

THE GUIDE

The Consent Conversation

*Forty small conversations
beat one big one.*

Sarah van Staden

PACFA-Registered Counsellor & Psychotherapist

Before you start. This guide discusses sexual assault and coercion in general terms. It contains no graphic detail. Some readers will have their own experience of sexual violence. Some will be parenting a child who has been harmed, and some a child who has caused harm. All of you are welcome here.

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This is an educational resource, not legal, medical or clinical advice.

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PART 1

Why this, why now?

Most parents are quietly operating on an assumption: the school covers this.

It's a reasonable assumption. Consent education is mandated in the national Australian curriculum. Schools run programs, bring in speakers, send home the newsletter. And many schools will tell you, accurately, that they've been delivering age-appropriate consent and sexuality education from kindergarten through to Year 12. But none of this answers the question a parent actually has: what did my child understand?

In August 2026, the University of Melbourne released the first Australian study of its kind. Dr Sara Meger and her team surveyed more than a thousand young people aged 13 to 17, alongside 2,307 adults and over 500 teachers. Among the boys surveyed, roughly a quarter agreed that feminism is damaging to society and should be resisted with violence if necessary. But the finding that should stop any parent is this one: young women in Gen Z were twice as likely as Millennial women, and four times as likely as Gen X women, to agree that marriage entitles a husband to sex with his wife even if she does not want it.

Read that again. On a question that is purely and simply about consent, the youngest generation of women is moving backwards.

The study found these attitudes tracked closely with what young people were consuming online, with engagement in manosphere content, pornography and online dating showing the strongest links. Teachers reported students quoting online influencers in class and refusing instructions from female staff while following identical instructions from men. Some of that behaviour was reported in children as young as six. Dr Meger's conclusion was that the problems with misogyny are structural, not individual, and the report's first recommendation was that respectful relationships education needs to start earlier.

None of this is an argument against consent education in schools. It is an argument about what a curriculum can and cannot do on its own. A curriculum delivers information to thirty people at once, in a room, in third period, from someone who will not be there at 1am on a Saturday. It cannot rehearse. It cannot repeat itself two hundred times across five years. It cannot compete, hour for hour, with an algorithm. And it cannot notice that your child went quiet at dinner.

You can. That's the whole thesis of this guide.

It's also the thesis of our practice. Most of what changes people doesn't happen through information. It happens inside a relationship, over time, through repetition. The consent conversation is no different, which is why it belongs at your kitchen table rather than only in a classroom.

Sons and daughters. Boys and young men commit the large majority of sexual offences, and this guide says so plainly rather than talking around it. Parts of what follows speak directly to raising a child who might cross a line. But no teenager occupies only one role. The same child who needs to know how to check is the child who may need to recognise pressure aimed at them, and who is far more likely than not to be the first person a friend tells. So wherever this guide addresses one position, it addresses the others too.

What you're competing with. Your teenager is receiving a continuous, high-production, algorithmically optimized stream of content about sex, status and gender from people who are very good at holding their attention and who have no interest in their wellbeing. You will not out-produce it. You don't have to. You have something the algorithm doesn't: repetition inside a relationship. The child who has had forty short, unremarkable conversations with a parent has something durable. The child who had one big talk has a memory of being embarrassed.

Forty small conversations beat one big one. Please read that twice. It is the most useful sentence in this document, and it lowers the stakes enormously.

Meger, S. et al. (2026). *Misogyny, Online Radicalisation and Youth Extremism in Australia*. University of Melbourne.

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PART 2

What consent is under Australian law

Parents often teach an outdated version of consent. The law has moved a long way, and teaching the old version can leave a young person genuinely exposed.

The affirmative model

Since 1 June 2022, New South Wales has operated an **affirmative consent** standard under the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW). Similar models now operate in Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, the ACT and elsewhere; the details vary by state, but the direction is uniform. In plain terms:

Consent is a free and voluntary agreement, at the time, communicated by words or actions.

Four consequences your teenager needs to be able to state back to you:

1. **Silence is not consent.** Not resisting is not consent. Freezing is not consent. The old “they didn’t say no” has no legal standing whatsoever.
2. **You have to check.** A person’s belief that there was consent will not be treated as reasonable if they did nothing (said nothing, did nothing) within a reasonable time before or at the time, to find out if there was consent. Not checking is itself the problem.
3. **Consent is specific and ongoing.** Agreeing to one thing is not agreeing to another. Agreeing last week is not agreeing tonight. It can be withdrawn at any point, and everything must stop when it is.
4. **Some circumstances mean there is no consent at all.** Among them: the person is asleep or unconscious; they are so affected by drugs or alcohol that they cannot choose or refuse; they participate because of force, fear of force, or fear of serious harm; they are coerced, blackmailed or intimidated; there is abuse of a position of trust or authority; they are deceived about the nature of the act; a condom is removed or not used when they were told it would be.

And one more thing that teenagers routinely get wrong: **being drunk yourself is not a defense.** Self-induced intoxication does not make an unreasonable belief reasonable.

Age

In New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and Australian Capital Territory the age of consent is **16**. In South Australia and Tasmania, it is **17**. It is **18** where the other person is in a position of special care: a teacher, coach, employer, health worker, or similar.

Two things flow from this that parents skip: