

# LET'S MAKE CONSENT A CONVERSATION

A GUIDE TO SEXUAL CONSENT AT OBERLIN COLLEGE

In a few weeks you'll be on campus meeting new people and learning about Oberlin's community values. One of those values is clear sexual consent. Sex and consent can be difficult things to talk about, so the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion has put together the basics to help you begin to feel more comfortable expressing consent. The quotes below come directly from other Obies who have asked us to share this information with you.

### WHAT IS CONSENT?

Oberlin's sexual misconduct policy says consent is clear when it includes the following four elements:

- **informed** (everyone knows what is going to happen);
- **freely and actively given** (it's not coerced, passive, or reluctant);
- **mutually understandable** (it is given in a clear and unambiguous manner);
- and **specific to a given situation** (consent to one thing does not mean consent to all things, and consent today does not imply consent tomorrow).

### WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT THIS?

Even if you aren't having sex, principles of good consent are useful beyond

just sexual activities. What if you want to hug one of your friends or have a conversation about a sensitive topic? How will you know if it is okay with them? Using the principles of consent can help to ensure we are not crossing others' boundaries.

### WHAT DOES CONSENT LOOK LIKE?

To practice clear consent, you and your partner should check in early and often. Consent is ideally verbal. The best consent is a back and forth asking and affirming. Asking might sound like this: "Can I kiss you?" "Is this okay?" "Would you like me to keep going?" "Does this feel good?" If you don't receive a clear "yes," either verbally or physically, there is no consent.

Consent can happen non-verbally. Nodding and smiling might be ways to tell your partner you're happy and enjoying what's going on. If your partner looks uncomfortable, it's time to check in. Are they tense, unresponsive, or quiet? Say something like, "Let me know if you want me to stop," or "You don't seem super into to this, am I misreading or do you wanna take a break?"

### WHAT SHOULD I SAY IF I WANT TO STOP OR IF I'M NOT SURE WHAT I WANT?

Clear consent also means communicating in a mutually understandable way when you want to stop. "Hey can we take a break?" "Want to just watch TV instead?" "I don't know if I actually want to do this." "Stop." "I'm not feeling it

right now.” “I want to take it a bit slower.” “I don’t really feel like it right now.” “Actually, I want to wait.” If non-verbal communication is easier for you, you and your partner may want to agree on a signal that means you want to stop, like snapping or slapping the wall.

### HOW DO POWER DYNAMICS AFFECT HOW I GIVE OR ASK FOR CONSENT?

There are power dynamics that can influence how comfortable someone is with giving or asking for consent. For example, a first-year might feel pressure to say yes to more than they’re comfortable with when hooking up with an upperclassman. It’s important to consider how holding a position of power or not can influence a situation, especially when it comes to sex.

### HOW DO YOU GET OVER THAT SELF-CONSCIOUS SIDE THAT ASKING FOR CONSENT IS WEIRD OR AWKWARD?

You might feel awkward the first few times you talk to your partner about what you want. The more you do it, the more normal it will feel. And the more that members of the Oberlin community do it, the more it will be

expected. Strategies for talking about consent might include planning ahead and thinking about what you would say when asking for consent or responding yes or no to a partner. It’s also important to practice asserting your boundaries in nonsexual situations. Saying “no” or not being into a particular sexual activity (or nonsexual activity) is okay.

### CAN YOU TRUST IF YOUR PARTNER IS CLEAR-MINDED ENOUGH TO GIVE CONSENT IF THEY’VE BEEN DRINKING OR DOING DRUGS?

The majority of sexual misconduct reports made to the college involve incapacitation through alcohol or drugs. Recognizing the signs of incapacitation is crucial. If someone is slurring words, stumbling, has unfocused eyes, or is throwing up, they may be incapacitated. You should take these signs seriously and as an indicator that someone is too intoxicated to have sex. Some people are able to consent after having a couple of drinks, but this can be tricky since incapacitation may not look the same on everyone, and not everyone recognizes their own incapacitation. Consider not having sex unless you’ve spoken about it with your partner

beforehand (i.e. while sober) and agreed on a certain level of comfort with non-sober sexual activity. If you decide to have sex when one or both of you have been drinking or doing drugs, check in more frequently to make sure your partner is sure about responding “yes.”

### WHAT IF I SEE THAT MY FRIEND IS DRUNK AND IS TRYING TO HOOK UP WITH SOMEONE?

If you see someone who is incapacitated and in an unsafe situation, it might be time to intervene. Follow these steps: **1. Trust your gut.** If something looks unsafe, it probably is. **2. Stay safe.** Don’t put yourself in a bad situation. Call campus security at 440-775-8911, the Oberlin Police Department at 911, or tell your RA. **3. Intervene,** if possible, by checking in with the people involved, creating a distraction, or offering someone assistance getting home. You could say, “Do you want to go to the bathroom?” “Want to go outside for a second?” “I’m feeling sick. Can we go home?”

These steps are covered in more detail during the Bystander Intervention workshop (mentioned on the next page).

## REQUIRED TRAINING FOR FIRST-YEAR AND TRANSFER STUDENTS

First-year and transfer students are **required** to attend two training workshops related to consent this year. The workshops are small-group, peer-led sessions that are facilitated by trainers from PRSM (Preventing and Responding to Sexual Misconduct). PRSM is overseen by the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

- Watch for announcements in September to sign up PRSM Consent Essentials. This two-hour workshop covers consent, alcohol and sexual misconduct, and intimate partner violence. The focus is on prevention and developing good consent practices, an important step in creating a safe community for all students.
- In February, first-year and transfer students will sign up to attend PRSM Bystander Intervention, a two-hour training that discusses how members of the Oberlin community have a responsibility to prevent sexual misconduct, identifies potential barriers to intervening, and introduces the skills to safely intervene. A large portion of the workshop includes discussions about alcohol and social situations where alcohol is likely to be present.

## TRAINING FOR ALL STUDENTS

Athletic teams, student groups, and residence halls can request training through PRSM by emailing [PRSM@oberlin.edu](mailto:PRSM@oberlin.edu). Some of the workshops we offer are listed here:

**Bystander Intervention** is the same workshop that's listed above. We're able to modify the workshop to be a refresher since all of our community will have already attended at least once.

**Consent 201** expands on ideas discussed in PRSM Essentials. It explores consent: how to ask for it, how to give it, and how to navigate Oberlin-specific factors that complicate it.

**Consent for Men** is designed for people who identify as men. It discusses enthusiastic consent and why we should all be using it.

**Party Planning** discusses ways to promote a safe campus and community. It covers fire emergencies, overcrowding, serving alcohol, and interacting with law enforcement.

**Support Skills** helps students develop skills that would be useful when supporting someone who has experienced harm.

**Healthy Relationships** explores unhealthy norms we establish in all types of relationships and uplifts the healthy behaviors that foster communication.

The Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion **oversees the implementation of the sexual misconduct policy. The EDI website is full of information and resources: [go.oberlin.edu/EDI](http://go.oberlin.edu/EDI)**

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