

XR Consent Advocacy Workshop

Duration: 1 - 1.5 hours

Image to promote the event in [Consent Advocacy / photos](#), use “April Rebellion 1” or “3”

Text to promote the event:

Want a non-arrestable way to meaningfully contribute to the rebellion in October? This could be your chance!

Consent is about giving permission for something to happen. It is at the heart of every healthy relationship. Relationships, both with ourselves and with those around us. And it's not as simple as it might at first appear...

This workshop aims to introduce participants to conversations around consent in daily life (including physical, emotional and sexual), the consent advocacy circle and its role in XR. We hope to achieve this through creating a reflective learning environment and carrying out practical, experiential exercises to help participants consider consent in their own lives.

By the end of the session we hope participants will be open to having discussions around consent and have a greater understanding of how to practice consent properly in their daily lives.

We'll be welcoming people who wish to join the Consent Awareness Teams (CATs) at XR sites during the October blockades – a non-arrestable, 1-2 hour/evening role, suitable for people with varying levels of confidence. There's no expectation that people who come to the workshop will join a team, and you're welcome to attend this workshop even if you know you don't want to join/become a CAT!

Content warning: There may be sexual content discussed in the workshop and topics that may be difficult for some people to talk about. We completely understand if people need to take time out at any point during the workshop and participation in practical exercises will be optional.

This workshop will be facilitated by

Materials & practicalities:

- Printout of this workshop brief
- Paper and pens can be a good alternative to the practical exercises, i.e. some people might like to journal during the exercise if they are not taking part
- Two facilitators may make it easier to demo experiential exercises or do the role plays
- Select and adapt content blocks as appropriate to your audience and the time you have available, though it's good to always do at least one experiential exercise (i.e. the distance practice or yes / no practice)

Audience: XR supporters or visitors to XR sites*

* Notes re age appropriateness: one or both of these sentences may need to be added to the workshop description:

- *May contain discussions of a frank sexual nature*

- *Guideline entry age 16+*

With this workshop we walk a line between inclusivity and age appropriateness of content. We have structured the document so you facilitators can do one of the following:

- Either - steer discussion towards consent in daily life if the room is predominantly children / families, or if the group is taking place in an open tent space where it might not feel suitably contained for sensitive discussions of a frank and sexual nature. This might also be the case if consent in daily life is predominantly the concerns of the group - e.g. how to commit to something we are passionate about without burning out.
- Or - facilitators might open a space for sensitive discussions of a frank and sexual nature, if you feel comfortable to do so and it feels appropriate and relevant to the group

Please choose / omit blocks of text - and adapt the description of exercises, so that they are relevant to your intention, and the nature of the group.

Aims:

- To introduce the Consent Advocacy Circle and with that, to introduce consent based behaviours and language as an integral part of XR activity (including consent accountability)
- To create a reflective and learning environment where people can begin to think about and discuss consent in daily life interactions and / or consent in sexuality
- To offer some embodied / experiential practice so that people leave knowing a bit more about how consent operates in their own life
- Have at least one practical take away that they can draw on to begin to improve their own consent awareness

XR Consent Advocacy Workshop

Space holding set-up and introduction:

- “Hello my name is And this is ... and this is the XR consent advocacy workshop
- **Outline of the structure** - we will be learning about consent through the presentation of concepts, discussion, and finally some experiential exercises - this workshop is 1 / 1.5 hours long (as appropriate)
- **Content** - the themes we will touch upon include consent - within XR, in everyday life, consent in sexuality / intimacy
- **Consent in the workshop itself!** - You can sit out of any exercises / you can leave - please do so with respect and care for the group space
- **Sharing** - some of the sharing may be of a sensitive nature, so that sharing can be open and honest please try to be with anything you hear sensitively and with respect. Please try to share only what you feel comfortable to share, in this one hour time container.
- **Complete confidentiality** – seek verbal agreement from all
- **Anything you need** from everyone else during this time together or any questions before we begin?

Opening round:

Suggested script: its useful for us as facilitators to get a sense of how you all are right now and what you hope to gain from the workshop. It would be great if you are willing to share your first name / a gender pronoun if you wish / one thing you hope to gain from the workshop / up to three words about how you are feeling right now)

ADAPT THIS ACCORDING TO HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE IN THE ROOM, YOU DON'T WANT IT TO TAKE UP HALF THE TIME!

