

# Let's Talk About Yes: UK Universities Activism Toolkit

Moving from a 'rape culture' to a 'consent culture'

**LET'S  
TALK  
ABOUT  
YES**

#LetsTalkAboutYes



## Overview

The Amnesty Student Network have joined a Europe-wide campaign to make it clear that sex without consent is rape. The UK is among the few European countries where the law already makes it clear that rape is defined by a lack of consent. But that does not mean consent is always sought. A clear understanding of what sexual consent means can prevent rape and other sexual offences.

This toolkit has been developed by contributions from Amnesty International staff and activists, and has been edited for use by student groups in the UK. The campaign is expanding to other countries in Europe and builds on years of work and activism on sexual violence in different countries.

We hope the campaign will help start or engage youth in conversations about sexual consent and contribute to a cultural shift where positive, enthusiastic consent is the norm, and people don't feel awkward to ask someone if they want to move forward. We envisage a student culture based on mutual consent, respect and positive sexuality.

- Rape is an important human rights issue which can affect people of any age, sex, gender or gender identity. Rape is a gendered crime that is disproportionately perpetrated by men against women. For an overview of the campaign and why this is an important matter see <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/11/rape-in-europe/>

The #LetsTalkAboutYes campaign seeks to engage activists, creatives and young people of all genders and backgrounds to talk about sexual consent, and contribute to:

- Increasing the number of conversations about sexual consent among young people
- Increasing collaboration with, and involvement of, youth activists and artists in these conversations
- Increasing awareness of myths surrounding rape.
- Increasing engagement with, and visibility of, the #LetsTalkAboutYes hashtag

This toolkit provides guidance and suggests ways in which you can contribute to the campaign and engage more people, especially youth, in talking about sexual consent in a light-hearted and respectful way.

### What's inside:

1. Talking and thinking about consent
2. Moving barriers: how to debunk misconceptions and avoid stereotypes
3. Taking Action:
  - Running an Art Workshop – see Being a multiplier: how to run workshops to encourage conversations and creative expression
  - Night of Action

- Taking Action: Creative guidelines: how to create content that triggers conversation
4. Resources for survivors and advocates: how to respond and support survivors of sexual assault
  5. Good reads and resources: how to learn more about consent

## 1 Talking and thinking about consent

In any conversation around consent, whether it is a public talk, a workshop or as part of a social media conversation we must be clear: **when it comes to sex, consent is everything and there are no blurred lines.**

You can use the following definition:

### Consent is...

**Given freely:** Sexual consent must be a voluntary and free choice for all parties involved. Being silent or not saying no is not the same as giving consent. Unconscious people and people under the influence of alcohol and drugs cannot consent. Sex is not consented under coercion or intimidation.

**Informed:** Lying or deliberately hiding certain intentions such as unprotected sex is not consensual sex. Getting someone too drunk to refuse sex or to agree to certain practices is not getting consent.

**Specific:** Consenting to one thing (i.e. kissing) does not mean consenting to everything else. A general rule is: If in doubt, ask. If you're still in doubt, stop.

**Reversible:** Consenting once does not mean consenting for ever.

**Enthusiastic!** The question is not whether a person says "no", but whether they say "yes" or otherwise actively express consent in a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways. This is what is called 'yes means yes'. 'I don't know' doesn't mean consent.

Meme from <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/sex/all-about-consent> + see their video: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bw2m5QbF50I/>

Consent is about communication and about making sure all sexual activities happen with mutual consent. Demystify the 'awkwardness' of talking about consent.

The Family Planning Association in the UK have compiled verbal and non-verbal signs to express consent – or not: <https://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/consent-giving-getting-respecting-leaflet.pdf>. And this is what consent looks like for US-based Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN): <https://www.rainn.org/articles/what-is-consent>.

The importance of sexual consent can be explained by considering other scenarios in which consent may be important and how they might be analogous to sexual situations:

- Would you eat someone else's food without asking them?
- Would it be ok to go into someone else's room/house without asking them? What if you were only going in to tidy up for them, or do some other kind of favour?
- If you bought someone a jumper as a present, would it be ok to make them wear it, or threaten that you will no longer be their friend if they don't wear it?

