



# HOW TO TALK

TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT CONSENT



## CONSENT IS ABOUT SAYING YES.

To give consent means you have freely agreed (or said yes) to something. Sounds simple, right? It's a bit more nuanced than that. It's only true consent IF the person has not been pressured, coerced or manipulated to say yes. So, if someone has felt intimidated or threatened then their "yes" is not consent. It's not a real yes because they only agreed to kiss you or let you read their diary because they felt scared or intimidated by you. Similarly, if someone is intoxicated (drunk) or asleep or under the influence of any substance then they cannot give you true consent. For someone to give you consent they have to give it freely with no pressure and be in their right mind.

## HERE ARE THE KEY POINTS:

- Consent is agreeing to something without pressure or intimidation.
- Consent can only be given by someone who is fully mentally present.
- Consent can be given and it can also be withdrawn. When consent is withdrawn the other person has to stop.
- Consent is NOT ongoing. This is especially true for sexual encounters. You can consent to one thing (e.g. kissing) but not consent

to something else (e.g. someone unzipping your dress). You can consent to kissing NOW but want to stop (thereby withdrawing you consent) in 15 minutes time. Consent tonight is not consent tomorrow night.

- Someone saying nothing is not consent. A lack of "no" does not equal a yes.

So, in other words you can say YES to something today and say NO to the same thing tomorrow. Or even an hour later. You can change your mind. For younger kids consent is about the right they have to let other people touch or not touch their bodies. Or their belongings. Parents can help teach consent by clearly asking permission, "Can I come into your bedroom?" "Can I have a chip off your plate?" "Did you ask permission (or consent) before you went into your sister's bedroom?" This helps set the tone of what consent looks and feels like.

Helping kids to read body language and facial expressions is also key. Someone might say "Yes" but their body language, tone of voice and facial expression may say something else – that they are unenthusiastic or scared.



## BOUNDARIES

Our friendships and relationships are only as good as our boundaries. We want to teach our kids about honouring their own personal boundaries as well as the boundaries of others. You may have a child who doesn't like hugging. That's totally okay and that's one of his or her boundaries. In a romantic relationship there may be a young teen who isn't comfortable kissing but likes holding hands. The biggest point is that boundaries can shift – but that shift can be forwards or backwards. You can suddenly decide you are comfortable with something (holding hands, kissing, hugging Auntie Sue or Uncle Dave) and then change your mind. Boundaries are moveable, and our kids are allowed to move their boundaries if they feel uncomfortable.

It's also important to communicate our boundaries to help avoid confusion.

## ENTHUSIASTIC YES

This is a terrific way to talk through consent. If it's not an ENTHUSIASTIC YES – then it's a no. What does enthusiastic consent look like? It's subjective but it means PAYING ATTENTION to someone's physical and emotional cues. Someone not saying anything or not moving is not consent. We want to teach our kids how to tell if someone is enthusiastic and interested in whatever you have proposed whether that's sex, going for a swim or attending a Nickelback concert.

## HOW TO SAY NO (ADVICE FROM KIDS HELPLINE)

There are many different ways to say no. A no said in any way should always be respected.

### SOME STRATEGIES FOR SAYING NO WHEN IT'S HARD TO DO:

- A polite no. E.g. "No, thank you".
- Reinforcing a boundary - "I feel (emotion), when (behaviour). I am going to (action/ boundary)." E.g. "I feel anxious when you burst into the bathroom without knocking. I am going to lock the door."
- Directing behaviour - "I feel (emotion), when (behaviour). I would like it if you could (preferred action)." E.g. "I feel angry when you use my phone without asking. I would like it if you could please ask next time."
- Offer an alternative. E.g. "Actually, we could try it this way instead..."
- Express polite doubt. E.g. "Maybe I see it differently, but I thought it would be better if we just hug goodbye, rather than kiss goodbye."
- Delay/be non-committal. E.g. "Maybe we could do that... but I have to ask my dad first."

If someone tries to challenge your no, rather than justify yourself, turn the question back on them.

E.g. A: "No." B: "Why not?" A: "Why should I do that?" B: "Well, because..." A: "Thanks for explaining that. My answer is still no."

### THINGS THAT MAKE NO HARDER (ADVICE FROM KIDS HELPLINE)

Saying no can actually be harder than it seems! Things like the power dynamic between two people (real or perceived), or how your body and brain respond to stress can make a big difference to our capacity to say no. For instance, a child may find it hard to say no to an adult. A child that sees themselves as "unpopular" might find it hard to say no to someone who they view as more "popular". Saying no with an audience present can be hard (i.e. peer pressure). And someone who is very stressed may experience a fight/flight/freeze response which might make it hard to find the right

words to express themselves, could make them react with aggression rather than say a polite "no thanks" or may even make them freeze/unable to say no.