[then lead by example]: “I am Rose, I hope to get you all really excited about consent! And I am feeling ... (e.g. ready, available but a bit tired!)

- Name
- (One thing you hope to gain from the workshop)
- (Up to three words about how you are feeling right now (e.g. sad / angry / anxious / curious / peaceful / anticipation / neutral etc etc)

10 mins total

Consent in XR:

Great! So let's start with consent in XR. I am part of the XR Consent Advocacy Circle and here is a description of why we exist and what we do:

Consent is about seeking agreement or giving permission for something to happen. Consent is at the heart of all healthy relationships: both at the heart of our own relationship with ourselves, and at the heart of the relationships we engage in with others.

The XR Consent Advocacy Circle works to cultivate and spread consent-based behaviours and language, as ways of being and relating that foster respectful interactions (including personal, conversational, physical, sexual, societal, global).

We advocate for consent based behaviours and language in XR spaces, through trainings and discussions such as this one. We aim to have consent awareness teams during gatherings and actions, so that consent has a clear and visible place in the ethos of XR.

We are a first point of call and assistance for anyone who has been affected when something goes wrong. We work to create and sustain increased safety in the XR community, through clear and caring consent accountability processes. So - that the context of how this workshop came to be.

But you might ask why do we need to be taught about consent, and have a team specially dedicated to it? On the face of it, consent should be simple. Yes means yes and no means no. We clearly communicate exactly what we feel and it is understood and acted upon by others. However, real life is often far more complicated and our consent skills may be impaired for a number of reasons. These might include (but not limited to)

- We may have been raised to override our own needs and desires to please others and it can feel hard to break out of those patterns
- We may have been socialised in ways that mean we dominate with our needs and desires, without realising that we are,
- We may be used to conditions in which we have little or no control - e.g. we may have a low level of control over our environment at work, or at school or home

Consent - the presence or absence of it - is woven into the fabric of our lives. Let's explore how it is for those of us here in this room, please (if you are willing) put up your hands if:

- You have ever taken on more than you can handle because you care about a cause and ended up feeling overwhelmed
- You have been given something (such as a meal, or a gift) that you really didn't like but you pretended to like it so as not to hurt the other person's feelings
- You have experienced some kind of touch that you didn't like but pretended that you did because you didn't want to hurt the other person's feelings
- You haven't asked for something that you really wanted [e.g. a kiss, some kind of sexual experience] because you were afraid of being judged or receiving a no

And finally please put your hand up if ...

- You are 100% brilliant at consent, and never have trouble communicating what you want, or responding with a clear and truthful YES or NO

So this is why we are here! These examples may have stirred memories of a time when consent either wasn't sought, or you felt unable to genuinely give consent. So I am going to ask (if you are willing) to come into pairs and begin to reflect on consent personally and in your life. You may also just want to sit and reflect or journal (offer paper and pens for those who want to sit out of pairs sharing).

Sharing set up

Timings approx 3 mins sharing each / 2 mins back as a group gather themes

- Timings approx 3 mins each, one speaks and the other practices deep listening - i.e. with acceptance, respect, not interrupting and only responding if requested to do so by the speaker - we will let you know when it's time to change over (maybe set a phone timer?)
- Share about examples in your life when consent wasn't sought or it was hard for you to genuinely give consent. For example - moving around this festival / office, speaking together, sharing a hug, doing the exercises in this workshop - life is a string of moments of consent sought or not sought, or consent being easy or difficult to express
- You may also wish to share about consent in more intimate or sexual encounters - *if you do so please check in with your partner first if that is ok with them!*

Bring them back to the group: *what kinds of themes are emerging? Where do you notice consent operating or absent in your life?*

About 15 mins in total

Experiential Consent Practices

So we have some ideas about the elements of consent now. However perhaps in your discussions you are now talking about some of the things that can make consent difficult. These include social norms, things we think we should do; gender norms, things we are conditioned to believe men or women should do, or power and cultural norms. All of these conditions are what we believe it is reasonable to request, say yes or say no to.

