

responding to disclosures

at the University of Windsor we use a three-step method for responding to disclosures of sexual violence

recognize

recognize incidents of sexual violence for what they are

recognize that survivors may not present symptoms of their trauma that we would expect

1

respond

respond to the very real barriers that survivors often face when disclosing

respond in a way that the survivor finds helpful

2

refer

refer them to appropriate and helpful resources, both on- and off-campus

3

Important things to know:

- When people experience a traumatic event, they might have a fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response in the moment.
- After a trauma, survivors may experience heightened attention to threats, jumbled memory of the event, nightmares, flashbacks, shame, difficulty translating the experience into words, and much more.
- Each person responds differently - it is not possible to predict how someone will present symptoms after a traumatic event.
- Survivors face many barriers to disclosing and reporting. Some barriers include: relationship with the perpetrator, worries about mandatory reporting, worries about dealing with the police, fearing they won't be believed, worrying that their story will be shared without their consent, and more.
- Supporting someone after a trauma is one of the most impactful things in terms of their recovery.

If you'd like to learn more, contact the Sexual Misconduct Response & Prevention Office to learn about our Responding to Disclosures training.



Where to start:

listen

The most important thing you can do is give someone your attention and the space to share. You don't need to know any more than what they want to tell you – don't pry or ask a lot of questions, as they can easily sound like victim blaming.

respect confidentiality

Remember, this is not your story to tell. Survivors should get to have control over who knows their story.

empathize and affirm

Empathy is our best effort to understand where someone is at and what they are feeling. Even when you don't fully understand, showing compassion and concern can go a long way. Affirm a survivor's decision to disclose. Assure them that you believe them and that it was not their fault. No one has the right to hurt them.

ask, don't assume

It is important we don't assume we know how survivors should behave or what they will need. There is no right or wrong way to respond to an experience of violence. People respond in different ways and often have different needs. Ask about what support looks like for them.

Helpful ways to offer support:



Offer emotional support



Offer practical help (like making a phone call or giving them a ride)



Offer information and resources

Things that are not helpful:



Trying to make decisions for them



Making it about you



Blaming them

Resources to share with them:

The Sexual Misconduct Response and Prevention Office

We offer confidential support to folks who have had any unwanted sexual experience. They do not have to report their experience, but we can talk them through their options. Contact us at svsupport@uwindsor.ca

Student Counselling Centre

The SCC offers provides registered students free, confidential mental health counselling delivered by trained mental health professionals. Make an appointment by emailing scc@uwindsor.ca. You can also check out the MySSP app for 24/7 talk or text counselling by licenced counsellors in multiple languages.

The Sexual Assault Crisis Centre

The SACC provides a 24-hour support line at 519-253-9667.

The Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centre

The Treatment Centre provides medical care for all survivors of sexual assault, including the collection of evidence. Reporting to police is NOT mandated. Contact them at (519) 255-2234 or satc@wrh.on.ca.