

Supporting Choice, Safety, and Healthy Relationships

Purpose: This guide helps Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) facilitate respectful, educational conversations about consent. The goal is **not to tell someone what choices to make**, but to help them understand their rights, communicate their boundaries, and make informed decisions.

Before You Begin

Remember:

- ✓ Speak calmly and respectfully.
- ✓ Use simple, clear language.
- ✓ Avoid judgment.
- ✓ Be patient.
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions.
- ✓ Respect the individual's experiences and values.
- ✓ Don't assume someone understands consent just because they can say "yes" or "no."

Starting the Conversation

Try saying:

"I'd like to talk with you about healthy relationships and making choices that feel right for you. Is this a good time?"

or

"Everyone has the right to make choices about their body. Can we talk about that together?"

What Is Consent?

Ask:

"What do you think consent means?"

Listen first.

Then explain:

“Consent means giving permission. It means everyone involved wants to participate and agrees freely.”

Ask:

“How do you know when someone wants to hug you?”

“What are some ways people say yes?”

“What are some ways people say no?”

Teaching “Yes”

Help the individual understand that a “yes” should be:

✓ Clear

✓ Freely given

✓ Without pressure

✓ Ongoing

Examples:

“I want to.”

“Yes.”

“I feel comfortable.”

“I choose this.”

Teaching “No”

Explain:

People can say no by:

“No.”

“Stop.”

“I’m not ready.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Not today.”

“I changed my mind.”

Walking away

Looking uncomfortable

Moving someone's hand away

Crying

Freezing

Explain

"If someone says no—or shows they don't want to continue—we stop immediately."

Important Teaching Point

Consent Can Change

Ask:

"If someone says yes at first, can they change their mind later?"

Correct Answer:

Yes.

People can change their minds at any time.

Body Autonomy

Ask:

"Who gets to decide what happens to your body?"

Answer:

"You do."

Then ask:

"Who gets to decide what happens to someone else's body?"

Answer:

"They do."

Role Play #1

DSP:

"Can I give you a hug?"

Individual:

"No."

DSP:

“Thank you for telling me.”

Discuss:

“Did I respect your answer?”

Role Play #2

DSP:

“Someone you’re dating says they don’t want to kiss today. What could you say?”

Possible answers:

“That’s okay.”

“Maybe another time.”

“Thank you for telling me.”

Understanding Pressure

Ask:

“Is this okay?”

“If someone says...

‘If you loved me, you would...’

Is that consent?”

No.

“If someone keeps asking after you already said no...”

Is that consent?

No.

“If someone threatens to leave unless you have sex...”

Is that consent?

No.

Personal Boundaries

Ask:

“What kinds of touch are okay for you?”

“What kinds of touch are NOT okay?”

“When do you like hugs?”

“When don’t you?”

Write answers together.

Private vs. Public

Discuss:

What are examples of affection that are okay in public?

Holding hands

Brief hug

Walking together

What activities belong in private?

Changing clothes

Masturbation

Sexual activity

Discuss why privacy matters.

If Someone Says They Feel Unsafe

Respond with:

“I’m glad you told me.”

“Thank you for trusting me.”

“I’m here to help.”

“What happened?”

Avoid:

“Why didn’t you...”

“You should have...”

“Are you sure?”

Safety Questions

Ask:

Do you know who to tell if someone makes you uncomfortable?

Do you know who to call if someone hurts you?

Do you know it's okay to leave a situation that doesn't feel safe?

Checking for Understanding

Ask:

Can someone make you do something you don't want to?

Can you change your mind?

Can someone else change their mind?

What should you do if someone says no?

What should you do if you feel uncomfortable?

Conversation Tips for DSPs

Instead of saying:

“You shouldn't have a boyfriend.”

Say:

“What do you like about this person?”

Instead of:

“You're not ready.”

Say:

“What do you think makes someone ready for a relationship?”

Instead of:

“Don't do that.”

Say:

“Let's talk about how to do that safely.”

Instead of:

“That's inappropriate.”

Say:

“Let’s talk about where that behavior belongs.”

Documentation

After the conversation, document objectively:

- Date and time of discussion.
- Topics covered (e.g., consent, boundaries, healthy relationships).
- Individual’s level of participation and understanding.
- Questions the individual asked.
- Any follow-up education or referrals needed.
- Any disclosures requiring mandatory reporting, following agency policy and applicable laws.

Avoid documenting personal opinions, assumptions, or moral judgments.

Quick Consent Reminders

Consent is...

- Freely given.
- Informed.
- Specific.
- Reversible.
- Enthusiastic.

Consent is NOT...

- Silence.
- Fear.
- Pressure.
- Threats.
- Manipulation.
- Assumed because someone is in a relationship.
- Permanent—someone can change their mind at any time.

DSP Takeaway

Your role is not to approve or deny someone’s relationships. Your role is to educate, support informed choice, protect safety, and uphold each person’s rights with dignity and respect. By modeling respectful communication and honoring consent in everyday interactions, DSPs help create environments where individuals can build healthy, safe, and meaningful relationships.