

# Middle School Scope and Sequence

## Personal Safety and Consent, Grade 8

### *Understanding and Applying Consent*



#### **PURPOSE**

Once students have a basic understanding of what consent means, it is important for them to apply it to situations that may be relevant to their lives, either it's immediately or in the future. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students are ready to apply the concept of consent to situations that may involve romantic partners and sexual activity.

#### **STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Participants will:

1. Be able to define consent.
2. Understand the challenge in interpreting non-verbal cues and the importance for clear, verbal communication around consent.
3. Apply the consent to possible real life situations.
4. Understand one's responsibility to ensure that affirmative consent is present when engaging in sexual activity.

#### **LESSON SUMMARY**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Minutes</b>	<b>Materials and Preparation Checklist</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Introduce the lesson and objectives you will be addressing around consent.
<b>Activity A: Introducing Consent</b> Consent Icebreaker <i>Hug, Handshake or High-Five or I always say Yes to This</i>	<b>15</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Review and select which Icebreaker you would like to use to introduce consent.
<b>Activity B: Defining Consent</b>	<b>15</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> White board or chart paper for writing the definition of consent. <input type="checkbox"/> If using video, set up projector for viewing
<b>Activity C: Practicing Consent – Consent Scenarios – <i>Consent? No Consent? or Unclear?</i></b>	<b>20</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing <i>Consent, No Consent, Unclear</i> headers on whiteboard or post on wall <input type="checkbox"/> Review and select scenario cards you will use for the activity <input type="checkbox"/> Optional: Laminate cards
<b>Final Wrap Up</b>	<b>5</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare exit slips or have notecards available for exit slip.

## INTRODUCTION

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### Welcome Class and introduce lesson by saying,

*Today we are going to take a look at how to know if someone is agreeing (or not agreeing) to something we want to do. This is also known as consent. In order to really look at this topic, we are going to do an icebreaker, spend some time defining consent, and apply consent to real life situations. Let's start with a fun activity that gets you up and moving around.*

## ACTIVITY A: Introducing Consent

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For this icebreaker, we've provided two options. You can select from *I Usually Say Yes to This*, or *Hug, Handshake, High Five*, to model affirmative consent. A full description of these activities are included at the back pages of this lesson.

## ACTIVITY B: Defining Consent

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*(This activity is adapted from Planned Parenthood)*

**I. Brainstorm** what consent means to them. Go over these definitions of consent:

- **Freely Given:** Shouldn't be under pressure or under the influence
- **Reversible:** Once given it's not permanent, a person can change their mind at anytime
- **Informed:** Someone should be clear what they are consenting to
- **Enthusiastic:** You can tell someone is giving it, both verbal and non-verbal
- **Specific:** Saying yes to one thing, doesn't mean saying yes to something else

## CONSENT



**F**reely Given  
**R**eversible  
**I**nformed  
**E**nthusiastic  
**S**pecific

 Planned Parenthood\*

**II. Show Video:** [Consent is Classic](#) or similar video that demonstrates positive consent.

### Ask

- *What did you see as signs of consent in the short interactions with each couple?*
- *What were some of the things people said or did when not giving consent?*
- *How did the other person respond?*

### III. Have students answer these questions individually or in small groups:

1. When can you know if someone is into you/or into something you want to do?
2. Why is clear, respectful communication—both ways—important?
3. What happens if you can't read someone else's signals?
4. Whose responsibility is it to make sure there is consent? (discuss asserter vs. gatekeeper in our culture)

## ACTIVITY C: Practicing Consent

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### Consent Scenarios

**1. Create headings—** *CONSENT*, *NO CONSENT*, and *UNCLEAR*. Write the headings on white board or on pieces of paper posted along a wall.

**2. Pass out scenarios.** Cut scenarios along dotted lines and pass out to pairs or small groups. Ask them to read their scenarios, discuss, and post them under the heading they think fits with the situation.

**3. Process in large group.** Go over the scenarios. You can ask each small group to explain why they posted the scenario under the respective headings. Ask students if they think the scenarios are under the correct headings. Explain why or why not. Move scenarios to another heading if the large group agrees it should be moved.

For situations that are *UNCLEAR* or *NO CONSENT*, ask students what could be done (particularly by the asker/initiator) to make sure there is consent?

Explain that Consent isn't just about the absence of a NO. Have students give examples of situations in which a person might not say No?

