

CONSENT AND RESPECT: FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

One of the primary purposes of University of Victoria's Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response policy is to instill and cultivate institutional, collective, and individual responsibility to create an environment in which consent and respect are foundational principles and practices at the university.

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SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE RESOURCE OFFICE

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICY

CONSENT AND RESPECT

“Every individual should expect to be able to learn, work, and live in a university environment free from all forms of sexualized violence. The university expects every member of the university community to practice consent and respect for the dignity and diversity of all community members, and to foster an environment in which these are fundamental principles”.

RESPECT

Academic and professional excellence are built in environments that foster dignity and respect for each member of the university community. The University of Victoria works to further instill these values through the Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Policy. In relation to sexualized violence, dignity and respect means valuing each person—regardless of their sex, gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic background, religious affiliation, socio-economic, or ability status—as complete and complex individuals regardless of their differences. Sexually objectifying others through words and actions within this environment undermines these values, and infringes upon their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Under the policy, it is integral that each member of the university community, including students, staff, or faculty, show each other dignity and respect in the language they use to address one another, in their interpersonal interactions, and in the consideration they give to one another’s ideas and contributions in the classroom and other settings including laboratories, recreational facilities, common social and academic spaces, residence, as well as within each unit and faculty. This is integral to creating environments where each person feels supported to achieve their personal, professional, and academic best.

CONSENT

The Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Policy defines consent as: *the voluntary agreement to engage in physical contact or sexual activity and to continue to engage in the contact or activity. Consent means that all persons involved demonstrate, through words or actions, that they freely and mutually agree to participate in a contact or activity.*

Specifically:

- Consent must be given at the outset and at all stages of physical contact or sexual activity;
- It is the responsibility of the initiator to obtain ongoing consent;
- Consent can be withdrawn at anytime by any participant;
- Someone who is incapacitated cannot consent;
- There is no consent where one person abuses a position of trust, power, or authority over another person;
- Past consent does not imply future consent;
- A person cannot give consent on behalf of another person;
- Silence or the absence of “no” is not consent;
- The absence of perceived resistance is not consent; and
- There is no consent when there is coercion, force, threats, or intimidation towards any person, or where there is fraud or withholding of critical information that could affect a person’s decision to consent.

CONSENT AS AN EVERYDAY PRACTICE

While understanding and actively practising consent is an important way to reduce sexualized violence, so too is establishing and practicing consent in our everyday interpersonal interactions. This includes establishing our own, and respecting one another’s, personal boundaries in all our interpersonal interactions. This may include, for instance, recognizing that not everyone considers a hug a friendly and innocuous gesture. In order to build a culture of consent, it is important to ask whether we can touch one another first. Similarly not everyone will welcome a compliment on their appearance—especially if it is one that could be interpreted as having a sexual connotation. It is good practice to begin by saying, “may I give you a compliment” or “may I give you a hug”?

Within this context it is important to keep in mind that power dynamics in our interpersonal interactions can make it difficult for some people to freely consent by providing a clear “yes” or “no”. It is therefore important to be especially sensitive to individuals non-verbal body language (e.g., moving away from a touch or an embrace) or their indirect communication (e.g., deflecting the request with a joke or by changing the conversation). Tuning in to these ways that people communicate their boundaries is the responsibility of the initiator of the action and those who hold positions of power within the interaction.