



**Tip of the Week
Newsletter
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5 Steps to Continually Improving Campus Prevention Efforts: Part 1

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Where does teaching consent to students leave educators, professors, counselors, and law enforcement? What are, if you will, the core ideas to be taught to our students, and how might we best ensure the seeds of these teachings find some fertile soil in their hearts and experiences? Think of the following list as a template to lay over your existing prevention efforts and consider areas where you may look to improve.

- 1. Think dialogue, not monologue.** We've seen the futility in programs where students are preached to or treated like children unaware of the issues at hand. Successful consent education takes into account the type of audience, and the developmental critical thinking and moral reasoning of those receiving the message. We cannot simply lecture students and expect them to come in as containers ready and excited to receive our information. The best consent programs engage the audience, answer questions, and work through scenarios the students can relate to on and off campus.
- 2. Know your policy and code.** Each school has its own nuances to its policy and codes that are informed by state and federal law. It is helpful to provide these to students during programs by using handouts, links, and other resources. One should not mistake the language in the code for educational programming, it is essential to link educational programming discussions about consent with the student code of conduct.
- 3. Use technology to help.** Whether it be the latest app summarizing consent-related issues or your favorite tea-based video on You-tube, technology has created a host of useful resources and talking points for educators looking to augment their programs and better engage their audiences. A word of caution, however: Don't let the technology drive your content, but rather have the content highlighted by the technology. Given the ease of retrieving videos, slideshows, and handouts from the Web, there is a temptation to allow others' creative and entertaining work to supersede the point, helping students engage in open communication around their sexual activity and consent prior to finding themselves having to think fast on their feet in the middle of a situation.
- 4. Good sex begins with good communication.** What are the qualities of a good relationship? So often, consent conversation become about what not do, what not to ask, and what behaviors to avoid, rather than a discussion about what **to** do. As with Martin Seligman's (2006) work in positive psychology, we encourage consent educators to study and share the qualities of what makes up excellent, sex-positive communication, rather than focusing solely on the negative. How do people who have good, consensual sex go about making that happen? Talking to each other about their turn-ons, turn-offs, boundaries, and comfort zones. To quote Burning Man's Bureau of Erotic Discourse (B.E.D.), "Communication is the best lubrication."

5. **Thou shalt not...** Make sure to review those times where consent is just not possible. These include relationships with power differentials (such as therapists and clergy), as well interactions involving minors. The biggest teaching point here must be around incapacitation and alcohol. Help students understand the difference between intoxication and incapacity. Incapacity is an extreme form of intoxication, in which a person could not make rational or reasonable decisions. Someone who is asleep or unconscious, has a mental/cognitive impairment, or has been seriously injured cannot consent. While there is not a specific blood alcohol level that correlates with incapacitation, it remains helpful to discuss the challenges that students may encounter when attempting to ascertain incapacity. For example, it may be easier to determine this if you know what someone has had to drink because the person has been with you all night. It may be more difficult to ascertain if someone was drinking apart from you. Similarly, if you are meeting someone for the first time, it is exponentially harder to know that person's tolerance for alcohol, what the person's baseline behavior is, and whether or not the individual can consent given a particular consumption level. In trainings, we suggest making the point that obtaining the low bar of, "Well, I don't think I will get accused of rape" shouldn't be the goal. Imagine you are jumping from a plane with a parachute. Is checking the straps once sufficient, or does it make sense to check multiple times? Would it be safer if you were familiar with the parachute instead of just putting it on without further thought?

Stay Tuned Next Week for Part 2...

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