



# REGIONAL GUIDE

## Durham

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Chapter 1: Talking About Consent



VESTA

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# This Guide is For You

**Welcome. We believe you. We believe them.**

This guide is for you and anyone who needs it. You have a friend and you're worried about them. They might be in a bad situation. You're pretty sure things aren't good and they're getting worse.

What do you need? Information. Resources. Things to do right now.

**This guide is a list of resources that you can share and take action on, if you or they choose to.** It has been written and sourced specifically for the Durham region. We created this guide for survivors of sexual violence and for those who want to help them. Maybe your friend needs support. Maybe you are a survivor and you never want to see another go through what you've experienced.

Sexual violence is a prevalent, intersectional and multi-factor issue affecting all communities. Its complexity makes it impossible to tackle alone. It takes every person who has endured gender-based violence standing up and refusing to let it happen to another.

**Thank you for taking the initiative.**



# What Are We Talking About?

Before we get into the details, let's talk about some important definitions.

**Gender-based violence (GBV)** is violence that is directed at people because of their gender. GBV covers many forms of violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence.

**Sexual Assault** is any non-consensual sexual act. Anyone can experience sexual assault, including spouses, significant others, and partners who live together. We often think that sexual assault and rape are the same thing, but sexual assault is a bigger category that includes non-penetrative sexual activity, including touching, fondling and molestation.

# What Are We Talking About?

**Rape** is about non-consensual penetration. Whether it's an object or a body part, rape means they have experienced unwanted penetration of the vagina or anus. Rape also includes having their mouth penetrated with someone's sex organ without consent. Even if they consented to earlier sexual activity, rape can still happen.

**Sexual Harassment** is about unwanted words and sexual behaviours that could include sexual assault and rape. Sexual harassment may include comments on how someone is dressed, on their body or looks, and these comments could be negative or positive. Sexual harassment has nothing to do with whether or not the person doing the harassing is 'just joking' or 'trying to give them a compliment'. It's about how the survivor feels about the behaviours, how severe it is, and how often this is happening.

# What About Consent?

Everyone talks about 'consent' these days. But what exactly does consent mean? According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, only **28% of Canadians feel confident they understand what consent means**. So, let's talk about that.

Consent means that you're actively saying that you're into sexual activity with someone. Any sexual activity without your active consent is sexual assault. Don't forget that you can't give consent if you're drunk, high, sleeping or underage.

Tricking, manipulating, or pressuring someone into sexual activity is called **sexual coercion**.

When we ask 'did they consent?' what are we really asking?

Back in the day, it was trendy to stand by the 'no means no' idea. We assumed that if they didn't like what was happening sexually, they would say no and likely push away or fight back.

Then we learned that survivors of sexual assault and gender-based violence may not be able to speak up. Fear, flashbacks, and trauma can make it impossible to speak, or even move. Survivors reported staying silent or just laying still until it was over and their silence was argued to be consent.



# What About Consent?

Today we know that consent is always ACTIVE and verbal. We're looking for an enthusiastic 'Yes!' because 'yes means yes'.

Not sure how to consent without ruining the mood? How about...

- **What sounds like fun?**
- **Does that sound good?**
- **What excites you?**
- **Is that good?**
- **What would turn you on?**
- **How does that feel?**



Want to know more? Check out the [Consent 101 video series by Planned Parenthood](#) and [our blog post on consent.](#)



**Together we can  
end gender-based  
violence. Be ready  
with resources.**



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