Your consent matters

By Andrea Lyle, RN

In the healthcare field, informed consent is required for just about everything. No procedure is performed until a stack of papers describing all the details of the care being provided is read and signed by the patient. For many of us, the reading of these forms is optional, but the signing is not. Our consent is often given without much thought because we know we have to give it in order to receive care.

Giving your consent means you are saying yes, you permit, approve or agree to something. While it is routine to give our consent in a healthcare setting, many people don’t realize there are numerous other things they give consent to on a daily basis. In fact, our consent is required every single day in every single experience. I had never considered the influential role my consent played in life until I read this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Not only can no one make you feel inferior without your consent, but no one can make you feel anything, do anything, think anything or believe anything without your consent either. Reading Roosevelt’s statement was an “ah ha” moment for me. It made “taking personal responsibility for my life” a lot more significant.

The truth is when you agree to do, not do, feel, not feel, think, not think, believe or not believe something, you are giving your consent – be it consciously or unconsciously. This is not to say there aren’t things that happen in your life that you do not directly consent to. However, how you respond to those things does require your consent, and your consent perpetuates whatever it is you are feeling, thinking, saying, doing or believing.

For instance, you may have had a traumatic experience in the past that profoundly affected your life. When you carry that experience from the past into today with the same mental, emotional, and physical response you had then, you are agreeing to perpetuate the experience in the present. Although you may have been a victim in the original circumstance, to continue to be a victim in this present moment you have to agree to that belief and continue to give your consent to it. Without your consent it could not be so.

Whether it is feelings, thoughts, words, actions or beliefs you hold about yourself, your life, other people or life situations, what you give your consent to is a very powerful choice. Your health, your happiness, your relationships, your financial status, your material possessions, your mental/emotional well-being and your spiritual state are all reflective of the many things you are saying “yes” to. Consenting to things that are in alignment with you will feel good and have positive results. However, consenting to things that don’t suit you and are not true for you can wreak havoc in all aspects of your life -- increasing stress levels, and harming your health and well-being.

Taking full responsibility for your health and your happiness means being aware of what you are consenting to. Here are a few tips to help you give your consent to a happier, healthier life:

1. **Say “yes” to you.** Make your feelings, thoughts, and beliefs a priority in your life. Too often we sacrifice what is good for us to make others happy, thereby consenting to feeling frustrated, resentful, overly stressed and out of sync.
2. **Become aware of how you respond to situations. If you find yourself becoming angry, frustrated, anxious, fearful or just stressed out, ask yourself this question “What am I consenting to in this situation that I could change right now to make it better?” Remember no one can make you feel any of those things without your consent, and no one can force your response without your consent either. Resignation is still consent. Doing things against your will still means you are consenting.**
3. **Interrupt patterns of behavior. Due to a lifetime of conditioning, we have all developed ways of responding to different stimuli that have become patterns. Without even thinking about it, we jump into those established patterns whenever similar stimuli affect us. It takes a conscious effort to become aware of these patterns. Learn to identify what you are consenting to that perpetuates the feeling, thought, or belief that you are having difficulty with. Then consciously make a change. Give your consent to better feelings, thoughts and beliefs.**

**Your life can change drastically when you become more aware of the role your consent plays in your big life picture. What you consent to matters.**

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