

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

LISTEN

It takes enormous courage to disclose an experience of sexual violence, so it's important to be attentive and listen. Allow the victim-survivor to take their time.

"Are you OK? I'm here for you. Take your time."



ACKNOWLEDGE

Having someone acknowledge what happened can help validate a victim-survivor's experience and their feelings. Acknowledge their courage and strength for disclosing.

"I recognise this may be difficult to talk about, but thank you for speaking out. What has happened to you is not your fault."



BELIEVE

Sexual violence is never the fault of the victim-survivor. Make it clear that you believe them and that their feelings are valid. It's important that the victim-survivor doesn't feel judged while speaking with you.

"Thank you for telling me. I believe you."



ESTABLISH SAFETY

Make sure to check the safety of the victim-survivor. They may still be at risk of immediate and/or future harm and it is important to determine whether they feel safe.

"Do you feel safe right now? Are you safe where you live/work/travel?"



OFFER SUPPORT

Ask the victim-survivor whether they would like further support. If they decline, that's not your fault. Respect their choice but feel free to remind them that support is always available if they change their mind.

"What would you like to do? What kind of support would you like?"



REFER

Although someone has disclosed to you, you are not expected to be their main source of support. To maintain a safe personal boundary, mitigate vicarious trauma and empower the victim-survivor to make an informed choice as best you can, it's important to refer them on to the appropriate service with their consent.

"Have you considered speaking to a professional about this? Here are some support services that can help victim-survivors."



DEBRIEF

Receiving disclosures of traumatic experiences, including sexual violence, can be distressing. It's important to ensure you are also okay. Support services are available to talk about how you are feeling. This can help mitigate the effects of vicarious trauma.

Always keep the identity of the victim-survivor confidential.



NOTE:

All adults have a responsibility to report if they suspect a child or young person may be at risk of abuse or neglect. Mandatory reporting is a legal requirement in some professions. Anyone over the age of 18 is legally required to report suspected child sexual abuse.