

CULTURE OF CONSENT

Definitions and Basis. <Explainer A speaking>

"At our events we practice a 'Culture of Consent' in our interactions. What does 'consent' mean? Consent means 'the presence of a yes', not 'the absence of a no'. 'Culture of Consent' means, for example, everyone should be able to decline if someone wants to touch them. It means we communicate our desires as offers rather than commands. We don't just go ahead with something like putting our arm around someone without asking that person's permission first. Not just in romantic relationships, but in ALL interactions, even between friends. This arises from our community's Covenant—collectively written every year by attendees like you!—with parts like, 'Respect each other's feelings, boundaries, confidentiality, property, and respect ourselves', and 'Be mindful of what we do; our actions have effects beyond what we might expect'. Culture of Consent allows us to respect 'the inherent worth and dignity of every person', the first Unitarian Universalist Principle."

<Explainers role-play for the audience in the next few sections, with body examples & gestures>

Consent Must Be Prior. <Explainer B speaking>

"Let's look at this more closely. Consent must be prior. You can't get consent AFTER you've already done something with someone, though it's still good to check in after. An example of 'Culture of Consent' would be if I went up to [Explainer A] and put out my arms to give them a hug. I make it look like what it is (a hug), and wait for their consent before going ahead. Maybe [Explainer A] says 'yes', and so I can hug them. I can also look for body language, like a nod, or the person opening their arms toward me to hug me. Practice using your words though, and your listening, especially with people you don't know very well. Maybe [Explainer A] says 'no', or they cross their arms over their chest, or they say 'I don't know'. Those all mean don't hug them. That's fine, and it's not necessarily a personal thing, maybe that person just doesn't want to be hugged right then. Or maybe they don't say anything at all, or they can't hear or see you. Those also mean no. Don't assume someone's consent. Respect these like you'd want others to respect your boundaries too. You don't have to touch or be touched, or talk to someone, without consent."

Consent Must Be Informed. <Explainer A speaking, more body examples>

"Consent must be informed too. I can't just go up to [Explainer B] and ask, 'Hey can I do this thing to you?' Like, what does that even mean? The person has to understand the action and its impact before they can give real consent. And what if someone feels really sleepy, or really sick? Just because someone says 'yes' does not always make it consent, you have to think about the context too. Try imagining yourself in their position."

People Need Options. <Explainer A speaking again>

"Another quick note. Consent can only really work if the person has a realistic alternative to something. If you only have one possible action or interaction, you can't really consent to it. People need options. Part of 'Culture of Consent' means creating options, and encouraging people to think about their needs and desires. Remember the part of the Covenant that says, 'Empower people to voice their needs'. Also, consider how some relationships between people involve differences in power and authority, and how this influences their available options, and ability to feel comfortable saying 'yes' or 'no'."

Expanding the Scope. <Explainer B speaking>

"'Culture of Consent' also applies to activities during retreats. You always have the right to 'pass' during activities, to not share or participate. You also have the right to do self-care if you need to. We won't force you to participate, except for personal and all-group cleaning obligations, and attending some of the all-retreat activities, where you can still 'pass'."

Toolbox For Dissent. <Explainer A speaking, whole group role-plays now>

"Let's all practice refusing consent, otherwise known as expressing dissent. Let's practice by saying 'no' together. By shaking our heads to show our 'no'. By putting our arms across our chests to show our 'no'. Let's all practice using a safe word when we feel uncomfortable, saying 'DOWN'. Let's all practice slow clapping above our heads to express discomfort with something going on. Remember, this clapping doesn't mean approval, and if you see it, join in to draw attention and show your support for the person who feels uncomfortable. Let's all practice getting outside support by asking, 'Does anyone know where I can find a Chaplain?'"

Allyship. <Explainer B speaking>

"Part of our Covenant states, 'Take responsibility for our actions, words, and things.' Consider how this relates to consent: take responsibility for your behavior. It also states, 'Act as an ally; defend those who need defending.' This means if you see someone pressuring or tricking people, or bragging about it, don't turn your back to it. Use your conscience. Talk about it. Seek allies. Or be an ally: call out their behavior. We don't have to tolerate bullying, we can create a better world!"

Summary. <Explainer B speaking again>

"In summary: consent means the 'presence of a yes' during interactions. Consent must be prior and informed. And people need options. This all applies even with friends, and not just one-on-one, but at retreats generally. Practice expressing consent and dissent. Let's support each other as we create a safe space for personal growth and community. Any questions?"