A common analogy used to illustrate how sexual consent should work is of making someone a cup of tea. Search 'tea consent' or watch the video on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>

Other useful analogies are 'handshakes and consent':

<https://megjohndanjustin.com/sex/handshakes-and-consent/>

and the 'consent castle': <https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/07/metaphor-for-consent/>.

Useful leaflet from the Family Planning Association

<https://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/consent-giving-getting-respecting-leaflet.pdf>

## 2 Debunking misconceptions and avoiding stereotypes

Here are some facts to respond to some common misconceptions and stereotypes:

- Dressing a certain way, drinking alcohol, other lifestyle choices DO NOT establish consent to sex.
- The absence of a "no" DOES NOT mean "yes" – only an enthusiastic "yes" means "yes".
- Sex on a previous occasion DOES NOT establish consent on other occasions.
- Perpetrators are NOT normally compete strangers. Most often, perpetrators are victims' partners, ex-partners or friends. They have friends, families, careers, they say "hello", "thank you", they can be famous or charismatic, they can be our friends.
- Rape is NOT 'just unwanted sex'. Rape violation of human rights and bodily integrity which does extensive physical, psychological and emotional damage.
- A delay in reporting rape is more likely evidence that the victim is traumatised and fear their rapist, NOT evidence that the rape didn't happen. Most survivors do not report. Those who do report or tell their stories often do so several weeks, months or even years after the rape. Their experiences are still valid and important. See *#WhyIDidn'tReport on Twitter*
- Rape is NOT uncommon. In the EU, 1 in 20 women aged 15 and over have been raped. That is around 9 million women. And 1 in 10 women aged 15 and over in the

EU have experienced some form of sexual violence. (*in response to: 'rapes don't happen often'*)

- Rape can affect anyone BUT women are disproportionately affected. It's important to acknowledge the gendered nature of rape; always using a gender-neutral approach is inclusive but hides the specific experiences of women. The measures that help women (talking about consent, promoting a consent culture, providing support services and amending legislation) also benefit men, non-binary people and people of other genders who suffer from sexual violence.
- Men CAN get raped: Rape is non-consensual sexual intercourse and while majority of victims are women and girls, anyone, of any gender, can be a victim.

### 3 Taking Action

The Student Action Network Committee are encouraging student groups to support the campaign in three ways. They're each different, targeting different groups of students - combining all three would be very effective!

Art workshops

Night of Action

Taking Action Online: use the #Let'sTalkAboutYes in posts.

#### Art Workshops

Consent may seem a vague and indescribable concept, and its boundaries appear blurred at times. As well as a crucial expression of self-determination and dignity, the idea of consent is also extremely personal to each and every one of us. To best express this individuality and multifaceted concept, the Amnesty Student Network are encouraging student groups to organise art workshops themed around consent.

Attendees should be given art supplies and settle in an environment where they feel safe to engage in perhaps difficult or triggering conversation and reflection. A short introduction should be given on why consent is a crucial issue and the questions attendees could ask themselves during the creation process. Attendees will then be left to create whatever is a representation of consent for them. This may be a picture or painting, a piece of writing, a cartoon, a photograph, even T-Shirt art. Workshop organisers should respectfully and sensitively encourage conversation between the attendees, perhaps on why they chose this type of art, and how this represents consent to them.

With permission, the pieces of art can be shared on social media or exhibited in student unions or other spaces where they will spark a conversation between students. The Student Action Network will be sharing creations on social media throughout the months of February and March to showcase the palette of consent representations.

The aim of these art workshops is not only the creation of artwork to engage students with the issue, but through process of creation, the personal reflection and discussions that may arise when participants explore their personal expression of consent.