Possible answers include: *Not sure how they feel in the moment, frightened, hadn't thought it through beforehand, feel pressured, feel guilty, power imbalance, raised in a culture where it's not okay to say no, don't want to hurt someone's feelings, don't want to lose a partner, want to avoid conflict.*

*Explain:*

Consent is not just about a verbal yes or no. It's important to pay attention to someone's body language and what they might not be saying. Think about the situation and whether the person might feel pressured or unable to say no. Non-verbal clues can give a lot of information. But talking/communicating is really the key to ensuring consent is present.

## FINAL WRAP UP

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### I. Close the lesson by summarizing the key learnings

**Say,** *It can be difficult to tell what someone wants or doesn't want by their body language or non-verbal communication. Even so, it's important to observe and pay attention to those cues. To make sure consent is present in situations remember these three things:*

- 1. Listen to one another's words and observe their body language.*
- 2. Say what you like or don't like and how you feel. Someone else might not know how you're feeling unless you tell them.*
- 3. Respect others boundaries. We can't really tell what someone really feels or wants unless we stop what we're doing and ask them.*

### II. Assess student understanding of consent

Hand out notecards or slips of paper and ask students to answer the following:

- What is one thing that you can do to make sure someone is agreeing or consenting to an activity?
- What is one thing you can say to someone else if you are not feeling comfortable with or agreeing to an activity or situation?

## Hug, Handshake, High Five

**Instructions:** Tell students that they are going to do an activity in which they can hug, shake hands with, or high-five their classmates.

**During the first round,** tell students to walk around the room and greet other people with a hug, handshake, or high five *nonverbally*. Students can only communicate what level of contact they want using their facial expressions and body language. Students have to try to come to a consensus on what type of contact they want before greeting each other. Have students walk around and repeat the process until they've greeted 3-4 people.

**During the second round,** tell students to do the same thing, only this time *half the students are allowed to talk*, and half must remain silent (try to divide the class with a neutral variable, like birthday or shirt color).

Finally, **do a third round** where *everyone is allowed to talk*.

**Ask the students the following processing questions:**

1. *How did it feel to navigate personal boundaries when no one could talk?*

Affirm that it is uncomfortable to be in a relationship when you can't communicate your desires or boundaries. Even if you can read people's body language that in many situations, including romantic situations, body language might be harder to read and can be influenced by things like intoxication or nervousness.

2. *How did it feel to know someone might misinterpret your body language?*

Students might answer that they weren't sure if someone was going to misinterpret their body language or that they exaggerated their body movements to ensure that their message got across. Affirm that it's common for people to be in a situation where one person communicates more easily and more openly than the other, and this makes asking questions and checking in even more important.

3. *In the situation where only one person could talk, how did you make the decision about what kind of contact you were going to have?*

Affirm that in every relationship and intimate situation, there are different power dynamics that can influence who has a louder voice.

4. *When everyone could talk, was there any change in the type of contact people had?*

A lot of times, communication makes things feel easier! Students might find that they felt more comfortable hugging each other when they were able to talk about it.

# I Usually Say Yes to This

Adapted from Gina Lepore, MEd | November 16, 2017, *Research Associate, ETR*

Here's an engaging and powerful activity that's a great way to introduce a learning process related to consent in sexual or romantic relationships. It's ideal for a Training of Educators or Training of Trainers. With adaptation, it can also be used as a classroom activity with teens or young adults.

**Title:** I Usually Say Yes to This

**Setting:** In-person training event

**Time:** 15-20 minutes

## Purpose

1. To experience and examine some of the dynamics that can make setting clear boundaries a challenge.
2. To explore the relationship between consent and group norms.
3. To begin to draw inferences about real-life situations where young people might feel pressures or experience confusion about expressing consent and setting personal boundaries.

**Best Used:** As a priming activity for a session addressing issues related to consent. The activity works best in a group that has already established familiarity and trust.

## Materials:

- Lightweight ball for tossing around the room between participants.
- (Optional) Chime or bell to call attention if necessary.

## Steps

### *Describe and Demonstrate the Game*

1. **Introduce the activity.** Say: "Before we begin the next activity, let's play a game. The game is called *I Usually Say Yes to This*."
2. **Invite participants to reflect.** Ask participants to take a moment to think of some activity or food they really love and pretty much always say yes to. This might be a hike, watching a movie, chocolate, pizza, or anything else they really enjoy.

Offer an example of something that *you* usually say yes to (e.g., "For instance, I love dark chocolate and I will always say yes if someone offers me some good dark chocolate.") Give everyone a moment to think of something they enjoy.

3. **Ask participants to stand.** If space allows, ask participants to stand and form a circle. Otherwise, participants may remain at tables or desks as long as they are close enough to toss ball to one another.

**Note:** Remember to make appropriate accommodations if you have participants who are not able to stand, or cannot do so easily.

