Consent in sexual relationships

Description of teaching strategy
This activity is adapted from the Negotiating Consent resource package developed by the Violence against Women Specialist Unit. This teaching and learning strategy aims to develop student understanding about consent in sexual relationships. This activity uses small group discussion of scenarios to explore consent in real life situations and reflect on individual’s rights and responsibility in sexual relationships.

What do we want students to learn?
At the completion of this activity, students should be able to:
- Recognise the importance of consent
- Identify consent and non-consent to sexual activity
- Understand the rights of giving consent and the responsibility of asking for consent

Syllabus links:

| 5.3 A student analyses factors that contribute to positive, inclusive and satisfying relationships |
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| Students learn about: | Students learn to: |
| • Developing equal and respectful relationships | • Develop ground rules and boundaries when forming relationships |
| • Recognising and responding to abusive situations | • Examine power, conflict and cooperation in different settings |

| 5.6 A student analyses attitudes, behaviours and consequences related to health issues affecting young people |
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| Students learn about: | Students learn to: |
| • Sexual health | • Analyse how sexual attitudes, behaviours and sexuality are influenced by gender expectations and assumptions |

Activity:
1. Divide the class into six small groups and ask each group to nominate a facilitator, scribe and reporter.
2. Handout photocopies of one scenario from the six scenarios to each group (multiple copies may be made to ensure each person has a copy of their group’s scenario)
3. Ask the groups to read through their scenario and discuss using the discussion questions.
4. Ask the scribe to take notes of the group’s responses to each question.
5. Teacher facilitates a class discussion using each group’s responses. Have each reporter read out their scenario to the class and then report back on their scenario. Invite the rest of the class to add comments.
6. Concluding activity:
   As a class, brainstorm an understanding or definition of consent as it relates to
   sexual activity. Encourage students to include as many important aspects to
   consent as they can. Record students’ responses on the board as a mind map.

Teacher notes
Each scenario represents a different story of asking for and giving consent and
varying respect for rights and responsibilities in relationships.

- Scenario 1: Lee does not ask for consent and Liana does give a number of
  signals that she does not consent to this sexual activity but these are ignored.
  Lee does not respect Liana’s rights to safe and consensual sex and uses force
  and drugs and alcohol to coerce her into having sex.
- Scenario 2: Chris asks for consent by showing the condom and waiting for Ming’s
  response. Ming refuses consent clearly. They both respect each other’s right for
  safe and consensual sex and behave with respect towards each other.
- Scenario 3: DJ and Di both ask for consent and give it. Then Di exercises her
  right to change her mind. Di and DJ behave with respect towards each other and
  DJ does not try to coerce Di into having sex even though he finds it difficult to
  stop.
- Scenario 4: Kathy indirectly suggests (at least to some) sexual activity. Dom
  declines Kathy’s offer, making it clear that he is happy to walk with her but then
  he would return to the party. Kathy doesn’t try to coerce Dom but she doesn’t
  appear very respectful of his wishes.
- Scenario 5: The situation begins with both parties consenting but then Kim
  decides she has had enough. Nick then puts on pressure and manipulates Kim
  into doing what he wants. In the end, he does not behave respectfully towards
  Kim and does not respect her rights.
- Scenario 6: Sam asks Sasha for consent to sexual activity and Sasha agrees.
  They both respect each other’s right for safe and consensual sex and behave
  with respect towards each other.
Scenario 1

Lee and Liana are at the beach with a group of friends. They've been there for a few hours and everyone has been drinking since the late afternoon.

Lee keeps topping up Liana's drink saying "Come on, drink up it'll make you feel great". Liana doesn't know about 'feeling great'. All she is starting to feel is pretty wasted.

Lee grabs Liana’s hands and says ‘come for a walk with me’. Liana shakes her head. She doesn’t think she will be able to walk straight or see where she is going. Once again Lee insists. ‘Come on, it will do you good to walk it off’. Eventually Liana goes off for a walk with Lee.

Minutes later when they are out of sight of their friends, Lee pulls Liana to the ground and kisses her. Lee begins to pull at her clothes trying to open her shirt and touching her breasts. Liana tries to push Lee off but she can’t get her arms to work properly. She starts to cry but she doesn’t say anything. She feels sick and just wants Lee to leave her alone.

Discussion questions

1. Does Lee ask for Liana’s consent to sexual activity? If yes, what words or actions does Lee use? Is this a clear way of asking for consent? Why or why not?

2. Does Liana give her consent to sexual activity? What words or actions does Liana use to indicate consent or non-consent? Is this a clear response? Why or why not?

3. Does Lee respect Liana’s sexual rights? If yes, in what way? If no, what rights does Lee abuse?

4. Do both individuals behave respectfully towards each other? Why do you think this?

5. How might each person feel in this situation?
Scenario 2

Ming and Chris are lying on Ming’s bed kissing. Chris stops kissing Ming and pulls out a condom, still in its plastic. He shows the condom to Ming and waits for a response. Ming looks at the condom and then says ‘No Chris. I like being with you and kissing but I don’t want any more than that.’ Chris is disappointed. He says ‘Are you scared your parents will find out?’ Ming says ‘No, it’s not just that. I am not ready.’ Chris puts the condom away and smiles at Ming. ‘Ok then.’ And he gives Ming a hug.

Discussion questions

1. Does Chris ask for Ming’s consent to sexual activity? If yes, what words or actions does Chris use? Is this a clear way of asking for consent? Why or why not?

2. Does Ming give consent to sexual activity? What words or actions does Ming use to indicate consent or non-consent? Is this a clear response? Why or why not?