Steps to organising a consent art workshop with your Amnesty student group:

- 1) Find a venue where discussions and creations stay private. Booking a room at your university or student union may be a good idea.
- 2) Provide art supplies: paper, cardboard, pens, paints, clay/playdough, scissors, crayons, white T-Shirts.
- 3) Create a comfortable space: offer drinks and snacks, put some music on, perhaps set the tables out in a circle.
- 4) Give a trigger warning and hand out resources on where and how to get help. It's important to research support services that are available locally, such as provided by the student union, university, or local council, which you can signpost students to.
- 5) Give a short introduction to the theme and the myths surrounding it. There is no need to go into too much detail, just lay out the definition of consent and how it may not encompass all its more subtle meanings.
- 6) Let the creative process begin! Ask a few questions which attendees can think about when creating: What does consent mean to you? When is consent required? How do you know when consent has been given? Do you think consent is a taboo subject? Why might it be taboo? Why do we find it so hard to define consent? What feelings does the absence of consent provoke? Why? Does consent evoke positive or negative feelings? What do you want your piece to express? Which art form represents your ideas about consent best?
- 7) Encourage a discussion: How did the workshop make you feel? Did you enjoy it? Do you think art is a good way of expressing personal ideas about consent? Do you feel more open to having conversations about consent now?

## Night of Action

**When?** 10th March 2020

**What?** A night-time or evening event to open up discussions about sexual assault and rape on campus and consent culture in wider society- whether it be a protest walk, a documentary film screening or an event totally unique to your student group.

**Who?** We want to create a space open for everyone to discuss and participate in solidarity against sexual assault and rape. Ideally keep your language as open and inclusive as possible. Although, sexual assault disproportionately affects women and girls it can affect anyone and creating an open space where nobody's voice feels silenced or ignored is crucial to this discussion.

**Where?** At Universities across the UK!

Similar to a typical 'day of action' that the Student Action Network has run, we want the 'night of action' to be a show of solidarity and power- and to give collective voice to an issue often silenced by society. For many students, but particularly women, the night is a period of uncertainty and fraught with fears for their personal safety and security. Inspired by the brilliant 'Reclaim the Night' marches (<http://www.reclaimthenight.co.uk/>) in November we want to run a campaign that reclaims spaces (and a time period) – We acknowledge that this campaign may work differently in different parts of the country- and we don't want anyone to put themselves in a situation where they feel unsafe or overwhelmed.

University culture- especially around drinking and club nights- is not an inherently safe space to protest in and so we encourage you to prepare as much as possible to ensure your safety, or if you do not feel a 'Reclaim the Night' style protest is right for your university group then we have a lot of other alternatives that can equally show solidarity and power. Much like the art workshops, we want these coordinated actions to open up a space that reflects your power and voices as particular Amnesty groups- so please only take this as a jumping off point to take an action that works and is authentic to you as a group.

### Safety

- Make sure your action is appropriate for your location and the turn-out you are expecting- don't attempt any actions where you feel you are putting yourself or others at risk.
- Make sure that everyone can get home safely- and no one is left isolated, having to walk home unsafely in the dark.
- Make sure you provide resources and contacts such as sexual assault helplines and local police contacts for anybody who is affected by these issues, it's important to look after attendees' mental wellbeing, as well as physically, during the process of this campaign.
- If it is a march keep in mind options for people who might have difficulty walking or other access needs.

### Night March

- Make sure to get permission from the council, or relevant campus body, in advance, they can ensure there is a police presence and that you are therefore protected if you get aggressively heckled.
- Choose an area of town that is busy for impact.

- Ensure your safety firstly and foremost- if you feel uncomfortable or at risk then it's not just okay but imperative to stop.
- When you leave at the end of the march, make sure that you leave in reasonably large groups and ensure that everyone gets home safely, and isn't left walking on their own at night.
- Maybe invite other societies to collaborate, such as University sport societies- to broaden the scope of your audience and increase your impact

### **Campaigning in your Student Union**

There may be a campus-specific issue you want to focus on and petition your SU to change their policy on -such as prioritising discussions on consent or improving support services for the victims of sexual assault and rape.

