

To be consensual people have to be informed. That means knowing what's being suggested, asked for, and/or offered, and why. We can't tune into what our wants, needs, limits and boundaries are if we don't know the full picture.

Consent isn't a one-off interaction, it needs to be ongoing throughout any encounter or relationship. Just because somebody has agreed to something, enjoyed something, or offered something once - or several times - doesn't mean they'll do so again. Just because we had energy and enthusiasm at the start of an interaction or relationship doesn't mean we still will some way into it. Things change.

Consent is often presented as a one-way interaction: one person asks or initiates and the other person agrees or refuses (yes or no). As well as viewing consent as ongoing rather than one-off, it can be useful to see it as relational rather than one-directional. How can we shift into a situation where everyone can bring their wants, needs, limits, and boundaries to the table, where we can share these openly, and then decide what we're going to do accordingly?

It's perfectly possible to consent to things we don't particularly want to do. We're probably all sometimes going to have to do that in order to help somebody else out, or to get something done, get paid, etc. However, the important piece here is that everybody knows what's going on, that they don't assume that just because we're consenting to something that means we're wanting it, or just because we're wanting it means we're consenting to it.

It's often harder to consent under conditions where only two options are made available, one of which is culturally - or otherwise - seen as the 'successful' option, and the other not. So for consent, it's great if we can offer several options to choose from, together, rather than just one option which you can do or not do, with not doing it being a loaded kind of choice.

True consent requires an awareness of power dynamics . People often don't feel free, safe, and able enough to tune into themselves and to be open about their needs, limits wants and boundaries. This is generally because they fear implicit or explicit punishment. Unless somebody really feels able to say 'no' to us, without fear of the potential impact of that, then they're not in consent. It needs to be just as easy for them to say 'no', 'I'm not sure', 'maybe under these conditions', or 'I'm not ready yet' as it is to say 'yes' or any version of 'yes'.

Given that we live in such a non-consensual culture, and have generally learned non-consensual ways of treating ourselves and others, **it's inevitable that we'll behave non-consensually at times.** Admitting to non-consent is not about saying we're a bad person. We can take responsibility for our part, listen and understand the impact of it, let the other person know that we won't do it again.