RESOURCES : Consent in the Context of Drug & Alcohol Use

YouTube Clips:

Understanding Capacity and Power Imbalance (Newcastle University - 2 mins 57):
https://youtu.be/iBvD3sACS4o

How to spot the signs someone is too drunk to consent (SARSAS - 48 seconds):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPO2s4vWWF0

Young people talking about consent (RISE ABOVE - 3 mins 52)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jasl2q3l26M

Recommended for 18+ only or those studying law
Alcohol and consent Case Study - Anton and Steph (Talk about Trust - 16 mins)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCjXzKBoVXg

ACTIVITY 1

True or False?

Aim: to debunk some of the misconceptions around giving and interpreting consent.

Give the group the statements and ask them if they are TRUE or FALSE. Allow time for discussion both before and after giving the correct answer.

1. 'If someone agreed to sex before they took the MDMA, it's still valid consent.'

False - If someone is too intoxicated to be able consent in that moment, then there is no consent, regardless of what they might have said before.

2. 'If they don't say 'no,' it means they consented.'

False - Silence or lack of resistance does NOT equal consent. Consent must be clear, enthusiastic, and freely given - every time.

3. 'We've been sexually active for months but I should still check for consent every time.'

True - A past experience does NOT guarantee future agreement - everyone has the right to say no, even after saying yes before.

4. 'Alcohol or drugs make sex more exciting and spontaneous.'

False - Intoxication impairs judgment and the ability to give or receive consent. It increases the risk of coercion and harmful situations, rather than making things 'more fun'. These substances can also affect the physical side of sex, making it physically more difficult and potentially less fun.

5. 'If someone freezes, goes quiet and cannot look you in the eye, they are not consenting.'

True - These are non-verbal cues. Freezing is a fear response which does not show enthusiastic consent. Lack of eye contact can indicate distress - consent is not being freely given.

6. 'People are their 'real selves' when they're drunk - they say and do what they truly feel inside.'

False - Alcohol lowers inhibitions but doesn't reflect someone's true personality. It can make people more impulsive, less aware, less empathetic and even regret their actions later.

ACTIVITY 2

Can consent be given?

Aim: to show how increased intoxication can lead to a situation where consent can no longer be given or interpreted as received.

Each part of the story is revealed and after each, the question 'Can consent be given?' should be answered, giving reasons for their answer.

Alex and Jamie are at a party drinking beer.

1. They are standing close and making eye contact with each other, smiling and laughing at each other's jokes. Jamie tilts her head slightly when she speaks, clearly engaged and Alex mirrors her movements. They are both seem comfortable, aware, and physically in control of themselves.

Can consent be given? **YES** - both are engaged, aware and showing mutual interest.

They share a joint and continue drinking.

2. Jamie is now swaying slightly while standing, her laughter has become louder and more exaggerated. She is blinking slowly and when she tries to grab her drink, her hand wobbles a little before securing it. Alex takes another sip of their drink and smiles at Jamie.

Can consent be given? **MAYBE** - but early signs of intoxication are showing, particularly in Jamie, so they need to check in with each other.

Jamie suggests they do some shots and Alex agrees.

3. Jamie is now leaning heavily on furniture, her eyelids drooping. When Alex speaks to her, she looks confused and nods vaguely. Her speech is becoming slurred and she laughs loudly at whatever Alex says. Alex is still chatting and smiling and is holding Jamie's drink for her.

Can consent be given? **NO** - Jamie is noticeably physically and mentally impaired, making it difficult to ensure clear, informed consent. Alex cannot assume consent at this point, even if Jamie appears to be interested.

15 minutes later.

4. Jamie's head droops and she is leaning heavily on Alex for support. Her eyes are glassy and unfocused. She can barely string a sentence together.

Can consent be given? **NO** - Jamie is not able to give consent in this situation. Alex should make sure she is safe and taken home to sleep it off.

ACTIVITY 3

Friends who step up - could be done as a role play activity

Aim: to help young people to see the importance of friends who are prepared to speak up and act to protect both potential victims and potential perpetrators of abuse in peer situations.
It can be used to introduce Bystander Intervention (main principles: Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct[1]) and Allyship[2] (when someone actively supports and stands up for a group they are not personally a part of).

Options can be given straight away or the group asked to come up with their own suggestions first. They can then discuss which option they would prefer and why.

