

RESPOND

Northeastern
University

A GUIDE FOR RESPONDING WHEN SOMEONE SHARES
THEY'VE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

R



RECOGNIZE A DISCLOSURE

The person disclosing might say things like, "I had a weird night..." or "an uncomfortable experience," but may not clearly label their experience as sexual assault, for example. Pay attention to the behaviors they are describing. Reactions to trauma can vary from distressed to numb. No matter their visible reaction, they deserve your support.

E



EXPRESS EMPATHY

Express empathy through your words and body language. Believe them. Say things like, "I'm sorry that happened to you," "You deserve so much better," "It's not your fault," "I care about you, and I believe you," or "Thank you for telling me." Use active listening skills. Let them know they only have to share as much as they want to.

S



SEEK SAFETY

- Assess if it's an emergency. If someone is in immediate danger or needs emergency medical care, call for help.
- Try to ensure that the space where you are speaking is safe and protects their privacy.
- Make sure their physical needs are met (water, blanket, tea, etc.)
- Do not touch them, even to give a hug, unless they give their permission.
- Do not "investigate" or ask for full details. It can be painful to retell.

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PROVIDE CHOICE

Provide choices when possible. "What do you need in this moment? How can I support you?" Avoid saying, "You should..." or, "Why didn't you...?", as well as labeling their experience for them.



Office of Prevention and
Education at Northeastern

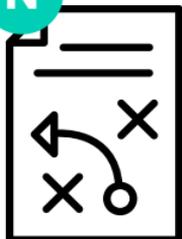
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OFFER OPTIONS

Ask if they'd like to know more about resources. You can also offer to accompany them to an office or make a phone call with them. For example, you could say, "**I know a bit about [resource]. Would you like me to tell you more?**" Respect their choices as to whether they access resources or not.



NEXT STEPS

The person who discloses to you might feel anxious about how your interactions will look going forward. Try, "**How can I support you going forward?**" Respect their decision to talk about it in the future or not to share updates with you. Keep their information private.



DON'T FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

While it's important that you don't rely on the person disclosing to you to attend to your own emotional response, your feelings are valid and you are not alone in this. If you notice that you aren't feeling quite yourself after responding to a disclosure or need a space to process, reach out for support.



If you have received a disclosure and are seeking confidential support, you can connect with OPEN's Community Consultation Services. Scan the QR code to learn more about this resource, or schedule a meeting by completing the confidential service request form at bit.ly/svrequestform.



Self-enroll in OPEN's Canvas course "RESPOND: Trauma-Informed Response to Disclosures of Sexual Violence" to learn more about this model.