A Love Lessons Project

CONSENT & NEURODIVERGENCE:
10 Things Everyone Should Know

A practical guide to clearer, safer communication across the human spectrum.

1. **Confusion is not consent.** If you're unsure what is happening, what someone expects, or whether you even want to continue, that uncertainty matters. Consent should not depend on someone correctly decoding hints, pressure, or ambiguous social cues.

2. **Freezing is not the same as saying yes.** Some people freeze, go quiet, comply, or mentally check out when they feel overwhelmed or unsafe. A lack of resistance is not the same thing as active, willing participation.

3. **Compliance is not enthusiasm.** Neurodivergent people may be especially used to doing what is expected, avoiding conflict, or trying not to seem "difficult." Going along with something because you feel pressured, confused, or afraid to upset someone is different from genuinely wanting it.

4. **You are allowed to need more processing time.** You do not owe anyone an immediate answer. "I need a minute," "I'm not sure," or "I want to think about that" are complete, legitimate responses—and a respectful partner will make room for them.

5. **Changing your mind is allowed.** Consent is not a one-time contract. You can want something at first and then stop wanting it. You can say yes to one thing and no to another. You can change your mind at any point.

6. **Clear communication is not less romantic.** For many neurodivergent people, explicit language can make intimacy feel safer, not colder. Asking "Is this okay?" or "Do you want me to keep going?" does not ruin the moment—it helps make sure both people are actually in the same moment.

7. **Sensory overwhelm can affect how someone responds. A person may become quiet, shut down, dissociate, or have difficulty speaking when overwhelmed. That is one reason it is so important not to treat silence or stillness as a clear sign of consent.**

8. **Social uncertainty does not create obligation.** You do not owe someone affection, touch, sex, or access to your body because they were nice to you, bought you something, traveled to see you, waited a long time, or told you how much they want you.

9. **Your discomfort matters—even if you can't explain it yet.** You do not need a courtroom-ready argument to pause or leave a situation. Sometimes the first information we have is simply, "*Something about this doesn't feel right.*" That is enough reason to stop and reassess.

10. **Other people do not get to overrule your experience.** Neurodivergent people are often taught to assume that someone else understands the situation better than we do. But another person's confidence does not make their interpretation more accurate than yours. Your boundaries, perceptions, and bodily autonomy matter.

If something has happened to you,
you do not have to decide immediately what to call it
or what to do next.

You deserve support, information,
and control over what happens from here.

RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline:
800-656-HOPE (4673)
rainn.org

Written by:
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