

# sexual consent: breaking down "appropriate age"

## What's age got to do with it?

When people consent (or agree) to do something, they need to have full understanding of what they are agreeing to. When it comes to sex, there are a lot of things to consider. Someone who is younger might not have the experience, knowledge, information, or resources to make decisions about sexual activity with another person. It's not just about knowing what sex is, but knowing what else is involved, such as your physical, mental, and emotional health and safety and how sex plays a role in a relationship.

## What's the "age of consent" in Washington state?

16 years old (RCW 9A.44.010). "Age of consent" refers to how old someone must be to legally consent to sex with an adult (adult = 18 years old). Note that the age of consent varies by state -- visit [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org) for laws in other states.

## So if you're over 16, can you consent to sexual contact with anyone who's older than you?

Not necessarily. It is not legal if the person is a teacher, your boss, or has authority over you due to the imbalance of power in that relationship. (RCW 9A.44.093)

## What if I'm not 16?

That's a good question -- sexuality exists throughout a person's lifetime, and it's totally normal to be asking these questions even if you're not 16. It's also important to note that there is nothing wrong with you if you are not sexually active by the age of 16! Everyone is different and you know what's best for yourself.

Note that according to Washington state law, sex is not legal, even if there is no force, if:

- The younger person is under 12, and the older person is more than 24 months older (RCW 9A.44.073)
- The younger person is 12 or 13, and the older person is more than 36 months older (RCW 9A.44.076)
- The younger person is 14 or 15, and the older person is more than 48 months older (RCW 9A.44.079)

## Remember your Building Blocks

The healthiest relationships consider more than just what is legal: just because it's legal doesn't mean that it's equal. For consent to be meaningful, ALL six of the Building Blocks of Consent need to be in place.

**1. Appropriate Age**

**2. Equal Power**

**3. Enthusiastic "Yes!"**

**4. Freely Given**

**5. Understood**

**6. Reversible**