

## ORIENTATION - CONSENT PRESENTATION (7/4/2006 draft)

### Disclaimer

- This is a lot of info in a very short amount of time, so if you have any clarifications, please interrupt us, but we can't take full blown questions until after orientation.
- Also, on Friday nights at 8pm we do gender caucus discussion groups - for men, women, and trans folks - here at St. Mary's, which is a great place to talk about it more.

Common Ground is not exempt from societal problems such as sexual assault. Sexual assault is a terrible problem in all communities, across race, gender, sexuality, and class. It is important for us to be pro-active in creating a culture here at Common Ground that embraces good consent practices.

### What is sexual assault?

- Most people still don't know what constitutes rape or sexual assault
- Sexual assault is any non-consensual sexual contact, with or without force, the threat of force, other coercion, or threats of other coercion.

### Our current, mainstream model of sexual interaction is unsafe.

- People may be committing sexual assault by doing exactly what they think they are "supposed" to be doing - for example, for men this can mean being a slick, silent, strong seducer.
- "Reading" body language too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that invites us to hear and see only what *we* want to.
- Said and unsaid arguments of "they got themselves raped" reveal some messed up expectations:
  - o That it is *the survivor's* responsibility to set someone else's limits.
  - o That rape occurs when *the survivor* does not succeed.
- Consent practices seek to charge everyone with responsibility for their behavior and communication.
- At Common Ground, all sexual contact, or physical contact that could be construed as sexual, such as hugging, kissing, or any time of intimate touching, not limited to any particular body part, must be based in consent.

### Consent is...

- *According to the CG Coordinator Manual:* consent is the presence of a clear, positive response.
- State Criminal Code defines consent as words or overt actions by a person indicating a freely given present agreement to perform a particular sexual act with the actor.
- Consent does NOT mean the existence of a prior or current relationship.
- A person who is mentally incapacitated, physically helpless, drunk, or drugged cannot consent to a sexual act
- Silence does NOT equal consent
- Consent is Non-coerced
- Consent is an ongoing discussion where both parties are autonomous and can change their minds at any time

### What consent looks like – clear and verbal

- "How would you feel about \_\_specific sexual act\_\_?"
- "Can I take this off?"
- Asking about little things like hugs – "hey, can I give you a hug" or "would you like a hug" (Without raising arms first!). If the answer to that is "no thanks," you already know that any more physical contact is probably not welcome
- Check in questions after initial consent, such as "how do you feel about this?" "How are you doing?" "Are you having a good time?"

## Implications

- The claim of "mixed messages" is an excuse - an after-the-fact justification for *your* failure to step up and be responsible for clarifying the situation.
- If someone feels assaulted, then they *have been* assaulted. No one else can reinterpret that experience for them, no one else can have the last word on how they should feel.
- Thus, good intentions do not matter - it was your responsibility to practice good consent and make sure everything was okay for everyone involved at every point in the process.

## Possibilities

- Much sexual assault occurs in a situation where the perpetrator does not realize it is occurring. Good consent practices are a way for everyone to be on the same page, and for every person who does not ever want to sexually assault someone else to make sure that they do not.
- Good consent practices allow us to feel totally safe and in control of our choices
- The word "sensual" is in the word "consensual." This is not an accident.
- In good consent practices, "no" is also a very exciting word to hear. It means that you made enough space where the other person felt safe enough and okay with saying what they really felt. Even when asked, actually saying no when you want to is *very* difficult.
- We have all kinds of people here coming from all kinds of backgrounds. So that every person in this community feels safe here it is very important for us all to try to be on the same page with practicing good communication and good consent.

**Next Step** - if you have questions, comments, or concerns about all this, or just want to talk about it more, definitely go to the gender caucuses on Friday nights at 8:00. There is a Women caucus, a Trans caucus, and a Men's caucus.