



Consent Education is Suicide Prevention

Amy Johnson

Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice

“Consent Education is Suicide Prevention” read the sign the woman held.

This resonates deeply with my work as Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice in the United Church of Christ, where I diligently advocate for sexuality education, its importance, its connection to justice, and its sacredness. This includes education about consent.

Congregants and pastors often ask: Does God love me as a survivor? Was it my fault? Where are resources to teach children empowering messages about their bodies, gender, and relationships? How should we handle bullying at church? How do I heal from my own abuse/assault? How do we minister to those who are survivors of sexual abuse and assault?

In response, we must remember that people who have been abused and assaulted sexually have had control of their bodies and decisions taken away from them. They face not being believed about the abuse or assault, being blamed for somehow not preventing the abuse or assault, and complicated legal and social service systems that often unintentionally re-traumatize people who have already suffered incredible harm.

This all takes a huge toll on the bodies, mental health, and spirits of survivors. Furthermore, when people are not able to access competent, knowledgeable health and mental health care providers to help them heal, they can feel hopeless. Trauma and hopelessness can lead to deep shame. And we know all too well that shame, especially when combined with stigma, can be fatal.

Bombardment with social media such as



the recent post on X saying “Your body, my choice” that [was viewed more than 90 million times and reposted nearly 4,000 times](#) activates existing trauma, and contributes to people having less emotional availability to come forward about abuse and assault they have experienced.

All of this brings us back to: consent education is suicide prevention.

Consent education starts with teaching about bodily autonomy at young ages. Use caution when tickling to avoid inadvertently teaching children they aren't in control of their bodies. Offer choices about showing affection to elders: a hug? High five? Wave? Blow a kiss?

When we listen to children about and celebrate who they know they are—what gender they are, who they love, how they experience their bodies—we support their bodily autonomy. By honoring them, we build foundations for their understanding of consent, rather than teaching them to discount their own knowing.

Consent education, when done well, not only helps us value our own self-worth as beloved children of God in all our glorious diversity. It also helps us know our value separate from whatever has happened to us. Consent education reminds us to listen to each other, honor our partner's feelings and limits, see the divine in each other, and treat one another as sacred members of beloved community.

M Jade Kaiser from [enfleshed](#) calls to us in a piece titled [“On speaking queerly in public.”](#) “I want us to raise a whole generation of kids who never learn to hate themselves.”

Consent education is indeed suicide prevention. Amen and amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Amy Johnson serves as the Minister for Sexuality Education and Justice in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