4. **Demonstrate the game.** Hold the ball in your hands. Say: "Here's how the game will work. I'll start by saying my name and the thing I love. Then I'll toss the ball to someone else. That person will say their name and the thing they enjoy, then toss the ball to someone else."

Answer any questions.

5. **Optional:** If you have a large group and it will be confusing for participants to remember who has already had a turn, ask participants to (1) share in order clockwise around the circle, or (2) share in order in a linear fashion, or (3) sit once they have shared.

*Play the Game*

6. **Play the game.** Say: "Ready?" When participants agree, say, "Ok, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I usually say yes to \_\_\_\_\_." Then toss ball.
7. **Have participants partner up.** When all participants have had a turn, ask them to partner up with someone close by.
8. **Explore No's.** Say: "Introduce yourself to your partner if you don't already know each other. Then take just a moment to share one thing you usually say no to. For example, I've never liked \_\_\_\_\_. So that's something I will always say no to."

"When both of you have shared a no, give each other a high five or a fist bump, then end your conversation so I know that you've finished. Stand quietly with your partner and wait for the next instruction."

Wait for all participants to finish (or, if they continue talking, use a chime to gather attention).

**Facilitator Note:** This next step, Step 9, requires you to pay close attention to participants' reactions. Time your instructions so you can stop participants before they complete the "exchange shoes" action. Keep your tone at the "STOP" segment light and humorous, rather than authoritarian. If two people actually put each others' shoes on before you stop the group, that's okay. You can use it in the debrief.

9. **Give a surprise instruction:** Say: "Okay, here's the last part of our game. Everyone please remove your right shoe (pause). Exchange your shoe with your partner (pause). Put your partner's shoe on (brief pause). Okay, STOP! Never mind. You do not actually have to put on your partner's shoe!"

Notice participants' reactions and use them to transition to debrief.

## Debrief

### 10. **Talk about the things you noticed as facilitator.** Here are some ideas:

- I noticed that (names of two participants) went ahead and put on each other's shoes before I could stop them! (Address the pair by name) Did you feel comfortable enough with each other to exchange shoes? Why was that the case?
- I noticed that (insert participant name) stopped and hesitated and looked at me with surprise. Can you tell us what you were thinking in that moment?
- I saw that most of you were very comfortable with the first two parts of the game, but I could see a shift in your body language when I asked you to exchange shoes. Who was uncomfortable? Who was uncomfortable but willing to go along with the game, anyway? Why was that the case?

Look for responses such as, "I trusted you;" "I figured you had a reason for asking, so I was willing to go along;" "You're the facilitator and we're expected to do what you say."

### 11. **Ask participants about their reactions.** Here are some ideas:

- Would you have felt differently if we had done this at the very beginning of the training, when we first met?
- If I had not stopped the activity, what would you have done?
- How do you think this game would have gone differently if I'd said before we started, "You can stop at any time if you are uncomfortable"?

### 12. **Affirm lessons learned.** Your goal is to help participants recognize that dynamics such as trust and power create secondary pressure to participate, even when someone is uncomfortable or unclear. Possible discussion points:

- Everyone has different comfort levels with different activities. Everyone has different limits, and we need to help young people learn to check for and respect their own and one another's limits.
- Sometimes we do things we're not comfortable with, especially if others around us *seem* to be comfortable. We don't speak up for a variety of reasons. These include social pressure, relationship dynamics, a sense of trust, a desire to participate and be agreeable. We can think of this as primary, or direct, pressure.
  - For instance, you may trust me as your facilitator because we have been working together already, or we've done other activities together and you felt comfortable with me.
- You may also have felt that you should go along with the instructions because the person next to you was willing to do so, or because another pair in the room was comfortable. This is especially likely if those other people are your friends or people you look up to.



- Sometimes pre-established norms or relationships add pressure to do things even if pressure is not explicit in the moment. We can think of this as secondary, or indirect, pressure.
  - For instance, it is a norm in our society that a teacher or facilitator has some amount of power over us. We are expected to go along with the instructions given by that person. Refusing to participate, or even requesting not to participate, might be seen as rebelliousness or disrespect.

That kind of pressure is secondary pressure. It may not be coming directly from the present situation, but rather from our preconceived expectations of one another, or our norms.

### *Closure*

13. **Invite participant reflection.** Ask: "What does this activity remind you of? What are some other situations where people might agree to go along with something even if they're uncomfortable, or where they may not speak up about their limits?"

Look for responses that mention sexual situations and consent.

14. **Affirm lessons learned.** Affirm that in sexual situations, people may have different levels of comfort, different limits, a sense of intimacy and trust, a desire to please, or a sense of obligation to participate (due to either primary or secondary pressure). Communicating about boundaries can be difficult in these instances.