All this is written in our bodies - so whilst we might have an idea of what good consent looks like, in practice it might be less easy. Because to be able to seek consent and give consent we need to be able to do all of the following:

- Slow down and notice what's happening in our bodies, and notice what is happening for the other person too

AND THEN

- Be able to make a choice or request based on what we notice, one that is congruent with what's happening in our bodies in the present moment (i.e. our wants / needs / desires in that moment)
- AND has some relationship with our wider aims / values / existing commitments and agreements etc.

AND THEN

- Be able to articulate that choice or request to another person, and be able to hear their reply which may trigger all sorts of emotional responses in us

Phew, no wonder it's complicated! So, let's have a simple practice now to notice the space between our bodies / actions / words.

Distance Exercise - Noticing our Comfortable Distance with One Another

Approx timings: intro & demo 4 mins / 3 mins each way / 5 mins back to the room discussion = 15 mins total (though let it run if they really get into it!)

This is an exercise for noticing in our bodies micro-moments of yes / no / maybe, and the relation between things we feel in our body and things we say. And how things may change once we have spoken too (i.e. consent is reversible). We will demo it for you now ...

DEMO

- Work in pairs standing - decide who is A and who is B
- A and B stand just a couple of metres apart and then A begins to move towards B VERY SLOWLY'
- At some point one of you will start to feel that is close enough - i.e. you are close enough for comfort
- If it's B - just stop walking. If it's A - you will need to say "please stop there".
- Once you have found your comfortable distance:

Spend a few moments noticing - Whoever stopped - how did you notice when it felt close enough? Where did you feel it in your body? Did you stop or say something as soon as you were uncomfortable or did you wait? Did it change afterwards? If so - you may negotiate the comfortable distance again! You can repeat again swapping roles - it maybe different the second time! And both of you get chance to say "please stop there".

[NB You might bring the group back here to share if they are just doing this one exercise. Or you might go on to do the second practice below and have a group sharing at the end.]

How it feels for me to say YES, and for me to say NO

Approx timings: 4 mins intro and demo / 3 mins each way / 5 mins back to the room discussion = 15 mins total)

This is a practice to notice something about our yes and our no. How does it feel in our body when our yes is congruent with what we actually want? How does it feel when it isn't? And the same questions for our no too. One person will say "yes" to everything (nothing happens though, you don't DO any of the actions!) and then "no" to everything. Then you change over and the other person has a go. We will demonstrate it:

DEMO

A keeps asking questions such as (give them these examples):

- Can I take your shoes and wear them?
- Can you go and wash those dishes for me?
- Can I give you £100?
- Can I take you out to dinner?
- Can I take and keep your favourite piece of jewellery?
- *Can I come and sleep in your tent? * see NOTES below*

- Can I hug you?
- Can I touch your hair?

[NB don't forget to say - you are not going to do any of the above, no touching!!!]

First of all B keeps saying YES to everything for about a minute. Then A asks the same set of questions again and B says NO to everything. Then B has a chance to say some things about what they noticed, for example:

- Was it easier to say yes or no?
- What did they notice in their bodies when they said yes to something they didn't want?
- What did they notice in their bodies when they said no to something they did want?

After all these stages have been done, then the pair switched over (i.e B asks the questions and A says yes to everything / no to everything then shares).

NOTES:

- *Someone might want to request their partner doesn't ask ANY touch or 'sexual' questions, having these repeatedly asked could be triggering or feel creepy - actively support the group to adapt the questions as they need in their pairs*
- On timings: it can become an endurance to be stuck in an endless loop of questions! You can time this exercise, if so 1 minute of yes to everything / 1 minute of no to everything is usually enough! Or you can just say "B - when you have had enough of saying yes, switch to no, and both end the exercise when you have had enough!

Come back to a circle - anything to share? What themes did you notice emerging?

Timings: approx 15 mins per practice / 30 mins for both

Closing thoughts - 5 mins

So that was an introduction to consent at these three levels:

- Personally - noticing consent in your own body
- Interpersonally - communicating about consent with another person
- Consent also exists at the macro level - i.e. the levels of society / community / government.

Some closing thoughts on this last level (from the XR Consent website page)

At a societal scale, the UN Declaration of the Rights for Indigenous Peoples states the principle of "free, prior and informed consent" being required for actions that would affect their lands and territories. How well we practice consent at the micro-scale in our daily lives also plays out at the macro-scale. Communities based on an extractivist mindset (such as mining, deforestation) correlate with higher levels of sexual assault: how we view and treat the land reflects how we treat other people. As such, an informed, environmental consciousness necessarily includes a deep understanding and practice of consent in our daily lives.

