



What Does "Informed Consent" Mean?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Published

November 24th, 2011

I recently heard the sad story of a woman who woke up from an investigative surgery to find to her horror that one of her breasts was missing. She had obviously signed consent for the hospital and doctor to do the surgery but did not have enough information to know what the results of that might be.

Sometimes we give permission, approval or agreement to something but don't have enough information to understand the process to be used or the risks associated with it.

Have you ever taken your car to a mechanic and returned to a large and unexpected invoice? Anger can result from not being part of the decision-making process as information is gathered. If you had known why the vehicle was not working properly you might have asked about the possibility of getting used parts or leaving the repairs to a later date.

When you agree to have your child assessed by a psychologist do you know what tests will be used, what they are measuring or how the results may affect your child's placement in the school system? Will there be a report? Who will get copies of it? Will someone explain it to you?

I once learned about parents who were upset when they discovered that their child had been given an IQ test. They didn't understand that this is one of the outcomes of a *Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)*. Even though they had agreed to using this test, they didn't understand the full implications of what that meant.

Assessments for Court purposes can be confusing and upsetting if the parties do not have full understanding. Often individuals who are going through divorce, for example, think that they can hire a psychologist to state that they would be the best parent for children and therefore should have sole custody. It is easy to assume that paying for a professional will guarantee support for one's case. Psychologists who are involved in custody and access cases focus on the needs of the children and not merely on the parent who has paid for the report.

Informed Consent means that you know in advance what services will be provided and how they will be conducted. Treatment for depression, for example, can consist of Cognitive-Behavioural therapy, hypnotism, medication, or a number of other therapies. Make sure you know which will be used, how often and in what duration.

Ask about the qualifications of the professional. What about confidentiality, report writing and release of information? What are the risks involved?

The whole area of fees can also be confusing. Do you know how much you will be charged for services? How will they be calculated? When are you expected to pay? Do you have insurance coverage that will help with this?

Informed Consent is designed to protect you. Being a wise consumer means asking questions and ensuring that you understand what will happen, how, when, where and the risks that you face.

Don't consent to do anything that you don't understand fully. You may end up being horribly disappointed, upset or even changed for life in a way that you wouldn't have chosen!