

Services For Education

DSL DISCUSSIONS - CONSENT

Raising the topic...

Consent is a key theme across safeguarding. Children must be taught to recognise safe and unsafe relationships and when it is okay to speak up if they feel unsafe or do not like what is happening.

People often think of the word consent in sexual relationships, but it is wider than that. It is how someone thinks, feels and interacts with others.

The key principles of consent are:

It must be freely given- there must be a clear choice

It needs to be informed- they must always know what they are consenting to

It is always reversible- consent can be removed at any time, even if the person has previously consented

It must be given enthusiastically- consent must be explicit, with clear verbal agreement and no hesitation

And it should be specific- consent must be sought each time, each occasion and never presumed.

Some children may do things they do not consent to through coercion, manipulation, threats of violence or exploitation. So as educators we have a duty to teach children about consent, bodily autonomy and relationships, in order to equip them to keep themselves safe and make safe choices as they go through life.

Questions to discuss...

Where is the curriculum do we teach about safe and unsafe relationships? Where do we use the word consent and explain what this is?

What are some of the signs that a child may be being coerced, groomed or exploited? What behaviours might you see?

Do we discuss consent and boundaries outside of PSHE/RSHE? Where else might this topic arise?

Do we share key principles explicitly with children in an age and stage appropriate way?

What would be the next steps if we felt a child was experiencing coercion, grooming or exploitation?

Are there any signposts we could share with children and families around this topic?

What can you do?

Model a consent-culture: Show the children how to ask for consent in all areas of school life. Normalise asking for permission and setting clear boundaries.

Age-appropriate messaging: Tailor the message around consent in an age and stage appropriate way. Young children need to learn about safe touch and sharing, whereas older children need to understand consent in friendships, romantic relationships and where they could be at risk of harm.

Ensure the curriculum is robust and fit for purpose: Go through your curriculum and identify opportunities where the topic of consent may arise. Ensure staff are confident leading these discussions and that there is a consistent message for all.

Respond swiftly and effectively: Where issues arise, ensure these are dealt with in line with your safeguarding policies and procedures. This may include in school Early Help through counselling or support or external support from Children's Services. Make sure all children know they can share their concerns and they won't be blamed or made to feel shameful.

HOW CAN SFE HELP?

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www.servicesforeducation.co.uk/safeguarding

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BESPOKE SAFEGUARDING TRAINING...

- Do you require further support with your safeguarding systems?
- Or want guidance with auditing your procedures and practices?

For bespoke, tailored Safeguarding consultancy contact us at safeguarding@servicesforeducation.co.uk