

How to Support Someone Who Discloses Sexual Violence

- Be gentle, be kind, be patient, move slowly, and thank them for speaking to you.
 - “I AM GLAD YOU are speaking to me”, “I don’t want you to be alone at a time like this”, “I’m sorry you have experienced something that is upsetting” (vs. *“I’m sorry you have been assaulted.”*)
- Permit **silence** to occur.
 - If you “fill the time” with conversation, the person loses the chance to be forthcoming. Resist any inclinations to share your own experiences. The person should be supported to focus on their own experiences.
- **Avoid** making your own judgments about the situation.
 - The person may feel conflicted about what happened. If you say, “it’s terrible,” it becomes more difficult to reveal, for example, that it was both positive and negative, and they are conflicted.
- Focus on **their** being upset.
 - “I cannot remove your distress, but I can make sure you are not alone” or “Explain resources” and/or “Help you be safe.”
- Be honest and transparent about any reporting obligations you have as a Responsible Employee, Mandatory Reporter and/or Campus Security Authority...HOWEVER...
 - **Inform them that whether they choose to take any next steps to seek support and/or make a report is entirely up to them.**
 - Assure them that resources are available whether they seek to take any additional steps.
 - Assure them that you will respect the decision(s) they make.
- Avoid encouraging discussion of details of their experience as this might re-traumatize the person.
- Do not assume the sex, gender or gender identity of the other person/people involved.
 - The experience may have been a same sex, gender or gender identity interaction, and in some cases, multiple people may have been involved.
- Do not assume the experience that is disclosed occurred outside of a romantic relationship.
- Emotional Expression: When traumatized, people may have blunted emotions (numb) or exaggerated emotions.
 - If they are tearful, allow them to cry.
 - If they are not tearful, it is not valuable to push for tears.
 - If their emotional expression is inconsistent with what you expect (e.g., the person smiles), do not discount what they are sharing.
- Self-blame is **COMMON**.
 - Do not try to remove self-blame; it may backfire. If they feel they did something to bring about their trauma, and they are being told they did not do ANYTHING, they might not feel honest.
- Just listen and practice the 3 C’s (Care, Connect and Contact). If possible, please express your support of and trust in the available resources.