

# Affirmative Consent

**Trainer Names:**

**Objectives:**

- Understand the definition of Affirmative Consent and why it is important
- Identify verbal and nonverbal clues that communicate others' feelings, wishes, and boundaries

**Time needed:** 45 minutes

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Normal = say out loud

Underlined = flipchart this!

*Italics* = trainer notes/instructions

**Bold** = key point

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**A Note on Triggers:** *In any discussion about Consent, it's important to be aware that some participants could be emotionally triggered by the discussion due to previous experiences that caused them harm. A trigger may cause someone to have a flashback or evoke emotions and reactions from that event. People experiencing triggers might respond in a number of ways: they may express strong emotions (such as anger, fear, sadness, shame, anxiety), withdraw from participation, be unable to concentrate, or create distractions that disrupt the group.*

## 1. Introduction [5 mins]

**Trigger warning:** *Before starting this session, tell the group that this is a training about a topic that might be sensitive or emotional for some people. Remind them that we all have different experiences, and that it is important to respect that and have compassion. Remind them who the Safe People are on your training team, and that they will be available to answer questions or talk with Sprogers after the session.*

*Introduce this session very briefly:* We will be doing some activities to help us think about the ways that people communicate, including how we express ourselves to others and how we listen to and understand what others communicate to us.

*Read Objectives (flipchart Objectives).*

**Anchor:** The ANCHOR step invites learners to reflect on past experiences which relate to the learning of the session. (e.g. "Think back to a time when \_\_\_\_\_. What did that feel like?")

## 2. Let's Have Pizza! [15 mins]

### Activity [5 mins]

*Instruct Sprogers to find a partner, and then **quickly and clearly** go over the instructions:* Your task is to create a pizza that both of you will enjoy. That means you have to figure out what your partner likes, and your partner has to figure out what you like. Here's how it works:

- Take turns asking yes/no questions. One at a time, you'll ask questions to figure out what you'd like on your pizza. One person will go first and ask 5-7 questions, then you'll switch and the other person will ask 5-7 questions.
- Ask verbally. Ask questions that invite new pizza possibilities! You can ask if your partner likes pepperoni, but consider also asking if they're willing to try kale.
- Reply nonverbally. Here's what's tricky: you have to respond nonverbally, using only your hands and your eyes. You can't use standard nonverbal communication – no nodding or shaking your head, smiling or frowning, or giving a thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Instead, come up with two new gestures for Yes and No.
- If you get stuck, you can start over. If you get frustrated, work with your partner to find a solution. Your goal is to work together, not against each other. The point is to see what it's like to try to understand some new nonverbal ways to communicate. If you get stuck, you can start over.

*After answering any quick clarifying questions about the instructions, start the activity! Remind them not to use any inappropriate gestures. Give time checks: Remind partners to switch after 1 or 2 minutes. When both partners have asked questions, bring attention back to the full group.*

### **Debrief Activity [5 mins]**

- How did that go? Is anyone excited about the pizza you're going to order? Can I get some volunteers to describe their pizzas? (*Notice whether a pair is in agreement about their pizza or whether there has been some miscommunication along the way.*)
- Was that challenging? (*Affirm that nonverbal communication may not be easy to understand.*)
- What did you do when things became difficult or confusing? Did anyone stop and start over? How was the second time different?

### **Connect the Dots [5 mins]**

There are many situations where people might use nonverbal communication. One is in romantic or sexual situations. The pizza game can offer us things to think about in romantic situations – especially ones where partners are communicating and making choices about emotional & physical boundaries. It's important in these situations to speak up about what you want and to listen to a partner's verbal and nonverbal communication.

We just did an activity that looked at ways to communicate to come up with a plan that worked for both people. You probably did some negotiating or compromising along the way, and hopefully both partners got a pizza they liked.

- Can anyone think of a time when you were with a friend or romantic partner and you didn't work on negotiating or compromising about an activity – when maybe you went along and did something you didn't want to do? **Without sharing what happened**, how did that situation make you feel? (*Look for and affirm answers such as: uncomfortable, not respected, like maybe I'd made a mistake, frustrated that we didn't communicate better.*)

**State clearly: It sounds like we agree that people don't like being pressured to do something they really don't want to do.**

- Why do you suppose people might go along with something they don't want to do? (*Look for and affirm answers such as: Sometimes people aren't sure how to speak up about their limits; The other person might be more assertive, or less likely to listen; They don't want to hurt someone's feelings; They want to avoid conflict; They are afraid of losing a friend or partner.*)

- Why do you think someone might pressure a friend or partner to do something?  
(Look for and affirm answers such as: They have trouble understanding, listening, or respecting limits; They are used to getting their way; They think that's what they're supposed to do, or that it's okay to do it; They feel entitled or that it is expected).
- What are some of the things we've learned from the pizza activity and our discussion?

