My partner and I give workshops on consent.

We talk lot about consent activities – things to think about and things you can talk about to establish consent before and during intimacy.
- Talking
- Texts
- E-mails
- Checking in before
- Checking in during
- Checking in after
- Touch
- Body language
- Sharing fantasies
- Setting boundaries and limits
- Safe words
- Power dynamics
- Drug and alcohol use
- Emotional and mental state
- Triggers
Wait a minute! I've been with my wife for 15 years. There's no way we cover all of this every time we have sex! We usually don't even explicitly ask each other! Are you saying that we're not having consensual sex??

Of course not!
When we talk about these activities, we're often talking about new relationships or pick-up sex and play.

The truth is, the way we practice consent changes as we build relationships.
Consent isn't a checkbox.

Consent achieved! Onwards!

And it isn't just a legal entity.

I now deem this encounter officially consensual.
Consent is a tool to build strong intimate, sexual, and romantic relationships!

When you start out practicing careful and explicit consent, you're building a Consent Castle that you can both enjoy!

Consent Castle?
It's my favorite consent metaphor.

It goes like this:
You've met someone awesome, and you decide you want to build a castle together/plan some sexy times.

You'll probably talk about what you want and what you don't want.

I've been thinking about a drawbridge...

I'd really love to give you a blow job.

Oooh, and a moat!

I'm not really into getting oral, but I love giving it...
You might even draw up some diagrams:

So, I was thinking about...

Oooh! That looks neat.
You can talk about your experiences.

I've never worked with sandstone before.

That's okay! I'll give you some tips.

I've never really tried muffing before.

I'll talk you through it. We can go slow.
And it's a good idea to check in to see how it's going.

What do you think about the colour so far?
I love it!

How does this feel? Is it okay?

It's good, maybe go a little faster?
The point is, when you’re building something with someone, you usually start out being really careful. You use scaffolding, and wear hardhats and steel-toed boots. You communicate a lot to make sure you’re both on the same page.
It might seem like a lot of work, but it's also a lot of fun!

You're building something that you're both going to enjoy.
You don't have to take these precautions, and maybe everything will be okay. But maybe...

owww!

That—that wasn't what I wanted to happen.

I'm sorry.
As you build your castle, you'll finish rooms, and you'll both get used to the space. If you've built it right, you don't have to wear hard hats all the time, because it becomes a safe, comfortable, familiar space.
As you establish a relationship based on consent, you learn what your partner likes and dislikes, and you may find that you're doing sexy or intimate things without explicitly talking about it at all.

Come here, you!

tee-hee!
The great thing about consent castles is that they are always works in progress. You may need to do some maintenance.

Hmm, I think this needs a new coat of paint.

I've been feeling really self-conscious about my body during sex lately.

Okay — can I help with those feelings?
You might want to add a new room, or refurbish an old one. In that case, you put your hard hats back on and plan things out a little more carefully.
Similarly, you may want to add something new to your relationship. That's the time where you slow down and start talking things through again to make sure you're both excited and having fun.

I think... I think I'd like to try using a strap-on with you.

That might be fun! What does that look like for you?
I use the Consent Castle metaphor because I think it's a good illustration of how consent and healthy relationships reinforce each other.
I don’t know anyone in a long-term relationship who always explicitly and fully negotiates sex and intimacy with their partners, every single time.
But my experience is that by being careful and deliberate with consent early with someone new, you build a solid foundation for a mutually satisfying relationship.
So gear up!

Because this is going to be a lot of fun...