

Talking about sexual consent and expectations can improve relationships and well-being

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Teaching the benefits of affirmative sexual consent while also validating anxieties people might experience about consent communication is an

important step for improving sexual health and well-being, according to a new study.

Although schools teach about [sexual consent](#), most individuals continue to practice passive consent through nonresistance, as opposed to a direct and a voluntary agreement to engage in [sexual activity](#).

The new study aimed to understand people's various perceptions of sexual consent communication in order to improve approaches to sexual education.

"Our recommendations will hopefully lead to consent being viewed as a means to greater sexual well-being in addition to its crucial function of ensuring psychological and physical safety for all parties in a sexual interaction," said Jessica Edwards, a researcher in [clinical psychology](#) at the University of Waterloo.

Edwards and Uzma Rehman, a professor of clinical psychology at Waterloo, surveyed 231 participants aged 18 to 64 representing different ethnicities and sexual orientations.

Participants suggested that they see consent communication as positively or negatively impacting four areas: communication quality, relational and [emotional experiences](#), sexual quality, and safety and coercion. The responses highlight some of the complexities people experience while trying to discuss consent.

"Participants noted that consent communication can lead to misunderstandings between partners, interpersonal awkwardness, and increase the risk for negative emotional reactions, such as rejection," Rehman said. "They also viewed it as enhancing the relationship, creating a context of safety and respect, and being instrumental in clarifying sexual expectations."

The study also examined the barriers that prevent people from talking about sexual expectations. It found that identifying and confronting barriers such as experiencing shame and guilt during such conversations is critical to effective education about sexual well-being education.

The paper was published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

More information: Jessica Edwards et al, Perceived barriers and rewards to sexual consent communication: A qualitative analysis, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/02654075221080744](https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221080744)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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