### LET YOUR CHILD KNOW THAT:

- It's okay to refuse an adult if they feel uncomfortable/unsafe. Saying no isn't the same as 'being rude'. E.g. "Sorry, I don't give out personal information about myself over the internet".
- If they say no to someone because they feel uncomfortable, you will support them in that decision.
- If they see a situation involving multiple people where someone else feels uncomfortable and it's safe to do so, they can be an upstander by asking the person if they are okay and reinforcing a boundary. E.g. "Hey, are you okay with that? No? Me either! Guys, stop doing that - we don't do that here."
- If someone crosses your boundary, it is not your fault - even if you didn't say no.
- It's never too late to get help!

### CONSENT IS LIKE A CUP OF TEA

[This brilliant British video](#) was made by Thames Police force in the UK to help teach people about the concept of consent.

### CONSENT VIDEO FOR YOUNGER KIDS

[This is a great video](#) which talks about the concept of consent to do with other people wanting to touch our bodies. It covers everything from the fact that you don't have to hug people to inappropriate touching of our genitals.

### CLEMENTINE FORD AND THE ROYALS: LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX [Watch Video](#)

### COURTNEY ACT TALKS ABOUT CONSENT [Watch Video](#)

[WELCOME TO CONSENT: How to Say No, When to Say Yes and Everything in Between](#) BY YUMI STYNES AND DR MELISSA KANG [Learn More](#)

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

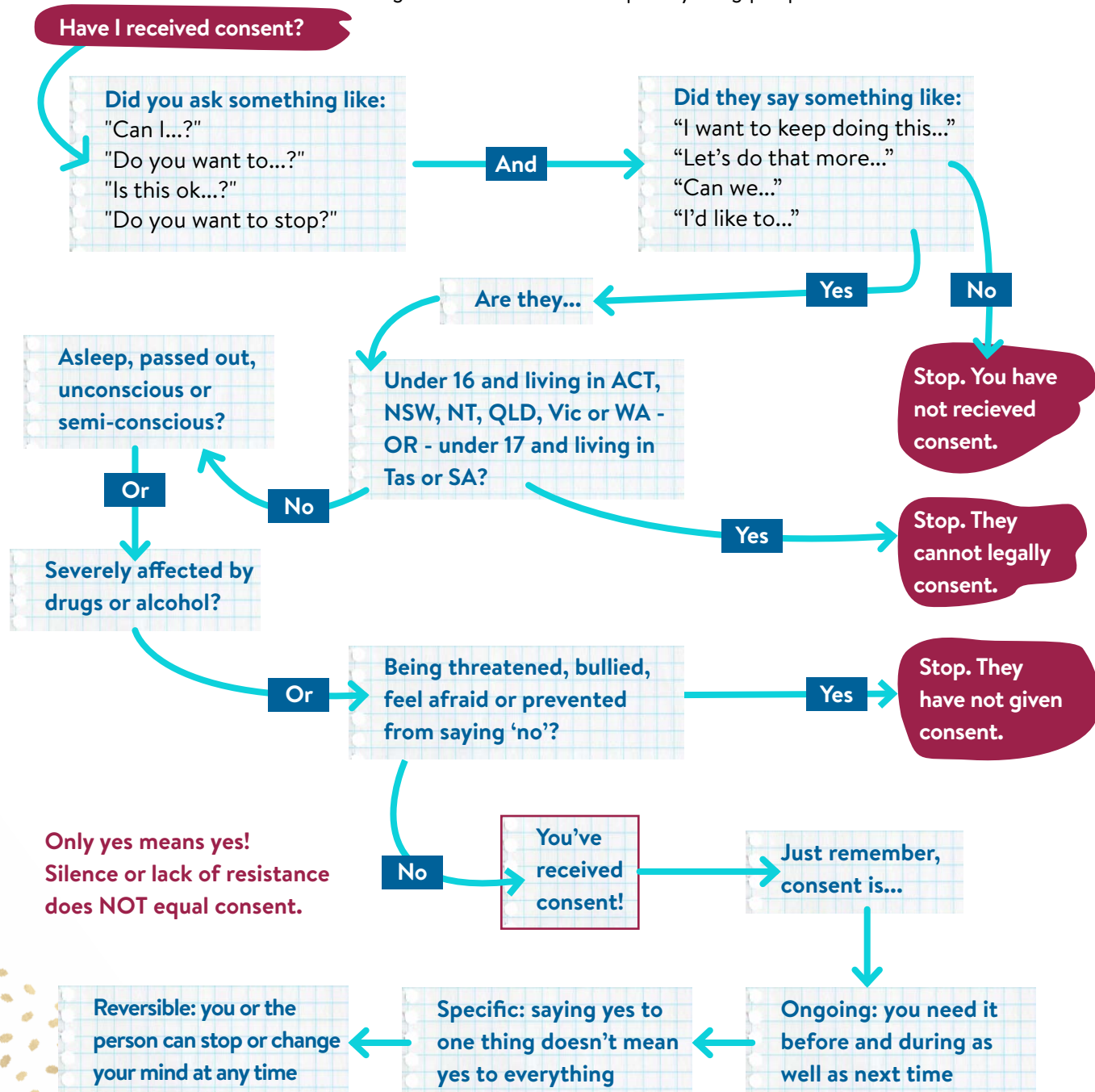
**Kids Helpline** is Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.  
Tel: 1800 55 1800

