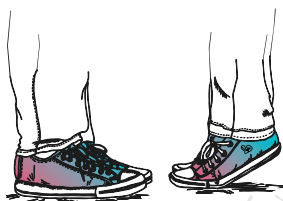




I ASK I ASK I ASK I ASK I ASK

# I Ask

## How Power Impacts Consent



Consent can be complicated when one partner holds more power than the other. By being mindful of the ways power imbalances may impact consent, you can take steps to ensure your partner feels comfortable communicating their needs.

## What Is Power?

- Power is the ability to influence the actions and choices of others.
- Power can be obvious, like in the case of a supervisor or mentor, or it can be less apparent like when there's a difference in sexual experience.

## Imbalances of Power

- Relationships have a power imbalance when one person has the power to influence things like money, a place to live, a job, or a reputation.
- Having power over someone can influence how comfortable they feel saying no to sex – someone may fear negative consequences for not consenting.
- When someone abuses power over a partner, they may use verbal threats or not. Either way, consent is never possible when someone feels they don't have a choice.

## Examples of Imbalances of Power

- **Age differences and sexual experience:** An older or more sexually experienced adult may make a younger or less experienced adult feel they need to “prove” that they are mature or experienced.
- **Level of ability:** Some adults who have physical or intellectual disabilities, older adults, or those who need assistance from a caregiver may rely on their partner in some areas of life, but their decision-making in other areas should still be respected.
- **Position in society:** Someone may have more social privilege than their partner – through their education, job, wealth, citizenship, or other factors.
- **Privilege:** White privilege, male privilege, and other unearned advantages are part of the power some of us bring to relationships.

## Checking In

- Before asking for consent, consider how holding a position of power might influence the situation.

*Ask yourself: “Would this person say yes if I didn't have power/authority over them?”*

## Make Consent Clear

- If there's a difference in power between you and your partner, your partner may feel less able to tell you their needs.
- Let them know they can tell you when they're not interested in doing something.
- Ask questions in a way that communicates you're okay with their answer – no matter what it is.

*For example, “I hope you know you can tell me how you're really feeling - saying 'no' is always okay.”*