someone look like when they're interested? How can you tell if a person is "checked out"?
- Withdrawal of consent at any point is ok!
- Because alcohol can make consent confusing, you can think about consent like you think about driving. If someone is too intoxicated to operate a car, they are too intoxicated to consent.
- Healthy relationships have safety, which means being able to be honest. Practicing consent is also practicing safety.

COMMON MYTHS

- Once you give consent, you can't take it away.
- If someone isn't saying no, that means yes.

CONSENT AND ALCOHOL

Consent can be complex and hard to communicate, especially when alcohol is involved. The overwhelming majority of sexual assaults reported by college age students involve alcohol.

Alcohol can impair your student's ability to judge whether consent has been gained as well as impair their ability to give consent.

Incapacitation

Incapacitation means that a person lacks the ability to actively agree to sexual activity because the person is asleep, unconscious, under the influence of alcohol or other drugs such that the person does not have control over their body, is unaware that sexual activity is occurring, or their mental, physical or developmental abilities render them incapable to make rational informed decisions. Incapacitation is not the same as legal intoxication. A person who is incapacitated cannot give consent.

The Conversation

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 another 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?”

“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?”



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.

KEEP THESE POINTERS IN MIND

- Listen to your student. Listening is the most important part of good communication. Be attentive and try not to be critical of your student.
- Ask your student about their views on consent.
- Use a metaphor. Consent is practiced in everyday life! No one thinks it's ok to take someone's phone without asking or to pressure them if they say no. Consent applies to everyday life and its application is easily transferable to intimate relationships.
- 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 may discourage your student from listening.
- 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 your student plan ways 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.

Asking for consent can sound like and look like the following:

Verbal

- Yes!
- I'm sure
- That feels good
- I want this

Non-verbal

- Direct eye contact
- Pulling someone closer
- Nodding
- Relaxed facial expression

If they have any doubt, they should consider the answer to the question "Did I get consent?" If they are still unsure, they should consider the answer is no. Ask your student how they might respond if they do not have consent. Consent being an active agreement means it is ongoing, mutual, and can be withdrawn at any time. It's also important to note that consent to one activity does not mean consent to all activities.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

It is common for conversations about relationships to happen in more than just one sitting and for 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.



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