

BODY SAFETY AUSTRALIA

Using the Consent Continuum

Consent is naturally complex and exists on a continuum. Consent education must therefore go beyond a simplistic binary teaching, acknowledging that consent is not black and white, yes and no. Body Safety Australia (BSA) developed *The Consent Continuum* to support educators in teaching the complexities and nuances of consent. This guide has been designed to support your use of this resource in the classroom. Additionally, Body Safety Australia offer additional resources to support this learning on their website: www.bodysafetyaustralia.com.au

If it's not green, it's not consent

The Consent Continuum considers consent on a spectrum from consent (green) to force (red), with consideration for the nuances of compliance, pressure and coercion. BSA affirms that if it's not green, it's not consent; if a 'yes' has been given through compliance, pressure or coercion, it is **not** consent. Consent must be freely given, fully informed and ongoing.

You are teaching ethics, not law

While it is important for young people to be aware of their legal obligations, when it comes to consent, laws can change quickly and vary from state to state. Conversations around consent should not focus on the law, but instead should focus on ethics. Consent should not be about what someone is legally required to do, but rather what is ethically required. Focusing consent education on the law fails to teach young people why they should be ensuring all their interactions are respectful, safe and consensual, and how they can do this.

While at times a 'yes' given through compliance, pressure or coercion can still be considered legally consensual, Body Safety Australia upholds that "**if it's not green, it's not consent**". Furthermore, consider that affirmative consent laws are being implemented across states in Australia, which places the legal onus on each individual person to actively **seek** consent, rather than relying on the other person to **provide** consent. Young people should be supported in understanding affirmative consent in the classroom and conversations should centre ethics, not law.

Exploring compliance, pressure and coercion

Situations that require consent are complex, and often may instead involve compliance, pressure or coercion. Educators should be exploring these nuances with students, rather than teaching consent through a binary lens. This teaching should be age-appropriate and consider intersectionality. Often, people will *comply* with something they do not actually *consent* to. This can look like hugging someone because they don't feel comfortable saying no, or simply doing the dishes because they are a child and have been told to do so by a grownup.

Power imbalances significantly impact a person's likelihood of complying or facing pressure and coercion. Consent education therefore must explore the impact of power imbalances, including the gendered nature of compliance. This can look like exploring age as a power dynamic, where a child is more likely to comply or feel pressured by an adult asking them to do something, and extend to other spaces of intersecting power imbalances. When we consider gender as a power imbalance, we may note girls feeling pressured by boys in a patriarchal society, while considering race we acknowledge the potential for people of colour to be coerced. We must also consider the complexities of ability, mental health, physical size, wealth, and religion impacting a person's ability to freely say yes or no.

These conversations should not centre sexual consent, as consent extends to all behaviours, and impacts relationships with friends, family, peers and strangers, not simply romantic and sexual relations. This also allows conversations to be age-appropriate and built on over time, from early childhood to late adolescence.



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EXAMPLES

CONSENT

**ASKING SOMEONE FOR A HUG,
THEY SAY 'YES'**

COMPLIANCE

**DOING HOMEWORK/CHORES BECAUSE YOU FEEL LIKE IF YOU
DON'T, THERE WILL BE A CONSEQUENCE (BUT YOU HAVEN'T
ACTUALLY BEEN THREATENED WITH A CONSEQUENCE)**

PRESSURE

**'CAN I HAVE A HUG? PLEASE? PLEASE? ...
BUT I'VE HAD A REALLY BAD DAY ... I
THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND'**

COERCION

**'IF YOU DON'T ____, I'LL TELL THE TEACHER
YOU CHEATED ON THE TEST'**

FORCE

**GRABBING SOMEONE AND MAKING
THEM HUG YOU**

Consent Continuum Scenario Examples

Think on the below topic examples and how they might fit into the consent continuum.

- Giving a piggyback ride to class
- Going to a sleepover
- Seeing an MA15+ movie
- Getting you to play a video game you're not allowed to play
- Asking you to play footy at lunch
- Asking for some of your lunch (food)
- Asking you to send a photo/video
- Sending you a photo/video

It is important that while using the consent continuum, teachers adopt a strengths-based, trauma-informed and intersectional approach. This is essential to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students as well as staff. For support with this, refer to Body Safety Australia's *Teaching Consent Education* resource.

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