3. Does Chris respect Ming’s sexual rights? If yes, in what way? If no, what rights does Chris abuse?

4. Do both individuals behave respectfully towards each other? Why do you think this?

5. How might each person feel in this situation?
Scenario 3

DJ has asked Di to go to Ilsa’s party. They have been seeing each other for about a month and they really like each other. DJ wants to have sex with Di and thinks Di feels the same but doesn’t want to push it. DJ wants them both to be sure. Di really wants to have sex with DJ but believes that a person should abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage. However, her feelings for DJ are making her question her beliefs and she thinks she might end up having sex with DJ.

Later, at the party…
Di and DJ go upstairs to Ilsa’s bedroom. They are kissing and cuddling. Di asks DJ if he wants to have sex. DJ says ‘Yeah you know I really want to but what about the whole no sex before marriage thing, are you sure?’ Di says ‘You know I love you and no one will know if we do it just this once.’ They kiss some more and Di takes DJ’s shirt off and DJ touches Di’s breasts. Suddenly, Di doesn’t feel so comfortable. She says ‘Please DJ. Can we stop?’ DJ stops even though it feels very difficult to. ‘I am sorry’ Di says ‘You were right. I don’t think I can do this.’ DJ replies ‘That’s alright. I don’t want to do anything you don’t feel comfortable with. Don’t feel bad for sticking up for your beliefs.’

Discussion questions

1. Does DJ ask for Di’s consent to sexual activity? If yes, what words or actions does DJ use? Is this a clear way of asking for consent? Why or why not?

2. Does Di give consent to sexual activity? What words or actions does Di use to indicate consent or non-consent? Is this a clear response? Why or why not?

3. Does DJ respect Di’s sexual rights? If yes, in what way? If no, what rights does DJ abuse?

4. Do both individuals behave respectfully towards each other? Why do you think this?

5. How might each person feel in this situation?
Scenario 4

Dom knew Kathy was interested in him. Wherever they were at the same party, Kathy seemed to be watching him. This time, a friend had introduced them and they had talked for a while. Dom thought she was OK, nice and everything but he wasn’t sure whether he liked her. When Kathy asked Dom for a lift home, and then said no-one was home at her place, Dom felt a bit strange. He knew his mates would think he was mad, I mean he seemed to be getting his chance to play around with Kathy, maybe even have sex and most of them would say he should just take any chance he could with any girl. But it didn’t feel right to him and he didn’t like her that way. He told Kathy he would be happy to give her a lift home but then he wanted to come straight back to the party. She seemed a bit annoyed and said ‘That’s okay; I think I will stay too’. Then she walked off and didn’t speak to him again.

Discussion questions

1. Does Kathy ask for Dom’s consent to sexual activity? If yes, what words or actions does Kathy use? Is this a clear way of asking for consent? Why or why not?

2. Does Dom give consent to sexual activity? What words or actions does Dom use to indicate consent or non-consent? Is this a clear response? Why or why not?

3. Does Kathy respect Dom’s sexual rights? If yes, in what way? If no, what rights does Kathy abuse?

4. Do both individuals behave respectfully towards each other? Why do you think this?

5. How might each person feel in this situation?
Scenario 5

Nick and Kim are at Phil’s 16th birthday party with about 30 of their friends. After lots of dancing, they decide to go for a walk alone together around the yard. Kim tells Nick ‘I really like you’ and starts kissing him. They cuddle and kiss for some time. After a while Kim feels it is time to go back to the party and tells Nick this.

Nick gets angry about this and starts to hassle Kim to stay there. Nick tells Kim ‘You are the one who started kissing me. It is not fair to just ‘pull the plug’ when you feel like it. I am not ready to stop yet.’ Nick pressures Kim to keep going by saying ‘You would if you really liked me!’. Nick states he would like to be Kim’s boyfriend but they’ll have to do more than just kiss and cuddle. Kim wants Nick as a boyfriend, so agrees, even though it doesn’t feel right.

Discussion questions

1. Does Nick ask for Kim’s consent to sexual activity? If yes, what words or actions does Nick use? Is this a clear way of asking for consent? Why or why not?

2. Does Kim give consent to sexual activity? What words or actions does Kim use to indicate consent or non-consent? Is this a clear response? Why or why not?

3. Does Nick respect Kim’s sexual rights? If yes, in what way? If no, what rights does Lee abuse?

4. Do both individuals behave respectfully and responsibly towards each other? Why do you think this?

5. How might each person feel in this situation?
Scenario 6

Sam and Sasha are going on a date to the movies. They have been going out for about two months and they really like each other. Each time they go out, they go a little bit further. First they just kissed, then they started touching each other and they’ve been close to having sex a few times.

As they drive to the movies, they start to talk about what they’ve been doing. Both Sam and Sasha think they are ready to have sex but they want to know what the other one thinks before they say anything. Sam feels a bit nervous but eventually plucks up the courage and asks. Sasha says ‘For sure, I would love to have sex with you. I was going to ask you but I was worried about what you might say.’

At the movies, they sit up the back and kiss a bit. They try to watch the movie but they can’t concentrate. The leave early and go back to Sam’s place. Sasha stays the night.

The next morning, Sam asks Sasha ‘How do you feel about last night?’ Sasha says ‘I feel fantastic.’ Sam says ‘Me too. I am so glad we both agreed’.

Discussion questions

1. Does Sam ask for Sasha’s consent to sexual activity? If yes, what words or actions does Sam use? Is this a clear way of asking for consent? Why or why not?

2. Does Sasha give consent to sexual activity? What words or actions does Sasha use to indicate consent or non-consent? Is this a clear response? Why or why not?

3. Does Sam respect Sasha’s sexual rights? If yes, in what way? If no, what rights are abused?

4. Do both individuals behave respectfully and responsibly towards each other? Why do you think this?

5. How might each person feel in this situation?