- You could host a sit-in or a march in your Student Union to draw attention to the specific issues you feel your student union could improve on.

### **Documentary/Discussions**

- As alternatives to a public protest – you could focus on creating a space of open dialogue on creating consent culture- whether a panel discussion, a more informal 'Amnestea' and discussion or any other event you envision.
- At these events it is important to create a safe and welcoming space for discussion and to provide links to resources and helplines before, during and after the meeting, as well as trigger warnings, as it can be a very sensitive and difficult subject for many people to discuss.
- If you want to show a documentary, video or film concerning the topic of sexual assault, make sure you give all the appropriate warnings and support needed.

### **Impact**

- Think about ways you could make your campaign as impactful and relevant as possible- what is your aim? What issues that are particularly relevant to your campus or to your local town? What are the best ways to spark conversation about consent?
- Having a visually impactful campaign is a brilliant way to attract more people- think about what would be most visually impactful at night (UV paint, (fake) candles for example) and the spaces that are most impactful to occupy (a busy student union, a walk from the university to a prominent area for university night life).
- What would work best for your group- a sit-in or camp out, a march, a silent protest, a candle-lit vigil?



## Taking Action Online

YES to spending time with an old friend/having a blowout birthday meal/putting on my trainers and getting outdoors.

'Yes' is a small, everyday word but 'Yes' gives us power'. 'Yes' shapes our lives. 'Yes' is important. Everyone should be able to decide when, what, and who they say 'yes' to.

...and it's the same for SEX. Sex without consent is rape. It's simple.

So, what did you say 'yes' to today? Help us spread the campaign #Let'sTalkAboutYes @Let'sTalkAboutYes #YesMeansYes #consent #womensrights

What have you said 'yes' to today? Snap a pic and share with the hashtag #Let'sTalkAboutYes @Let'sTalkAboutYes !

- See the Amnesty UK Students Instagram for example posts on normalising yes: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8ooLjFJJT3/>
- Remember to time your post at a peak use time, like in the evening, and to use tags and hashtags!



## Other tips and ideas for taking action

- Working with arts societies/art departments or student unions at universities, organise workshops or creative competitions on the topic of consent. For example, a competition could be held over the course of a few months, increasing the length or regularity of engagement – and through student unions could increase engagement across campuses to ask people to vote in the competition with a prize of some sort to be won.
- Lobby student unions to increase discussions around consent and improve reporting and support structures for survivors of sexual violence.
- Combine creative projects with campaigns for change on both a national level, and local University level.
- Encourage students to create merchandise (posters, postcards, t-shirts etc) using the art that is created by the students to sell across campuses with funds being raised to support relevant organisations.
- Run events or stunts on campus, linking them up to engagement with the campaign on social media:
  - Panel discussions/film screenings (good for visibility and cross-campus engagement) - team up with other societies on campus and invite speakers
  - Provide students with examples of stunts that have taken place on university campuses around the world, for inspiration (particularly if their university has been quiet on the issue of sexual assault or consent) -such as:
- ['Carry That Weight' Changes the Conversation on Campus Sexual Assault](#) and ['A rapist in your path': Chilean protest song becomes feminist anthem](#), replicated in many countries.
- Other collaborative creative events e.g.:
  - Team up with the drama department to write and produce a play (such as <http://www.sin.ie/2019/09/11/active-consent-programme-to-tour-ireland-with-original-play-the-kinds-of-sex-you-might-have-at-college/>)
  - Team up with the fashion department and run a fashion show to increase visibility of the campaign and as a means of expressing that anyone can be the victim of sexual violence.

