



# How to say no

## Key Facts and Discussion

### Facilitators' Guide

#### Sexual consent, what's it all about?

Sex is supposed to be a positive and pleasurable experience – this is impossible if you or your partner feel like you're not ready, or are forced into having sex. Here are some things to think about:

1. Both you and your partner should be enthusiastic about any sexual encounter, if one of you feels obligated or pressured into doing something they are not excited about, and may not feel ready for, then something is going wrong.
2. You can say no at any time. Having sex (or any other sexual activity) before, with a previous partner or a current one, doesn't mean you have to/or want to do it again.
3. Being in a relationship with someone or being married to them does not give them the right to do anything they want to you – or you to them. It's no different to sex with anyone else – you must both consent, each time and to each type of activity.
4. You can change your mind about sex at any time, and it's completely fine to stop before or midway through. This is your right and you should never feel pressured to continue.
5. Giving your consent and getting your partner's consent may feel a bit awkward but ultimately sex is about communication and can and should be a positive and pleasurable experience.
6. The legal age to have sex in your country may be different depending on whether you're a boy or a girl.
7. Any sexual contact without consent is wrong whatever the age of the people involved.
8. If you decide to have sex with a partner, make sure it's safe. Using a condom every time you have sex is the best way to protect yourself and your partner against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV.
9. It can be difficult to say no in the heat of the moment – so letting your partner know beforehand about your wishes will make it easier later on.

## Ideas for discussion

*The subject of sexual consent should be approached sensitively and with the understanding that some of the young people you are talking to may have experienced coercion, abuse or assault. It is important to make it clear that no one should feel guilt or blame for not stopping a sexual encounter they didn't want to have.*

What do you (or your group) know about sexual consent, or saying no? Maybe you've never really thought about it before. Here are some questions to think about yourself, or discuss in your group.

1. What does sexual consent (in other words both partners agreeing to sex) mean to you? What are the signs that your partner is giving consent?

### FACILITATORS' NOTES

Groups may not have thought about giving and getting sexual consent before and may not yet understand how important it is. Talking about sexual consent will make it clear that this is a fundamental right and a responsibility.

It's useful to talk about what consent looks and sounds like. Consent sounds like an enthusiastic yes or something else that's positive like 'I'm open to trying'. There are also more physical cues like letting out a sigh, reciprocating with a similar touch, looking a partner in the eye and smiling.

2. Saying no may seem like such a simple thing, but the reality is that it can be hard to do. What are some good ways to let your partner know that you don't want to have sex? What are good ways to make sure that your partner is happy with what you are doing?

### FACILITATORS' NOTES

It's helpful to talk through how people can be clear and respectful towards the other person when saying no, even when it's awkward or the situation is feeling pressured. It's good to let the group know that even though it can be hard to say no it's better to be clear than to go ahead and do something that they don't want to do.

Talking about how to say no to sex generally may lead to other conversations about saying no to sex at certain times and places, to something that they may have done before, or to sex without a condom. Groups may not have thought about sex and saying no to this level of detail before – again it's worth emphasising that saying no is their right, and also that they don't have to say why if they don't want to.

It is also important to discuss this from the perspective of the person initiating sex and their responsibility to make sure the other person feels safe, comfortable, and is enjoying themselves.

3. Many people feel pressured into having sex because they think they 'should'. What are some other reasons why people have sex, even if they're not ready, or don't want to?

### FACILITATORS' NOTES

Discussion may bring up that people feel they should have sex to appear mature, to please their partner or someone else in the family or community, or because it's an outdated rite of passage. Emphasise that it's always an individual's choice whether to have sex or not and a respectful person would never pressure their partner into having sex.

4. What do you think is the relationship between sexual consent and sexual health?

### FACILITATORS' NOTES

Groups might explore how likely it is that a person would be able to negotiate safer sex options, such as using a condom, where there isn't consent – and the different STIs this might leave them at risk of. Discussion may naturally lead to how to talk about safer sex options, especially when 'in the moment' or feeling under pressure. What would a respectful partner propose or agree to?

5. Healthy relationships, whether sexual or more, are built on respect and boundaries. Are you comfortable talking about issues of sexuality and consent with your partner when you're in non-sexual situations? What about with your friends?

#### FACILITATORS' NOTES

This discussion is all about communication and it may be worth emphasising here how important it is to feel safe when talking about important issues. Groups may mention maturity, responsibility and respectfulness when talking about sex and safe sex as things that can make people feel more confident and in control, and strengthen relationships. Things that may help people stay grounded in the exciting first stages of new relationships include sharing experiences with friends and supporting each other when meeting new people.