Closing

Have a check out circle e.g one thing they have learned / gained / something they are grateful for.

So that's all for today. You can come and speak to us after about anything this workshop has stirred for you. If you were inspired by and want to join the consent advocacy team, or take part in more consent training events, sign up to a mailing list here.

Don't forget to ask and write their emails below, if they are interested in being part of the consent advocacy awareness teams in the rebellion!

Email Addresses

EXTRA CONTENT!

NB: This is all here to support you to have different things to draw upon during the workshop. You can swap content blocks around and design your own according to the specific needs and themes of a group.

A common question:

After having spent an hour talking about consent, it's worth considering that we may soon move off into action to non-consensually block traffic! In the consent advocacy circle we like to reflect on this as follows:

If someone groped you on the bus, it would be appropriate and proportionate to shout NO, or push the hand that is touching you away. Individual drivers - we might argue - are not violating our individual consent. However XR actions are targeted and systems change, we are very sad and sorry that we disturb an individual's day.

However the disturbance caused by doing nothing will be far worse, and already is in those regions of the globe that are currently impacted by climate crisis. To take another example, if I banged on your door and told you to wake up at 3am you might be angry with me. However once you discover the house is on fire, then you might feel differently.

XR targets its non-violent actions in locations where we are able to impact the heart of capitalist economies and political governance that are steering us towards climate catastrophe. It is these systems - and our compliance with them - that is leading us headlong into climate crisis. This is the global consent violation we are saying NO to through our NVDA - just like it would be appropriate and proportionate to shout NO and push away a hand that gropes on the bus.

Two consent frameworks:

A brief usable summary of the [wheel of consent](#):

This summary is appropriate for situations such as busy offices / being asked to do tasks / burn out through doing too much. Whenever you are asked to do a task

1. Pause / breathe / maybe lower your eyes to turn your attention in
2. Take a moment to recall that much of the time it is true to say "I don't have to do anything"
3. Ask yourself "do I want to do this?"
4. If no to number 3 ask yourself again "am I willing to do this?"
5. If no to both 3 and 4 - don't do it
6. If yes to either 3 or 4 ask yourself - "do I have the capacity to do this?"

FRIES - this consent structure applies more to sexuality

The word FRIES can help us recall baseline elements that need to be present in order for consent to take place. Consent is FRIES - freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, specific. Let's look at each in a little more detail:

Freely given - not coerced, not pushed for, recognising power imbalances which lessen the ability of one person to choose. This can be obvious as when a cleaner walks into the office of a CEO, or less obvious as in this space there is a “leader” and “participants”. Any imbalance makes it harder for people to freely give consent.

Reversible - consent is ongoing, a yes can change to a no at any time

Informed - [you may act this one out if you are a pair of facilitators]

- “Hey Amanda, can I have a chat with you about some things?”
- “Sure, when shall we do it?”
- “I will come over to yours at 3am”
- “No wayyyyyy!!!!”

We need to enquire into and be fully informed of parameters before we can say a genuine yes or no.

Enthusiastic - This one is context specific, for example you may agree to put out the bins but not feel enthusiastic about it, but you have still consented! But when it comes to sex however - if we follow our desires and the other is silent, disconnected or absent, or going along with stuff - then you don't have consent. In sexuality - consent needs to be enthusiastic.* [see footnote below]

Specific - for example, what do we actually mean by “sex”? What you mean might be completely different to what I have in mind!

* [NB you may just stop here. However sometimes people ask

“well I have been with my partner a long time, and sometimes I don't feel enthusiastic about sex, but sometimes we still have a go. Is that not consent then?”

What you might say in reply is

Sure, in relationship perhaps we agree to keep a sexual relationship going, and this is where our agreement framework lies. In which case psychotherapist and sex educator [Esther Perel](#) has come up with a good phrase which is rather than being “enthusiastic” you might feel “seducible”. So you might say:

“Hey I am not sure if I will feel like sex tonight, I may do but I am not sure! I may be seducible but I don't know. Can we try some stuff (specify what) for 30 mins and then check in and see if we want to continue?”