## 4 Resources for survivors

You will find some useful resources linked throughout this toolkit, but here are some general UK based examples:

- Rape and effects of rape- Rape Crisis South London [http://www.rasasc.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/rapeCrisisSouthLondon\\_rapeAndTheEffectsOfRape\\_informat ionForSupportersOfSurvivors.pdf](http://www.rasasc.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/rapeCrisisSouthLondon_rapeAndTheEffectsOfRape_informat ionForSupportersOfSurvivors.pdf)

- Self Help Guides SARSA <https://www.sarsas.org.uk/self-help-guides/>
- How Do I Tell Someone About My Sexual Assault? - <https://www.projectconsent.com/how-do-i-tell-someone-about-my-assault>
- [My Body Back](http://www.mybodybackproject.com/), London-based project to support women one year on from a sexual assault: <http://www.mybodybackproject.com/>
- Sexpression (find out if there is a Sexpression Society on your campus) - <https://sexpression.org.uk/>

**Make sure to research relevant organisations and support services for your city/campus.**

## 5 Good reads and more resources

### Educational resources

- Everything You Need to Know About Consent That You Never Learned in Sex Ed: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/consent-how-to>
- TedX Talk: Why we need to change the way young men think about consent: [https://www.ted.com/talks/nathaniel\\_cole\\_why\\_we\\_need\\_to\\_change\\_the\\_way\\_young\\_men\\_think\\_about\\_consent](https://www.ted.com/talks/nathaniel_cole_why_we_need_to_change_the_way_young_men_think_about_consent)
- Quickies: Sexual Consent Basics: [https://www.scarleteen.com/article/disability\\_quickies/quickies\\_sexual\\_consent\\_basics](https://www.scarleteen.com/article/disability_quickies/quickies_sexual_consent_basics)
- Consent video from Amaze: <https://amaze.org/video/consent/>
- What is Consent?: <https://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/what-consent/>
- The Consent Castle metaphor: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/07/metaphor-for-consent/>
- All About Boundaries: <https://www.rewriting-the-rules.com/sex/all-about-boundaries/>
- The Consent Checklist by Meg-John Barker: <https://www.rewriting-the-rules.com/zines/#1570712847485-79489f1b-f52a>
  - “This zine provides a checklist that you can work through when considering how to do anything – sex, a social event, work, a relationship – consensually. It explores and unpacks the key elements needed to ensure that people are freely agreeing to something, that they can tune into their wants, needs, limits, and boundaries and feel safe-enough to express them to others concerned.”
- Self consent: an introduction: <https://loveuncommon.com/2017/09/28/self-consent/>
  - "Self consent, at its heart, is about treating your needs, desires and limits with respect. It is about being curious about yourself, and making choices that express your authentic self. It is central to learning to have a consensual relationship with others because it embeds consensual practice in your life and all your interactions.[...]"

- Sexual abuse: The questions you've never had the chance to ask (video explainers): <https://ninaburrowes.com/sexual-abuse-the-questions-youve-never-had-the-chance-to-ask/>
- ChemSex and consent (useful resource for the discussion of consent in general): <https://lgbt.foundation/news/chemsex-and-consent/228>

## Training resources

- Beware of trolls and online harassment, the best strategy is often to ignore them. For other strategies, see: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-deal-with-trolls-on-social-media/>
- Handshakes and consent activity: <https://bishtraining.com/three-handshakes-an-activity-for-learning-how-consent-feels/> and video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awrp7EJGqyc>
- Top tips to teach about consent: <https://bishtraining.com/top-tips-for-teaching-about-consent/>
- Negotiating sex – start with the wheel of consent: <https://loveuncommon.com/2018/02/14/negotiating-sex-start-with-the-wheel-of-consent/> and the 3-minute game <https://bettymartin.org/download-wheel/>
- On disclosure and building trust in workshops (pages 14-16) <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ACT3000102015ENGLISH.PDF>

## Podcasts

- 7 Tips for a Consensual Hook Up: <https://megjohnandjustin.com/sex/7-tips-consensual-hook-up/>
- Make Consent Your Aim: <https://megjohnandjustin.com/relationships/make-consent-aim/>
- Laid Bare podcast by Oloni, about sex, relationships, feminism and race in ("adult content"): <https://soundcloud.com/laidbarepodcast>

## Series on Netflix

- Unbelievable, a series based on a true story of American survivor Marie Adler's story: <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80153467>
- Sex Education, a series about well, sex education: <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80197526>