

### **What is consent?[1]**

In New Zealand, an important factor in establishing healthy relationships is giving consent for sexual activity, it is a fundamental key in human rights. Consent is defined as a mutual agreement of both the individuals where they freely and willingly engage in sexual activity. It is not a one-time event but a continuous process requiring clear, informed and enthusiastic participation for everyone involved. It has to be freely given without pressure, manipulation or coercion. It must be specific and one 'yes' should not agree to everything. Consent must be asked for every sexual interaction, and should be withdrawn at any time through words or actions. According to the New Zealand Law, there are specific circumstances where a person would be unable to provide with legal consent. Hence, the law has recognised and raised public awareness regarding the circumstances where consent is not considered.

Under New Zealand law, it has been clearly stated that there are specific circumstances where a person is considered unable to give legal consent. Thereby, the New Zealand Law has recognised and increased the public's awareness on the circumstances where consent doesn't count. These are as follows:

- If someone is too drunk/too high on drugs
- If someone is under 16 years of age
- If there is any force, threat or pressure involved

### **[Understanding Sexual assault and consent | New Zealand Police](#)**

Respect, fairness and equity are the main components that these legal protections designed to deliver to each and every individual. Their main aim is to keep people safe from abuse, harm or any type of discrimination on any form or interaction. The rights of the individuals are protected regardless of their gender, sex, or relationship status. These laws ensure the dignity and personal boundaries of everyone is valued, respected and protected. No one has the right to pressure a person into a sexual activity which they do not want to take part in, everyone has the right to feel safe and comfortable in their surroundings. The person who is initiating the sexual activity is responsible for asking the other person is legally able to consent.



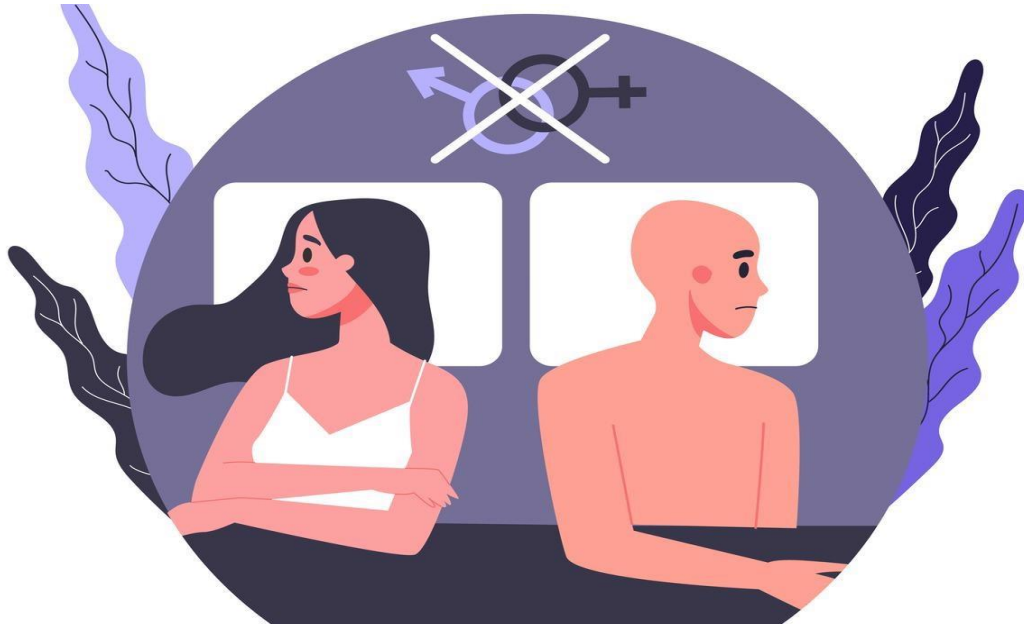
### Importance of consent in sexual wellbeing: [2]

Consent is an important part of wellbeing, as it ensures that everyone involved in a sexual relationship agree to participate voluntarily, respectfully and in a safe manner. This indicates that all participants clearly say "Yes" to what is happening, without any pressure, force, or confusion. Seeking consent before any sexual activity makes individual's feel respected, valued and empowered over their own body and choices. It creates the foundation for healthy relationships by encouraging open communication, trust, and emotional safety. Promoting consent can help people protect themselves from harm and support their right to make informed decisions about their own sexual experiences. Consent is not only important in personal relationship, it is also a legal and ethical responsibility that protects people's rights, safety, and dignity. This is why it is essential to promote a culture, where asking for and giving consent is normal. Doing so helps support the sexual health and wellbeing of both individuals and the wider community.