A wheel of consent introduction:

taking consent deeper, specific to touch and intimacy

Its sometime said that consent needs to be specific (see FRIES above). When it includes touch, we also need to be specific about who the touch is for. Not sure what I mean? Here are some examples: Suppose I say to my colleague - may I hug you? And she says “yes sure” - so we have consent don't we? However might it change according to WHY I want to hug her - for instance I may ...

- Be guessing that you want some reassurance and think this will give it to you
- I may be feeling a need for some physical contact to reassure and ground myself
- I may fancy her and really really want to touch her but don't know how to ask and this is a more socially acceptable way to do that ...

So when we start moving to consent in touch we want not only to get clear on who is doing something - i.e. who is offering to move in and hug - but also on who it is for and what is the intention of the touch. Then we can be much clearer in our asking for things and giving of consent.

Why is this important? Well if we practice this with the little things - such as with a hug - it helps us be much clearer when we come to communicate about the bigger things. E.g. suppose it wasn't a hug but the question is - "How about I give you a massage? My tent is over there..." and the intentions might be:

- I want to reassure you as you looked like you had a bad time in the action
- I want contact / connection to ground and reassure me
- I fancy you and want to initiate some kind of more intimate or sexual encounter...

If we practice noticing, the following consent can get clearer all round:

- Who is doing it?
- Who is it for?
- Setting a boundary / limit or asking for clarification

Here are some examples [if there are two facilitators it works well to do these as little role plays] speak these out then ask audience to feedback:

A - "I'd love to stroke your hair, are you willing to let me do that?"

B - "Yes that's fine for a few minutes, but not all day"

ASK AUDIENCE

WHO IS DOING IT ... WHO IS IT FOR ... WHAT'S THE BOUNDARY

(A is touching / it's for A / boundary is a time limit)

A - "I'd love a shoulder massage, are you willing to do that for me?"

B - "Yes I am happy to, as long as you sit down so I don't strain my arms"

ASK AUDIENCE

WHO IS DOING IT... WHO IS IT FOR ... WHAT'S THE BOUNDARY

(B is touching / it's for A / boundary is comfort / body position)

A - "I'd love to share a massage with you, as I am really enjoying your company and would like to get more intimate with you. Are you up for that?"

B - "Yes I would like that too, but I would like to set a time limit, and check in about the kinds of touch we both do and don't want to receive. How does that all sound for you?"

ASK AUDIENCE

WHO IS DOING IT ... WHO IS IT FOR ... WHAT'S THE BOUNDARY

(A & B might both be touching / it's for A & B / boundary is time and having a negotiation about likes / dislikes before the touch)

This framework is taken from a brilliant embodied consent practice and map called [The Wheel of Consent](#) by Dr Betty Martin.

Keep adding resources and exercises below!

Followup Email

Hiya all,

Thanks for coming to the **XR Consent Awareness workshop** in [redacted].

I hope the workshop has given you some new ideas and tools for how to discern and maintain your own boundaries.

Please fill out this form, as it will help the XR Consent Advocacy Circle to get a picture of which XR sites there are people/teams at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScpRDrTcQQViugqlpkfQVz-Mwul4Jqmvvmz0PXmHVKNDPmhEvA/viewform>

I'm CCing xr-consent@protonmail.ch – reach out to that email address at any time for support or questions! That'll be the best address to **contact** during the October blockades for anything consent-related in XR.

You'll find more **info and resources** at rebellion.earth/consent, including the workshop outline in case you want to reference it – or run it yourself (if so, let us know)! There's also some really good videos (the *2-min Consent – it's simple as tea* is a must-watch!), and you'll also find the *Sexual Assault and Harassment in XR Spaces* Policy, which hopefully won't be needed!

During the October rebellion we'll have **Consent Awareness Teams** (CATs) at each site. Each blockade site in London has a CAT group chat to help you connect with other CAT members. There are **links to join the WhatsApp CAT group chats** for each site (just tap the links from your phone) and you can [read more about the Consent Awareness Teams here](http://rebellion.earth/consent). So that you can find it easily (and help others join), you'll also find this document linked from rebellion.earth/consent. You'll need whatsapp installed to join the group chat. If you don't have a smart phone you'll probably need to rely on someone else to keep you updated, or let us know if you have another idea!

Much gratitude!

Name [redacted]