



# Healthy Relationships

Discussion Guides for Adults with Disabilities, Family Members & Guardians

## What is Consent?

### The Importance of Consent

**Consent helps you feel safe and in control.** It means knowing your rights, building good relationships, and setting clear boundaries. Learning about consent is especially important for those with disabilities. Knowledge about consent can help people with disabilities stay safe and avoid problems. This guide will show you how to talk about boundaries and respect them in any kind of relationship.

### Understanding Consent

**Consent means giving a clear, informed “yes” or “no” with understanding and without pressure.** Consent is about making sure that both people agree to do the same thing in the same way, at the same time. It means:

- **Clear:** Consent should be direct—someone says “yes” or gives an obvious, positive signal.
- **Informed:** People need to know all the important details to make a choice.
- **Without Pressure:** Consent only counts if it's given freely, without any pressure, guilt, or force.
- **Adjustable:** Consent can be taken back at any time. If someone changes their mind, their “no” should always be respected.

### Quick Tip!

#### Set Communication Guidelines



Agree on **verbal and nonverbal signals** for stressful conversations.



Examples:  
Thumbs up = yes  
Palm out = stop  
Rotating finger = repeat



Use what works best for you, like hand signals, code words, or communication boards.



Practice in easy, fun ways, like talking about favorite foods or movies.

**Clear communication helps everyone feel heard and safe!**



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Consent isn't only for romantic situations. It's part of all relationships, like friendships, family, and work. Communicating clearly about consent helps people feel safe and respected.

**Consent starts with knowing how you feel.** Before you can say "yes" or "no" to something, it's important to check in with your body. Our bodies often send signals when something feels good or when something feels wrong. By learning to listen to these signals, you can make sure you're making choices that are right for you. Taking a moment to check in with yourself can help you decide what you need in a situation and give you the confidence to express it.

## Body Check-In: Case Study

**In this section, we'll practice applying the idea of consent to a real-life situation.** The goal is to think about how to use what you've learned about consent in a practical scenario.

**Background:** Maya is a caregiver for Sam, a teenager who loves visiting the park every afternoon. Maya, who uses a wheelchair, prefers to communicate with gestures and facial expressions. Sam is autistic and he communicates best with direct language. He has some sensory sensitivities, including a dislike for physical touch.

**Situation:** One day, Sam decides he wants to go to the park and, without asking, begins pushing Maya's wheelchair toward the door, assuming she'll want to join. Maya feels uncomfortable with Sam pushing her chair without asking but isn't sure how to let him know.



### Discussion Questions:

1. What does your body feel like when you're calm and safe?
2. What does it feel like when something is wrong or uncomfortable?
3. Can you think of a time when you felt uncomfortable or tense? What did your body tell you?
4. How can listening to your body help you decide when to say "yes" or "no"?



### Discussion Questions:

- What's happening between Sam and Maya in this situation?
- How could Sam ask Maya if she wants to go to the park?
- How might Maya express her feelings in a positive way?
- If Maya says she doesn't want to go, what could Sam do to make her feel comfortable without pressuring her?
- Why is it important for Sam and Maya to communicate in ways they both understand?



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## Example Dialogue

**Talking about consent can feel tricky sometimes.** Practicing real-life examples can help you feel more confident. Below are examples of how to talk about consent in both healthy and unhealthy ways.

### Healthy Examples



**Person A:** “Can we talk about consent in a way we’re both comfortable with?”

**Person B:** “Sure. What’s on your mind?”

**Person A:** “I just want to make sure we’re on the same page.”



**Person A:** “What do you think makes a relationship healthy?”

**Person B:** “Probably trust and respect. What about you?”

**Person A:** “I agree! I think good communication is really important too.”

### Unhealthy Examples



**Person A:** “You have to tell me everything you’re thinking. That’s how relationships work.”

**Person B:** “I don’t feel comfortable sharing everything.”

**Person A:** “Well, if you trust me, you’d do it.”



**Person A:** “If you cared about me, you’d agree with the way I want you to do things.”

**Person B:** “But I’m not sure I’m okay with that.”

**Person A:** “You’re overthinking it. Just do it.”

## Practice! Asking for a Hug

**Roleplay asking for a hug with your loved one.** Take turns being the one asking for a hug and the one responding. When it’s your turn to ask, practice using clear, respectful language like, “Can I give you a hug?” or “Would you like a hug?” When it’s your turn to respond, try saying both “yes” and “no” in a calm and confident way. Practice using words, gestures, or body language to show your answer.

Take turns and try different answers. Pay attention to how it feels to ask for a hug and to say yes or no. Practice using healthy communication and respecting boundaries.



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## Discussion Questions:

1. How did it feel to ask for a hug using clear language?
2. How did it feel to say “yes” or “no” to a hug?
3. Were there any moments when it felt awkward or uncomfortable? Why?
4. Did you feel respected when someone asked for a hug? Why or why not?
5. What made it easier or harder to say “no” to a hug?
6. How did you know if the other person felt comfortable with the hug or not?

## Wrapping Up the Conversation

**Consent is an ongoing process.** It’s not just something that happens once—it’s something we keep talking about and checking in on as we grow and change. Sometimes consent can be confusing, and it’s okay to have questions or feel unsure. That’s why it’s important to keep having these conversations.

We encourage you to keep practicing what you’ve learned and to check in with yourself and others. If you ever feel unsure or need more information, feel free to return to this guide or explore our other guides on healthy relationships. You can also use the additional resources listed below for support and guidance.

Organization	Contact	How They Help
<b>National Adult Protective Services (APS) Association</b>	(202) 370-6292 or visit <a href="http://www.napsa-now.org/help-in-your-area/">www.napsa-now.org/help-in-your-area/</a> and ask for your state APS office	Helps professionals and individuals report and respond to the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities who are the victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and to prevent abuse whenever possible. There is an APS office for each of the 50 states.
<b>National Domestic Violence Hotline</b>	1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or text "START" to 88788	Offers confidential support and guidance for anyone in an unsafe or abusive relationship.
<b>National Sexual Assault Hotline or RAINN mobile app</b>	1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or download the <a href="#">RAINN app</a>	Provides free, confidential support for survivors of sexual assault.
<b>Love is Respect</b>	1-866-331-9474 or text "LOVEIS" to 22522	Specializes in supporting young people experiencing relationship abuse or those unsure if their relationship is healthy.

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