Consent: What Does That Really Mean Anyways?

*Consent* is the act of *asking* someone for permission before doing something that involves that other person, AND the act of *giving* someone permission to do something that involves you.

**When should I ask for consent?**
Consent is important in multiple aspects of our lives. Consent is all about respecting other people’s *boundaries* - the rules they have around their body, personal space, belongings, and personal information. This means that consent can sometimes be as simple as asking a friend for their permission to post a photo that they are in online, asking a loved one for permission to give them a hug, or asking someone for permission to share a story they told you.

**How do I know if someone is giving me their consent?**
Recognizing consent is pretty easy when you know what to look for.

**Consent sounds, looks, and feels like:**
- A clear, enthusiastic “yes!”.
- Body language: Words are important, but sometimes our words do not match our body language. If someone says, “yes” to something but then seems less active or engaged in what is happening, it is important to check in with them to ensure they feel safe and empowered to communicate their boundaries
- Comfortable and safe: Because we only need to allow things that we want to happen, giving consent should feel good! Maybe a bit awkward sometimes, but still good. While our boundaries may change, our feelings of comfort and safety should not.

**Consent DOES NOT sound, look, or feel like:**
- A lack of “no” does not mean “yes”: Just because “no” isn’t said, doesn’t mean consent can be assumed
- Bribed, Forced, or Guilted: If bribery, force, or guilt is used, consent cannot be given. Consent can only be given if saying “no” is a safe, respected option.
- Uncomfortable or unsafe: We never have to give consent for things that make us feel uncomfortable or unsafe and we should never feel forced to give consent
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Read through the following scenarios and answer the questions.

1. Taylor and Alex love to wrestle. One day when Taylor and Alex are in the middle of wrestling, Alex decides they don’t want to wrestle any more. Alex asks Taylor to stop and continue another time. Taylor immediately stops and asks what Alex would like to do instead.
   a. What boundaries were set? By whom? Were they respected?
   b. How does consent relate to this scenario?

2. Sam and Devin have studied together every Thursday after school all trimester. One week, Sam says she cannot study that Thursday because she has a friend from out of town visiting. Devin becomes upset and tells Sam she has to study with him because he has a big test Monday morning and needs Sam to help him study for it. Sam apologizes but says again she has a friend visiting on Thursday. Devin becomes more upset and says he’s afraid of failing. Sam feels guilty, so she agrees to meet Devin Thursday after school to help him study.
   a. What boundaries were set? By whom? Were they respected?
   b. How does consent relate to this scenario?

3. Jordan and Stevie like to send goofy photos to each other over Snapchat. They often screenshot each other’s photos and laugh at them together when they hang out. One day Jordan and Stevie are hanging out with a group of friends and Stevie decides to show Jordan’s goofy photos to everyone. Jordan is really embarrassed, but doesn’t say anything because she doesn’t want to seem stuck up.
   a. What boundaries were set? By whom? Were they respected?
   b. How does consent relate to this scenario?
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4. Logan and Lilah have been crushing on each other for a few weeks now. They talked about it, and decided to start dating. Two days later, Lilah told Logan that they are not really dating because they haven’t kissed yet. Logan feels a little pressured to kiss Lilah, and really wants Lilah to be their first kiss, but doesn’t feel ready to have a ‘first kiss’ yet.
   a. What boundaries are being pushed here? Whose boundaries are they?
   b. How does consent relate to this scenario?
   c. How can Lilah and Logan make sure everyone feels comfortable, and like their boundaries are being respected? Write your own ending to this scenario.

Contact Umbrella: If you have any questions or concerns about a relationship that you are in, an advocate would be more than happy to hear from you. Contact us in Caledonia & S. Essex counties at (802)748-8645 and in Orleans & N. Essex counties at (802)334-0148 or email an advocate at Advocate@umbrellanek.org