



Consent -
What you have a
right to expect:
A guide for children
and young people

Consent – it's your choice

Before a doctor, dentist, a nurse, or anyone else looking after you can examine, treat or care for you, did you know they need your consent? That means they must get your agreement. Choosing whether to give consent needs thinking about. This leaflet is your guide to:



- how consent is asked for and given;
- what you need to know before giving consent;
- how old you should be to give consent on your own;
- when your parents can be involved;
- when other people can give consent for you.

How will you be asked?

The way doctors, nurses and care workers ask for consent partly depends on what they plan to do. They may ask in an informal way, that is, without asking you to say anything but simply to do something.

For example, they might ask to have a look at your throat. If you then open your mouth, it's a signal that you consent.

For something more complicated, like an operation, you'll be asked directly – for example to sign a form agreeing to the treatment.

What do you need to know before giving consent?

In order to make a decision, you and your parents need the doctor, nurse or therapist to give you information about the treatment or care which they are offering. You should always ask questions if you don't understand or feel you want to know more. For instance, you might want to find out about:

- why they think the treatment or care will be good for you;
- what sort of things it will involve;
- what benefits they hope will result;
- how good the chances are of you benefiting from this;
- whether there are any alternatives;
- whether there are any risks;
- whether the risks are small or large;
- what may happen if you don't have the treatment.

If the person who is asking for you to give consent isn't able to answer your questions, ask him/her to find out or arrange for someone else to talk to you about your concerns.



If you do not speak English, ask for an interpreter. You can also ask for translation of any written information you are given. If you have a sensory impairment, for example have difficulty hearing or any other communication needs, ask what is available to help you.

How long can you take to decide?

If you want time to think about your decision, say so. In emergencies, decisions may have to be taken quickly, perhaps to save your life. But at other times it is often possible to take as much time as you need.

What if I'm asked about students being present?

Sometimes you may be asked if you mind students being present while you are treated. If you are undecided, ask what they intend doing. Will they be observing only, taking notes or examining you. If you prefer, you can specify students of one gender only.

If you are not comfortable about students being present, you can always say no. It will not make any difference to the quality of the care you receive.

When can you give consent for yourself?

Always if you're 16-18 years old

You can give consent to being examined, treated or cared for in the same way that adults can. If you agree to a particular treatment, the doctor or nurse does not have to ask your parents for consent as well. But if you decide to refuse a particular treatment, sometimes your parents become involved (page 4).

Sometimes if you're under 16

If you are under 16, you may still be able to give consent for yourself – provided you're able to understand what is involved in the proposed treatment or care.

This means that you may be able to agree by yourself to some treatment or care, investigation or immunisation, and not to others. For example, if you're 13 or 14, you may be able to give consent yourself for an injection to protect you against meningitis. However, the information needed for agreeing to something as serious as a heart operation might be too much to weigh up by yourself.

When should your parents play a part?

Even if you are able to give consent yourself, it's still a good idea to include your parents in your decision. If they know what is happening, they will be able to help you think through your decision and to support you better. That is why doctors, nurses and other people caring for you will encourage you to involve your parents. If you are close to other adults, such as your grandparents or an aunt, you might like to involve them too.



What if you don't want your parents to know?

Sometimes young people want to be able to get advice or treatment, such as contraception, but may not want to tell their parents. If you are able to agree for yourself, the doctor or nurse will not tell them without your permission except in exceptional circumstances to protect you or someone else from serious harm.

When can other people give consent for you?

If you're under 18 and you find it too difficult to decide or you feel you don't understand enough, other people can give consent on your behalf. Usually this will be:

- your parents or guardian if you are living with them or being looked after by the Health and Social Services Trust with the agreement of your parents;
- either your parents or your social worker if you are under a care order.

What if you don't want to consent but your parents do?

The rules say that your parents may still decide whether this is in your best interests to have a particular treatment and give their consent on your behalf. This rule applies until you reach the age of 18. However, it is exceptional for a disagreement to get this far without being sorted out.

In very serious or complicated situations, **a court** can be asked to decide whether it is right for your doctor to go ahead with a particular treatment. This might happen, for example, if you and your parents disagreed over whether you should have a very serious operation.

Suppose I'm not happy about how I've been approached about consent?

You should tell the health or social care professionals concerned that you're worried so as they can help you. But if you're still not satisfied, you are entitled to complain. You or your parents can find out how to go about it from the Health and Personal Social Services organisation looking after you. You can ask for help from your local Health and Social Services Council who represent the interests of the public and provide information, advice and support on health and social services issues.

Would you like more help with consent?

Here is a list of organisations you can ask for more help and support about giving consent to treatment and care.

Health and Social Services Councils

Eastern Health and Social Services Council

19 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EJ
Tel: 028 9032 1230
Minicom: 028 9032 1285
Email: ecouncil@ehssc.n-i.nhs.uk

Southern Health and Social Services Council

Quaker Buildings
High Street
Lurgan
BT66 8BB
Tel: 028 3834 9900
Minicom: 028 3834 6488
Email: reception@shssc.n-i.nhs.uk
Website: www.shsscouncil.net

Northern Health and Social Services Council

8 Broadway Avenue
Ballymena
BT43 7AA
Tel: 028 2565 5777
Minicom: 028 2565 5777
Email: info@nhssc.n-i.nhs.uk
Website: www.nhssc.org

Western Health and Social Services Council

“Hilltop”
Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital
Omagh
BT79 0NS
Tel: 028 8225 2555
Minicom: 028 8224 8389
Email: lpreston@hilltop.n-i.nhs.uk

Parents Advice Centre

Franklin House
12 Brunswick Street
Belfast
BT2 7GE
Tel: 028 9031 0891
Helpline: 028 9023 8800
E mail: belfast@pachelp.org
Website: www.pachelp.org

Provides a service for parents and young people offering support, guidance and counselling.

Children's Law Centre

3rd Floor
Philip House
123-137 York Street
Belfast
BT15 1AB
Tel: 028 9024 5704
Advice line: 080 8808 5678
Minicom: 080 8808 5678
Email:
info@childrenslawcentre.org
Website:
www.childrenslawcentre.org

Health websites (with lots of links to other useful sites)

www.lifebytes.gov.uk
(for 11-14 year olds)

www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk
(for 14-16 year olds)

Help young people, their parents and professionals work with and understand laws which affect children.

The Department will make this document available in Irish, Cantonese, audio tape and braille and will consider requests for translations into other minority ethnic languages.

Health Promotion Team
Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety
Castle Buildings
Belfast BT4 3SJ

Telephone: 028 9052 0534
Textphone: 028 9052 7668
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

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