

RESPONDING TO TITLE IX DISCLOSURES: TRAINING FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

Preparing to Respond – What to Say/Do

When responding to someone who has disclosed that they have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, remember, even though they are coming to you because they trust you, this is a difficult conversation for them, and everyone behaves differently when they are telling you what happened.

- ✓ There is no one way people act when they have experienced an upsetting or traumatic event and it is important not to make assumptions about someone's experience based on how upset they may seem or the details they share.
- ✓ This person may be in shock or may have compartmentalized the event. They may appear depressed, angry or display little emotion.
- ✓ The experience they share may sound disjointed, and most likely will not describe the event in chronological order.
- ✓ They may struggle recalling details or they may recall everything with sharp clarity. This is completely normal.

7 Tips

If someone discloses an experience of sexual harassment or sexual assault to you, there is never a perfect script to follow, however, here are examples of best practices or a list of 7 tips that you can consider incorporating into your own personalized response.

1. **First, find a private place to talk.** If the person is comfortable moving to a quiet, non-distracting place, create an environment that is private, so they feel comfortable speaking with you. It's ok to suggest moving to a more private environment. Ask if they would be ok meeting in your office.
2. **Practice good listening skills.** That means, stop what you were doing. If you are in your office, close out your email, silence your cell phone and turn it over. Do not multi-task. One of the best and most difficult things you can do is listen without interrupting or appearing as if you are distracted.
3. **Be affirming.** Avoid asking questions about what happened and avoid jumping in to provide solutions or advice. Instead, validate what they're sharing with you by nodding your head and staying attentive.
4. **Respond without judgment.** Here are some statements that can be helpful:
 - a. "I believe you and this is not your fault. You did nothing to cause this to happen to you, and it never should have happened." Individuals who have experienced sexual

harassment or sexual assault often feel shame about what happened, blame themselves and/or and fear judgment.

- b. "I am sorry this happened to you, this must be very painful, and hurtful." A Reporting Party sharing an experience of sexual harassment or sexual assault requires vulnerability and courage. Validating the experience and naming an emotion communicates empathy and understanding. Or, you can restate the emotions they've just shared with you about how they are feeling.
 - c. "I want to support you. You are not alone." Experiences of sexual harassment, and particularly sexual assault are very isolating so communicating that you are willing to support that person is very helpful and reassuring.
5. **Non-verbal communication is important.** That means maintaining eye contact, nodding your head to encourage them to continue speaking shows you are engaged and interested in what the Reporting party is saying.
6. **Empower them.**
- a. Talk to them about their personal safety. It's ok to ask, "Are you feeling safe? I want to be sure you feel safe on and off campus."
 - b. Find out if they need medical assistance. Encourage them to seek medical care, but don't push. You can say, "I think it's important to make sure you are physically ok. Why don't we figure out where to go to get checked out by a doctor?" Or, "would you like information for local hospitals in the area who can conduct a medical or physical exam?"
 - c. Offer to provide them with information on obtaining campus resources such as counseling or student health center.
7. **Encourage, do not force, the Reporting party to report the sexual harassment or sexual assault.** You can open the conversation by saying:
- a. "You have reporting options available to you."
 - b. If there has been a sexual assault say, "You may report to the police, or the University's Title IX Coordinator. How do you feel about those options?"
 - c. If there has been sexual harassment, again, encourage, do not force the Reporting party to report the incident to the University's Title IX Coordinator.

Preparing to Respond – What NOT to Say/Do

When a Reporting party discloses that they have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, here are some things to not say or do:

- a. Responding in a shocked or over-reactive manner. “Oh my God, this is terrible!” or “You need to report this to the Police!”
- b. Disbelieving, minimizing, or questioning the “truth” of the Reporting party’s disclosure, especially if they seem very calm or are resistant to reporting to an OWA, Mandatory Reporter Employee or the police.
- c. Focusing on your own emotional reaction, such as sadness, anger, or telling them about a similar experience you may have had.
- d. Questioning why they did not act in ways society expects someone to respond by asking, “Why didn’t you tell him/her to stop commenting on your looks? Or “Why didn’t you fight back?” Or “Why did you drink so much?”
- e. Comparing stories. For example, do not say, “Well at least you weren’t raped by someone you knew really well.”
- f. If you do not have time to meet with them do not say, “I don’t have time right now, can you come back later?” Rather, say, “I am on my way to teach my Communication 233 course, can you meet me in my office at 1:40 p.m., does that work with your schedule?” If not, decide on a specific time for you to meet. Do not end the conversation without a firm day and time to meet. If the student or employee doesn’t show, follow up. Email and invite them to come in and talk, or if appropriate – meet virtually.
- g. Telling anyone else. You are not an OWA or Mandatory Employee Reporter. Telling anyone else would betray their trust. However, your Institution’s policy may have exceptions for cases involving a minor or if the Respondent poses an imminent threat to campus. **Always** refer to your Institution’s Policy.

Know your Institution’s Title IX Policy & Procedures

1. Know your Title IX Coordinator’s name and contact information. Be prepared to introduce the reporting party to the Title IX Coordinator, if requested.
2. Obtain contact information of your University Police Department, emergency and non-emergency contact numbers, Counseling and Prevention contact information, on-campus victim advocate information, and student health center information.
3. Know how a student or colleague can file a report with your Title IX Coordinator.
4. Be prepared to answer questions about your Title IX policies and procedures.

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