



## How to Talk to Your Student about Healthy Relationships and Consent on Campus

College is an exciting environment full of new experiences and new relationships that will significantly shape the lives of students during these early years of becoming adults. Away from the familiarity of home and family, we at Wake Forest University strive to create a safe and supportive environment for students as they forge ahead on these new paths, yet we understand that parents and caregivers also continue to hold an important and invaluable role in helping your students navigate life at college. As you prepare your student for college life, it's important to have conversations with them about relationships and consent.

### Promoting Healthy Relationships

New relationships are essential to the college experience, and students will find many opportunities for making friends and dating. As they prepare to enter this new social world, now is a good time to talk with your student about how to develop healthy relationships with their peers. The [five keys](#) to a healthy relationship are Respect, Learn, Empower, Consent, and Communicate, and helping your student understand how to cultivate these in all their relationships will give them the tools they need to create a positive campus culture.

- **Respect**: Promote and model healthy attitudes and relationships; treat others the way you want to be treated.
- **Learn**: Access credible information and resources to promote your overall health; when you have a question, seek answers from a credible source.
- **Empower**: Everyone has the right to set limits, feel safe, and get support; you deserve to be respected and listened to.
- **Consent**: Seek mutual agreement without fear or pressure; ask for consent, and check in to make sure consent is clear.

- **Communicate:** Express yourself to partners, peers, and family; you can talk openly and honestly with people you trust. If you notice something is wrong, you can speak up.

## **Defining Consent**

[Consent](#) is an essential element for healthy relationships and how to respect their personal boundaries and the boundaries of others. Consent is important in many aspects of our daily lives, not just in sexual relationships, and it is a vital part of clear and honest communication. Understanding consent helps students understand their own boundaries and communicate those boundaries clearly with others, as well as respecting others' boundaries. When talking with your student about consent, use these points to define what consent is and isn't:

- Consent is voluntary, mutual, and can be withdrawn at any time.
- Withdrawal of consent at any time is okay, and should be respected.
- Consent needs to be clear and specific.
- Past consent does not mean current or future consent.
- Consent is freely given and there is no fear or pressure involved. Coercing or pestering someone to give in is not consent.
- There is no consent if a person is mentally or physically incapacitated or impaired because one cannot understand the fact, nature, or extent of the sexual situation, including due to alcohol or other drugs.
- Safety is key to healthy relationships, and practicing consent is practicing safety.

It's also important to talk to your student about making healthy decisions around alcohol and other drugs while at college, and it's crucial to emphasize that sexual assault is never the survivor's fault, no matter what they are wearing, if they've been drinking, or what their relationship to the perpetrator is. etc. The Wake Forest University policy definition of consent can be found in the [Title IX and Sexual Misconduct policy](#).

## **Talking to Your Student**

Going away to college is exciting, but it can also bring some anxiety, both for you and your student. You want them to have amazing new experiences, but you also want them to be safe and make healthy choices. Your student is transitioning into young adulthood, gaining more independence, but maybe feeling unsure about leaving the familiarity of home. These conversations about relationships and consent may feel awkward in the beginning, but ultimately they can give both you and your student new confidence in making the transition to college. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

- Plan the conversation. Consider where and when you and your student can be comfortable talking.
- Ask your student about their views on relationships and consent. Share facts and debunk myths.
- Listen to your student, be attentive, and try not to be too critical. Let them know that they can talk to you even about difficult things without being judged.
- Try not to use blanket statements or scare tactics. Speak specifically and encourage open communication.
- Collaborate with your student about ways they can articulate their boundaries. Empower them to state what they do and do not want with confidence.
- Help your student plan ways to ask for consent, and even practice how they might ask for consent or communicate boundaries in different situations.

Most importantly, keep the conversation going! Check in with your student, and let them know you are always there for them to talk about their concerns and safety.

### **How to Support Students Who Disclose Sexual Assault**

Learning that a loved one has experienced sexual assault can be [overwhelming](#); you may feel anger, anxiety, confusion, disbelief, guilt, and sadness. If your student discloses an assault to you, it's important to support them and acknowledge the trust they've put in you by disclosing about an assault, which takes a lot of courage. Survivors often feel afraid, ashamed, or dirty, and may struggle to understand what happened to them and why, so it's vital that they receive a compassionate and caring response. Here are some ways to support your student:

- Reassure the survivor that the assault was not their fault and that you believe them. These can be the most powerful and helpful words for a survivor to hear.
- Understand that people respond differently to being sexually assaulted. Expect a range of emotions from your student, and remember that regardless of how they are reacting emotionally, they need support.
- Tell them you want to be there for them. Let your student tell as much or little about what happened as they would like, and avoid asking a lot of questions about the details of what happened.
- Encourage them to seek support and medical care through campus and community resources, but let them make their own decisions including how and when to seek help. However, if you are concerned about your student's safety at any time, get help immediately.

## **Campus Resources:**

### **Confidential Campus Resources**

- [Safe Office](#)

The Safe Office provides confidential support and assistance related to sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and all forms of interpersonal violence. The Safe Office also serves as a liaison to resources, provides information about reporting options, offers educational programming, and provides confidential consultations for concerned students, parents, faculty, and staff.

<https://safeoffice.wfu.edu/>

[safe@wfu.edu](mailto:safe@wfu.edu)

### **24/7 helpline 336.758.5285**

- [Student Health Services](#)
- [University Counseling Center](#)
- [Office of the Chaplain](#)
- Sports Psychologist in the Athletics Department

### **Non-confidential Campus Resources**

- [Title IX Office](#)
- [Office of Diversity and Inclusion Offices](#)  
(Intercultural Center, LGBTQ+ Center, Women's Center)
- [University Police](#)

### **Community and National Resources**

- [Family Services \(Winston Salem agency\)](#)
- [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#)
- [Rape and Incest Abuse National Network \(RAINN\)](#)
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline \(live chat option available\)](#)

### **Prevention Resources on Campus**

- PREPARE Peer Educators student group
- [Office of Wellbeing](#)
- Culture of Respect Initiative

Content adapted from UT Knoxville, RAINN, It's On US, and NSVRC