This is why it is important that people check in frequently with partners, pay attention to their body language as well as their words, and be prepared to stop if unsure about proceeding for any reason, whether the other person actually says no or not.

15. **Discuss relevance for youth.** Ask participants if the things they have learned in this activity would be useful for the youth they work with. How would they adapt this kind of activity for a youth workshop or classroom?
16. **Conclude the activity.** Say, "Ideally, people will always feel free to enjoy what is happening and also to stop anytime that feeling changes. Good communication in relationships includes being able to say both yes and no authentically, according to each person's own desires and limits. We want young people to understand how important it is to check in with partners to see if they're both on board for the same things, especially in romantic and sexual situations."

You can add the following as a transition to additional learning activities related to consent. "As we move through our activities today, stay open to feelings of slight discomfort—these can be a sign of learning. Please also feel empowered to speak up if you're uncertain about a topic or activity. That gives us all an opportunity to check in with ourselves."

Thank participants for their participation and engagement.

### Adapting for Classroom Work

- Use with classrooms that have already met for some period of time and have established trust with each other and the instructor.

- Make sure Group Agreements or Groundrules are an established part of the class before embarking on this activity. Refer back to these agreements if needed during the activity.
- Change language as appropriate (e.g., “classroom” instead of “training,” “teacher” rather than “facilitator”), and shift the focus so you’re not talking *about* youth, but instead are talking *with* youth.
- In discussions, avoid asking youth to share personal stories involving sexual experiences. However, you might ask them to talk about movies or TV shows where these dynamics have occurred, or non-romantic instances with friends or partners (for example, choosing a movie or a place to eat, what to do on Friday night, what music to listen to).

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You're talking to someone you really have a crush on. You ask if they want to hang out sometime. They say "maybe...but I prefer to hang out with friends."

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You see someone you like at a party. You start a conversation and after a while get closer and try to put your arm around them. They keep talking, but back away and cross their arms over their chest.

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You meet someone new when you're out with friends. You ask if you can I have their number. They say "Yeah, sure..I'll message you."

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You're about to have sex with your partner for the first time. You ask them if they have protection. They say "uh, yeah..hey...don't worry about it."

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You start kissing your partner, and they tell you they're really tired.

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You've been hanging out with someone at a party. You can tell they're getting drunk. You ask them if they wanna go upstairs. They fall all over the place, and say, slurring their speech, "uh.....yeah, why not?"

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You ask someone you've just started hanging out with if they're interested in taking the relationship farther. They say "yeah, I'd love that."

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You had sex with someone at a party a few weeks ago. The next time you're together, you move right in and start making out with them. They pull back and seem stand-offish, even though they were really into it the last time.

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You've been dating someone for a while. You tell them that you want to take the relationship to a new level. They act surprised but don't really say anything and change the subject.

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You're making out with your partner—they seem into it, but say they aren't ready to have sex. You stop what you're doing and say "yeah, whatever, I thought you loved me". They say, okay, I guess we can do it if that's what you want."  
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You've been texting someone you really like and all of a sudden they stop responding.  
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You're walking home with someone you've always had a crush on. You reach for their hand and say "is this okay?" They nod and smile.  
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You're alone with someone you've been hanging out with a lot recently. All of a sudden one day you lean over and kiss them. They look at you confused. You kiss them again thinking they're just surprised.  
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You're at a dance and make eye contact with someone really attractive across the room. They come over and ask you to dance. They get closer and closer, touching you a lot as the night goes on. At the end of the night you make plans to get together again.

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You've been kind of dating someone and all of a sudden they start saying they're too busy every time you want to get together.

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You meet someone and really hit it off. You have this urge to kiss them, so you ask "can I kiss you"...they say "yes..what have you been waiting for?!"

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You're making out with someone and put your hands under their shirt. They are still kissing you, but say "let's keep our clothes on" so you back off a bit and keep making out.

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You are on a first date and ask someone if you can come inside when you drop them off, knowing that no one else is home. They say, “not tonight, but let’s do this again soon.”

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You get up the nerve to ask someone you really like to prom. They act surprised but blush and give you a huge smile. They say they’d love to.

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You’ve been having sex with your partner and one day you try something new. All of a sudden they stop responding back to your new moves.

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You’re flirting with someone at a party. You’re not really into them as much as they seem to be into you. You figure you could get pretty far with them. After a few drinks, you go for it. The person seems really into it too—like they’ve just been waiting for you to make the first move.

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**Consent**

**No Consent**

**Unclear**