

Teens, Sex and the Law

It seems too many teens that adults are always making a big deal about people having sex under the age of consent. Many young people think that if they feel ready to have sex and they use protection, it is nothing to do with anyone else. But every teen needs to know the sex laws and what they mean.

So what does the age of consent mean?

The age of consent is the age when the law says you can agree to have sex. In most countries, until you reach this age you can't legally have sex with anyone, however old they are. Sometimes the law is slightly different when the partners are of a similar age, but there is usually still a minimum age below which sex is always illegal.

But our parents say it's okay...

That doesn't make any difference - your parents don't make the law. Teens can't get around the laws for smoking, drinking or driving because their parents say so, and it's the same with sex. The age of consent laws always apply, whether you're in love, or you've been together for ages, or you've had sex before.

But it's no-one else's business. Why do we have these laws?

Although many young people are mature enough to know how to deal with it if someone tries to get them to have sex, some teens are not grown up enough to know what to do. Age of consent laws are there to stop young people from being exploited by adults.

What is the age of consent?

What the age of consent is depends on where you live - there are different age limits in different places, and in some places the age of consent is different for boys and for girls.

Is there an age of consent for gay men and lesbians?

Yes. Some places have different age of consent limits for gay men and lesbians.

What is 'statutory rape'?

If you are under the age of consent and you choose to have sex with someone who is over the age of consent, then they can be charged with the crime of 'statutory rape'. Some countries have different names for this crime, and some states in the US call it 'unlawful sexual penetration' or just 'rape'.

And what's sexual abuse?

This is when a person is pressured into any type of sexual contact that they do not agree to. If you know anyone who is being pressured in this way, you should tell an adult that you trust what's going on.