

Building a Culture of Consent During Orientation

A Tool for Orientation Coordinators

Messaging provided during orientation can set the tone for someone's experience at the University of Toronto. Orientation is an opportunity to educate, inform, and proactively model attitudes and behaviours that demonstrate a culture of consent. Modelling the essence of consent throughout orientation sets the stage for prioritizing consent in all aspects of one's life.

Culture of Consent

A culture of consent is one where communication and consent are the norm in all interactions. Consent is the practice of checking in with someone else, and asking permission before engaging further with them.

In such a culture, individuals are respected, not objectified, and have autonomy over their actions, bodies and decisions. Incidents of harm and violence are not minimized.

What does a culture of consent mean to you?

When selecting orientation leaders and designing events, materials and trainings with consent culture in mind, you can contribute to building a safe, inclusive and welcoming community for everyone. This tool outlines some of the ways you can build a consent culture during orientation and beyond. It includes a list of guidelines for you to consider.

Understand Consent

Role modeling consent extends into everyday activities (for example, students should not be forced to participate in any activity in which they are not comfortable).

Make consent a larger theme in orientation activities in an intentional manner.

Respect individual boundaries—do not assume that people are comfortable giving hugs, for example.

Have a 'challenge by choice' and 'right to participate/right to pass' message. These messages ensure that participants know they can choose not to participate in activities or that they can modify their participation. This action models asking for consent and can help create a safer space for participants.

Ensure that your programming includes a variety of fun activities that are non-sexual and do not revolve around drinking or drug/substance use

Provide an overview of activities ahead of time so that students are able to choose if, how, and when they wish to participate in an activity. This demonstrates a respect for enthusiastic and informed consent.

Ensure that programming reflects the tenets of consent: it is ongoing, continuous, active, voluntary, mutual, aware, conscious, enthusiastic, and informed.

Provide activities that do not require physical contact. If an activity requires physical contact, ensure that asking for consent is an established practice incorporated into the activity.

Educate Orientation Leaders

Education is a powerful means of prevention. By educating others regarding sexual violence and consent, we are normalizing these conversations.

Cultivating a culture of consent is a shared responsibility. Educate leaders on consent and what is meant by a culture of consent.

Role model by educating leaders to recognize and take action when others are in need of help. Discuss bystander intervention techniques with your team (direct, distract, delegate, delay, document).

Educate leaders about harmful myths and appropriate behaviours and/or language that should be used to contribute to everyone's safety.

Encourage Orientation Leaders to complete the online sexual violence education and prevention training module. The module is available on Quercus.

Encourage Orientation Leaders to attend and participate in the training sessions provided about this topic. Incorporate a practice of regular check-ins with orientation leaders to provide an opportunity to identify issues.



Three ways I can teach my Orientation Leaders about consent & consent culture:

Include Consent Education in Orientation Programming

Include intentional programming within your orientation schedule on consent. The Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre (SVPS Centre) can provide guidance and financial support for these initiatives.

Use the SVPS Centre resources and digital assets provided in your programs.

Embed intersectional approaches in education, recognizing the multiple aspects of identity that affect individual experiences.

When planning programming or education related to consent and sexual violence prevention, ensure your programming aligns with the principles outlined in the University's [Guiding Principles for Sexual Violence Education and Prevention Initiatives](#).

Reach out to the SVPS Centre to discuss programming ideas and plans.

Ideas I have for consent education during orientation:

Use Inclusive Language

In your materials, your events, and in your training of leaders, use accessible, inclusive, and culturally-sensitive language that promotes a welcoming and safe environment. A welcoming environment is important because it helps students to feel that they can ask for help and support if they need it.

Inclusive language is intentionally welcoming; it reflects the right of people of all identities, relationships, and backgrounds to be part of the U of T community. For example, avoid collective pronouns that are gendered (phrases like 'you guys') in favour of non-gendered alternatives ('your team', 'these leaders', 'our group').

Review cheers, chants and marketing materials to ensure messages that minimize, trivialize, promote, or perpetuate sexual violence are not included. Student Life, your primary staff contact (for example, the Deans of Students) and the Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre are available to review with you.

If you are unsure, consult with peers, Equity Offices, the SVPS Centre, and/or your primary staff contact to ensure that your messaging is welcome and inclusive.

Be Inclusive of All Gender Identities and Expressions

In creating a culture of consent, it is important that activities do not reinforce a gender binary. Consider creating groups using non gendered categories, such as numbering, letters, TV Show Names etc...