**Add:** The ADD step introduces new information and tools for learners to consider.

### 3. Define the Term: Affirmative Consent [10 mins]

Ask the group to think about the term "Affirmative Consent," which is sometimes also called "Yes Means Yes". Ask them to turn to a partner and talk for a moment about what they believe these terms mean.

After a minute of pair discussion, bring attention back to the full group to review the definitions. Let them know that this definition takes some of the principles from the pizza game and puts them into a definition about making choices and agreements about setting emotional and physical boundaries.

Have someone read aloud the definition:

Affirmative Consent means that both people clearly and freely agree to engage in sexual activity. They must be awake, aware, and able to make decisions. Consent can be given through words or actions, as long as those words or actions clearly communicate willingness and permission. Consent must be ongoing and can be withdrawn at any time.

Check for comprehension: Are there any clarifying questions about this definition? Give an example or two, and emphasize the importance of consent being **clearly and freely given**.

- Can you think of any situations where someone might not be able to give consent? What if someone is asleep – can that person give consent for sexual activity? (Affirm the answer: No, they cannot).
- What if someone is confused or unable to understand what's happening for any reason? Can that person give consent for sexual activity? (Affirm the answer: No, they cannot).
- If someone hasn't said No, can a partner assume that means Yes? (Affirm the answer: No, the absence of a No does not mean Yes).
- What if someone is being pressured or feels threatened in some way? (Affirm the answer: No, true consent cannot happen if a person is feeling pressured or threatened).
- What if one or both people are impaired due to alcohol or drug use? Can they give consent for sexual activity? (Affirm the answer: No, they cannot)

Note to trainer: Issues related to consent and drinking are sometimes unclear. You may wish to clarify that one drink may not leave a person too impaired to make a clear decision. However, when people continue drinking, or what that one drink is large and very strong, or the person is not used to drinking, clear thinking and true consent may not be possible. Remind them that any level of drinking is illegal for people under 21 and specific legal issues may come up when a minor has been drinking and there are questions about consent.

*Connect back to the pizza game:* In the game you just played, you practiced non-sexual Affirmative Consent. You practiced communicating both verbally and nonverbally about your likes and dislikes. In romantic and sexual relationships, people also communicate both verbally and nonverbally about what they want and about their limits and boundaries. It's important for both partners to pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication.

**Apply:** The APPLY step invites learners to utilize the new information in a task, challenge, or focused conversation. (e.g. practice, application, case studies, compare, etc.)

#### 4. Language of Consent [10 mins]

*Before the training begins, hang flipcharts around the room with the headings listed below. Point out these flipcharts now and explain that their task is to walk around and write examples on at least three of these categories. Pass around markers as you explain these instructions. Give them **5 minutes** for this task.*

*After 5 minutes, call everyone back. Have Sproggers take turns reading aloud the responses on the flipcharts. Look for and affirm answers such as the following, and add anything from the "Benefits of Affirmative Consent" list that isn't mentioned:*

**Say NO Nonverbally:**

- Pushing away
- Avoiding eye contact
- Crossing arms
- Turning body away
- Not reciprocating
- Silence

**Say NO Verbally:**

- "Not now"
- "I'm not sure..."
- "I don't think..."
- "Wait"
- "I like this, but..."
- "Please stop"

**Say YES Nonverbally:**

- Reciprocating
- Pulling a partner closer
- Smiling

**Say YES Verbally:**

- "That feels good"
- "I like..."
- "Mmmmm"
- "Yes!"

**Ways to Check for Consent Verbally:**

- "Is this okay?"
- "Is that a yes?"
- "Can we try..."
- "I really like this. Do you?"

**Benefits of Affirmative Consent:**

- Build intimacy, enjoyment, and trust in a relationship
- Help both partners be on the same page and share the pleasure of being close
- Get to know one another and share your likes and dislikes
- Act with respect and maturity
- Reduce the chance that you'll be misunderstood or hurt someone
- Follow rules and laws and avoid trouble

**Away:** The AWAY step invites learners to connect their new understanding to the real world context of their lives. (e.g. a personal action plan, commitment, projection into future, etc.)

## 5. Closing [5 mins]

*Summarize the big takeaways from the session:*

- Affirmative Consent provides guidance for people engaging in sexual activity. It makes sure that consent is given affirmatively by both people. And remember: **Affirmative Consent requires a Yes**. The absence of a No does not mean Yes.
- Affirmative Consent involves these steps: People **listen** to one another's words and body language, **express** what they like and how they feel, and **respect** and observe one another's boundaries.

*Flipchart the three keywords – **LISTEN, EXPRESS, RESPECT** – and have everyone say them together. Thank everyone for taking part in the activity, and remind them again who the Safe People are.*

### **Resources:**

This activity has been adapted from ETR's ["What Do You Want?" Understanding Affirmative Consent](#)