Scenario 1

Liam, Charlie and Sam are in a club. Liam is smoking a joint and starts flirting with Charlie. He is swaying, laughing loudly and leaning into Charlie more than usual. Charlie has also had a few drinks and doesn't seem fully aware of Liam's state. Sam notices the shift and feels concerned.

What should Sam do next?

✔Option 1: Distract Liam with a casual conversation to steer him away from Charlie.
✔Option 2: Pull Charlie aside and ask, "Hey, do you think Liam is actually okay right now?"
✔Option 3: Get another friend involved so you can speak to both of them.

Scenario 2

At the park after school, Riley notices a classmate trying to talk to his friend Taylor. They are being very persistent and Taylor seems uncomfortable. He is avoiding eye contact, looking tense and trying to turn away.

What can Riley do now?

✔Option 1: Step in with a casual interruption, like "Hey Taylor, wanna come grab a snack with me?"
✔Option 2: Ask directly, "You okay? Do you want me to stay with you?"
✔Option 3: If the situation escalates, message someone else, or contact the police if they think Taylor is at risk of harm.

Scenario 3

Finn and Jordan are at a party drinking. Jordan starts making comments that seem pushy about someone they're both interested in. Finn realises Jordan is not in a fit state to make clear decisions, but Jordan insists they're fine and starts to approach the person.

How can Finn intervene without escalating conflict?

✔Option 1: Lightly shift the conversation, saying, "Hey, let's grab some water for a sec.."
✔Option 2: Say something neutral but firm: "I think maybe we should just chill tonight."
✔Option 3: Get another mutual friend to back him up, reinforcing the importance of making safe choices.

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[1] https://righttobe.org/guides/bystander-intervention-training/

[2] https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/news/2023/3/15/building-gender-equality-with-young-people

ACTIVITY 4 - only for those 16+

The best night for everyone!

Aim: To encourage forward planning, consider different scenarios that might arise during the evening and to keep every member of the group safe. Young people work in groups to plan the night and then you can go through to see if they included everything listed. They may even think of other, better solutions than these.

Disclaimer for this activity: The legal age for drinking alcohol in the UK is 18 years old. Controlled drugs are classified into Class A, B, and C, with possession of Class A having the most serious legal consequences. Possession of any controlled drug without a prescription is illegal, regardless of age.

The Respected programme is designed for young people aged 11-16 and this activity has been specifically developed for The Talk about Trust event. Its use should be carefully thought out, particularly regarding the size of the group undertaking it and the legal aspects should be reiterated at the start; regarding drugs and the permitted age for drinking alcohol.

Imagine you're planning a night out with mates. What are the things you will put in place and try to stick to in order to guarantee everyone's safety, if you know alcohol/drugs are likely to be involved?

Checklist:

1. Set Up a Buddy System

- No one should be left alone. Pair up and agree to check in on each other throughout the night.
- If someone starts feeling unwell or uncomfortable, their buddy can step in.

2. Plan Your Route & Transport

- Pre-arrange your way home-whether it's an Uber, a designated driver, or public transport.
- Have backup options in case plans change. No one should be stranded or forced to go with someone they don't trust.

3. Limit Substance Intake

- Ideally nobody is drinking or taking any drugs but even one to two that are sober is helpful.
- Decide in advance how much you plan to drink and try to stick to it.
- If drugs are involved, never mix substances - it increases the risk of dangerous reactions.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with water and eat beforehand.

4. Keep an Eye on Your Drinks

- Never leave drinks unattended.
- If someone offers a drink and you didn't see it being poured, politely decline.
- If a drink tastes or looks odd, stop drinking immediately.

5. Watch Out for Each Other

- Recognise signs of intoxication. If somebody is showing clear signs of intoxication, they cannot give consent to anything.
- If a friend seems too intoxicated to make good decisions, step in and help them out.

- Be mindful of who your friends are interacting with - if someone's acting pushy or creepy, consider intervening or taking some action (may need to get help).

6. Emergency Plan

- Have a group chat where everyone checks in throughout the night.
- Agree on an SOS phrase - if someone sends it, everyone knows they need help.
- Memorise emergency numbers and know where the nearest safe place is (e.g., a bouncer, police station, or open business).

7. Respect Boundaries

- Make sure no one feels pressured into drinking or taking drugs.
- Encourage clear communication - if someone looks uncomfortable, step in and ask if they need help.
- If anyone is too intoxicated to make decisions or appears to be getting intimate with someone in this state, don't let them go home together, especially if it is someone they just met.