Use someone's appropriate pronouns (ex. she/her, he/him, they/them) and if unknown, the use of "they" works in most situations. Check out the No Big Deal Campaign to learn more

Incorporate name tags with the opportunity for people to use their pronoun and provide right to pass

Provide information about about single user and all-gender washrooms.

- [St. George Map](#)
- [UTM Map](#)
- [UTSC Map](#)

Know Your Message

If bringing in outside performances and/or media, ensure that you are aware of their content.

With external performers and vendors, explain the goal of building and reinforcing a culture of consent during orientation and set the expectation of appropriate messaging.

Have a feedback strategy that allows you to gather your participants' reactions anonymously. Review this feedback when making future decisions about programming.

Recognize Power Dynamics

Talk with your orientation leaders about the power they hold and how to hold that power responsibly.

- Sexual violence often occurs in a context of power dynamics, where power is asserted and control is taken from those with less authority. It's important to acknowledge the power dynamic that exists between orientation leaders and new students. Orientation leaders hold a trusted position, by which they have a level of power over their students. These power dynamics may remain in place after orientation programming has concluded.

Set clear and firm boundaries regarding interpersonal relationships between orientation leaders and incoming students and ensure orientation leaders are aware of parameters of their role.

How will I discuss positional power and consent with my Orientation Leaders?
What can I say?

Manage Risk

Follow risk management protocols set out by your College, Faculty, or Campus Administration, and/or your Student Society or Union.

Ensure there are orientation leaders who are assigned to monitor the space (virtual or in-person) and that these people are known and accessible to participants.

For virtual events, follow these guidelines to avoid Zoom Bombing. Have a plan around what you will do if there is an incident of this. Communicate this plan to participants along with community expectations of virtual engagement.

Acknowledge the risks associated with respect to sexual violence and events serving alcohol. Take measures to address risk level as a means of preventative action.

Even if you are organizing a late-night event where alcohol is not being served, remember that attendees may consume alcohol/drug/substances before arriving. Even if alcohol is not being served, make sure there are leaders assigned to monitor the space.

Provide University community safety cards in orientation kits.

Promote the University's Travel Safer program, which provides students traveling alone on campus with accompaniment:

- o UTSG: 416 -978-SAFE (7233)
- o UTM: 905-828-5200
- o UTSC: 416 -287-7022

Provide bystander intervention training to leaders and volunteers, especially around intervening when someone may be experiencing harm or is intoxicated.

- Encourage folks to intervene if they are unsure if someone needs help. It's ok to check in. Remember there is power in numbers; encourage orientation leaders to intervene in pairs or call for support if they are concerned for safety.

Have clearly outlined safety procedures if someone is intoxicated, unconscious, falling over, looks confused or lost, or is sick.

Examples of intervention strategies I can share with my team:

Provide a C.A.L.M. Response to a Disclosure of Sexual Violence

If someone discloses an experience of sexual violence, listen and validate the person's experience. Provide a C.A.L.M. response.

C: Create a Safe Environment

- Ask if the person would like a private space to talk.
- Ensure that the individual understands when you may need to involve others to provide support and create safety. You cannot always promise confidentiality – be sure to communicate any limitations you may have.

A: Ask "How can I support?"

- Ask individuals for information only to the extent that is necessary to connect them to the relevant professional supports.
- Avoid asking for details or prying for information outside of your scope of responsibility.
- Example: "I'm wondering how I can best support you, within my role, and support you with connecting to supportive services?"

L: Listen, Validate and Reassure

- Respond with compassion and communicate belief.
- Let them know you can help by connecting them to support services.

M: Make a Connection

- Discuss the resources available to them, including the option to speak with someone at the Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre.
- Offer to facilitate a connection to a support resource.

Who would I contact if I became aware of a disclosure? What is the protocol during orientation if I become aware of an incident of sexual violence?

Know Your Resources

Be able to refer to:

- Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre
- 416-978-2266
- svpscentre@utoronto.ca
- www.svpscentre.utoronto.ca

What other resources are available?

Know Relevant Policies and Protocols

Know the University's Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy & the related Student Guide.

Ensure your leaders are aware of the Policy & Student Guide:

- [SVSH Policy](#)
- [Student Guide](#)

Consult

You do not need to figure this out on your own. The Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre, your primary staff contact, and Student Life are available to support you.

If you would like further support and/or training please connect with the Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre.

Who is my primary staff contact? What is their contact information?

Updated June 2022

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This guide was informed by and adapted from the following:

Consent Comes First. n.d. *Orientation Checklist*. Toronto Metropolitan University.
New College. 2017. *Risk Assessment and Responsibility Form*. New College – Office of Residence and Student Life.