**ReachOut** Australia's leading online mental health organisation for young people and their parents

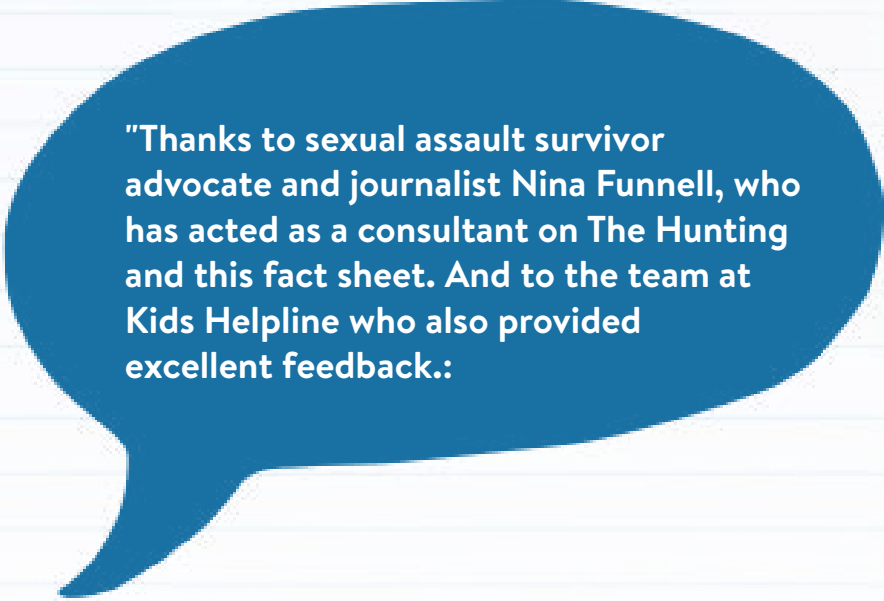
**1800 RESPECT** National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service Tel: 1800 737 732

**The Line** A website offering excellent tools designed to look at what's okay and what's not okay in sex, dating and relationships.

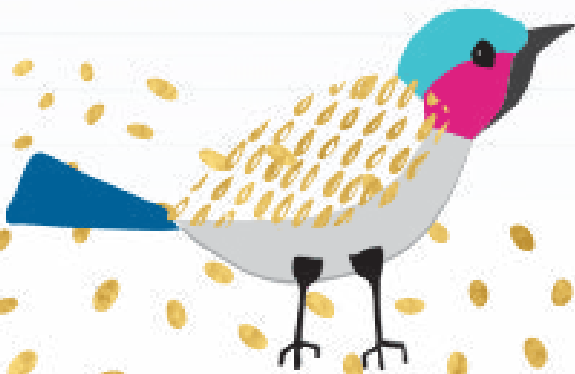
**Youth Law Centre** Free confidential legal information and help for young people under 25.



Source: Kids Helpline



"Thanks to sexual assault survivor advocate and journalist Nina Funnell, who has acted as a consultant on *The Hunting* and this fact sheet. And to the team at Kids Helpline who also provided excellent feedback.:



## About Rebecca

### OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS...

Rebecca Sparrow has been a travel writer, a magazine editor, a newspaper columnist, a TV scriptwriter and a novelist. She is perhaps best-known as the author of three best-selling non-fiction books for teenage girls designed to help them navigate those tricky high school years. Those books include *Find Your Tribe (and 9 other things I wish I'd known in high school)*; *Find Your Feet (The 8 things I Wish I'd Known Before I Left High School)* and the best-selling *Ask Me Anything (heartfelt answers to 65 anonymous questions from teenage girls)*.

Aside from writing books Rebecca writes for Mamamia, plays agony aunt to teenage girls on the [Ask Me Anything podcast](#) and runs an online course called [The Lighthouse Plan](#) to help parents build deeper bonds with their daughters. She is also co-captain of [three online book clubs](#) for kids, teens and adults. Bec talks to thousands of high school students every year about friendship, resilience, giving back and life online, and is also an ambassador for The Pyjama Foundation and ReachOut Parents. In 2018 she was invited to be a member of the Queensland Government's Anti-Cyber Bullying Taskforce. She is a mother to three kids (including one tween girl!)