### **Importance of consent for mental, emotional and physical health:[3]**

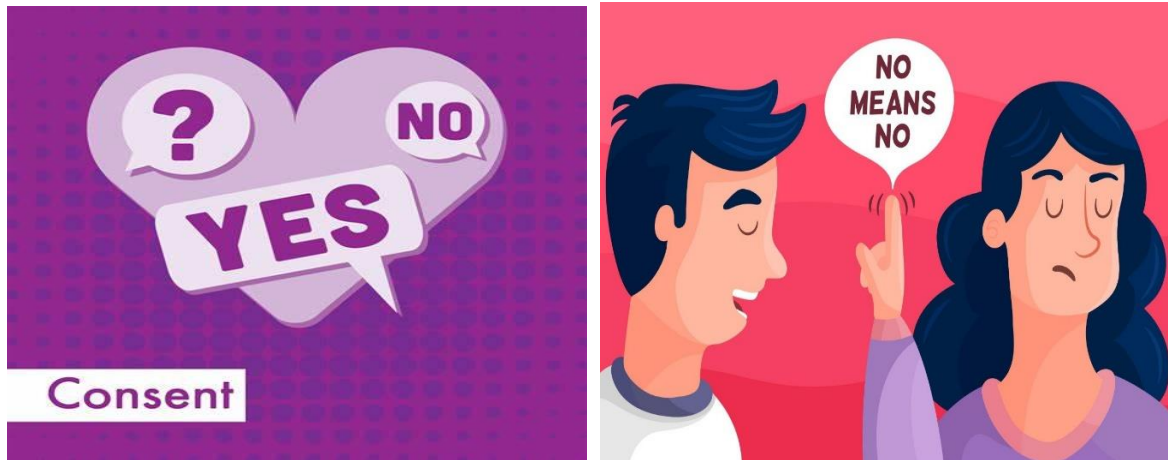
Consent is important for mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing as well, because it ensures that all people involved in a sexual or intimate situation feel safe, respected, and in control. Consent that is given freely and clearly, helps protect individuals from unwanted experiences that can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, or trauma. Respecting consent and one's personal boundaries help build trust, confidence, and a sense of security in relationships, which supports an individual's emotional stability. On a physical level, consent play an important role to help prevent harm and reduce the risk of sexual violence, coercion, or sexually transmitted infections. Overall, practicing consent supports healthy, respectful, and positive experiences that contribute to overall wellbeing.



### **An international student perspective: [4]**

In New Zealand, for international students, consent can be understood differently due to cultural, legal, and social differences this can affect how they understand and experience consent in relationships. This legal and cultural approach to consent may be unfamiliar to international students, especially for students from countries where open discussions around sex and relationships are often limited due to conservative social norms. Many international students, particularly from conservative cultural backgrounds, experience a significant shift in their understanding of sexual health and consent after moving to countries like New Zealand. Therefore, these students may face challenges such as limited prior sex education, language barriers, and difficulty navigating a more open and individual-rights-focused environment. It is essential for international students to actively learn about NZ's consent laws, communicate clearly in relationships, and seek support when needed to ensure respectful and safe experiences. Many students come from families where sex and sexual health are rarely discussed, with knowledge often acquired informally through the internet or peers. Exposure to New Zealand norms around casual, safe sex and open dialogue has influenced students' evolving views and behaviours. However, despite access to a wide range of information and university support services, students often feel overwhelmed and unsure of how to access help, especially when information is not presented in a culturally sensitive manner. While most are comfortable visiting general practitioners when unwell, there is limited awareness around the importance of preventative sexual health care and holistic support. Living in a more open and sexually permissive environment, such as New Zealand, has

helped students better communicate boundaries and expectations, though acting on their knowledge of consent can still be difficult in real-life situations.



Services to approach during crisis:

- The NZ police: Call triple one (111) when you need an emergency response from Police.  
[New Zealand Police | Nga Pirihimana O Aotearoa](#)
- Safe to talk: Sexual Harm Helpline, 24/7, Free  
[Contact Us | Safe to talk](#)
- Sexual wellbeing clinics  
[Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa | Sexual health advice & clinics in NZ](#)
- For international students: Citizen's Advice Bureau  
[Citizens Advice Bureau](#)
- At Witt: Te Puna Manaaki  
[Mental health and wellbeing - Te Puna Manaaki home - LibGuides at Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki \(WITT\)](#)

Reference:

- [3] Beres, M. A. (2014). Rethinking the concept of consent for anti-sexual violence activism and education. *Feminism & Psychology*, 24(3), 373–389.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353514539652>
- [1] Burnett Foundation New Zealand. (2022). *Consent*.  
<https://www.burnettfoundation.org.nz/articles/sex/consent/>
- [1] Lofgreen, A. M., Mattson, R. E., Wagner, S. A., Ortiz, E. G., & Johnson, M. D. (2021). Situational and Dispositional Determinants of College Men's Perception of Women's Sexual Desire and Consent to Sex: A Factorial Vignette Analysis. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(1/2), NP1064-NP1097. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517738777>
- [1] New Zealand Police. (2025). *Understanding sexual assault and consent*.  
<https://www.police.govt.nz/advice/personal-and-community-safety/sexual-assault/understanding-sexual-assault-and-consent>
- [4] Parker, A., Harris, P., & Haire, B. (2020). International students' views on sexual health: A qualitative study at an australian university. *Sexual Health (Online)*, 17(3), 231-238.  
<https://doi.org/10.1071/SH19209>
- [4] Plan International. (2021). *Young people's perspectives of sexual wellbeing and consent: A literature review*.  
[https://planinternational.org/uploads/2021/12/young\\_peoples\\_perspectives\\_of\\_sexual\\_wellbeing\\_and\\_consent\\_-\\_a\\_literature\\_review.pdf](https://planinternational.org/uploads/2021/12/young_peoples_perspectives_of_sexual_wellbeing_and_consent_-_a_literature_review.pdf)
- [2] World Health Organization. (2025). *Sexual health, human rights and the law*. World Health Organization.  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564984>