

# RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE



## BEST PRACTICES FOR RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

### CREATE SAFE(R) SPACE

When possible, provide a safe and comfortable space that ensures privacy, and that will have limited distractions.

### COMMUNICATE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

Be clear about the limits to your confidentiality. At times, the disclosure may be unexpected but it will still be important to find an opportunity to share your limits to confidentiality with the survivor.

### LIMITS TO CONFIDENTIALITY

To whatever degree is possible, **communicate your limits to confidentiality as soon as you can.**

- 1** An individual is at immediate risk of suicide
- 2** An identified individual is at immediate risk of harm
- 3** Campus safety may be compromised
- 4** A child or youth under the age of 16 has experienced abuse

**If none of the above limits apply, you do not need to share any information disclosed.**

You don't have to be an expert to support someone impacted by sexual violence. Remember, getting support looks different for each person. The individual gets to decide what next steps look like for them.

### DEFINITE DOS:

#### PROVIDING A SUPPORTIVE RESPONSE

- Listen
- Provide space for them to control the pace and content of what they share
- Validate their feelings
- Be empathetic
- Thank them for telling you
- Assure them it was not their fault
- Remind them that consent is freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic and specific
- Ask how you can help and if they would like information about resources
- Model consent

### TRY TO AVOID:

#### UNSUPPORTIVE RESPONSES

- Dismissing them
- Minimizing their experiences
- Asking or pressing for further details
- Making decisions for them
- Invalidating them or their feelings
- Telling them they "should..."
- Blaming them
- Being racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, classist, ableist, Islamophobic, etc.
- Defending the person who has caused harm
- Panicking or pulling the focus back to your reactions
- Questioning the person who caused harm

### REFER

Ask the survivor if they would like to know about resources available to them. Remember that it's okay if the survivor is not ready to talk to anyone else at this time, and that it's their choice whether or not to connect further with others.

### CARING FOR YOURSELF: DEBRIEF & CONSULT

It can be difficult to hear a disclosure, and to know that someone has experienced such harm. It is important to acknowledge the impact a disclosure has had on you, and seek support for yourself:

- Meet with the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office
- Confidentially debrief with a trusted family member, friend or other support person in your life
- Connect with your local Sexual Assault Support Centre or campus resources

For more information on responding and supports available, please visit:

[uwaterloo.ca/hrei/svpro](http://uwaterloo.ca/hrei/svpro)



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and Response Office