

HOW TO RECEIVE A DISCLOSURE OF SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

Recognizing that sexualized violence is a significant systemic, societal, and campus problem, the University of Victoria has created a policy to respond to the issue. The purpose of the policy is to instill and cultivate institutional, collective, and individual responsibility to prevent and respond to sexualized violence and to support survivors and those impacted by sexualized violence. This document provides guidance on one important responsibility—how to respond in a trauma-informed and survivor-centred manner when receiving a disclosure of sexualized violence.

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SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICY

HOW TO RECEIVE A DISCLOSURE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SURVIVOR-CENTRED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED?

To be survivor-centred means prioritizing the safety of those impacted by sexualized violence and providing them with options and choices about what to do following a disclosure and/or report.

To be trauma-informed means understanding that sexualized violence is a traumatic experience, and that no two people will experience and respond to trauma in the same way. Care must be taken to receive a disclosure in a way that reduces or eliminates shame, minimizes re-victimization, and facilitates healing and empowerment.

DISCLOSURES

Anyone on campus can receive a disclosure. A disclosure is the process of someone sharing their story of sexualized violence with you. How you respond to a disclosure can have a significant impact on how a person feels about what happened to them, and what they should do next. Receiving a disclosure is an opportunity to validate a survivor and help them access the support they need to address the trauma.

It is common for people to feel uncertain or anxious about how to respond to a disclosure. Below are some tips for what to do when someone discloses. Keep in mind that you are not alone in this process and can contact the sexualized violence resource office in EQHR for information and support. It is also the office that receives formal reports of sexualized violence.

Tips for how to respond to a disclosure:

- **Listen non-judgmentally and empathetically:** create a space where people feel safe to talk about what happened to them. It is best to withhold your own feelings of shock and disbelief, and it is best to avoid asking any questions about the incident, regardless of how curious you may feel. Questions, even well-meaning ones, can feel judgmental and critical. Remember that regardless of the context in which the event occurred, it is never the survivor's fault.
- **Believe and validate:** take the disclosure seriously. Believe people and validate their feelings. It is a tremendous risk for anyone to disclose sexualized violence because of the shame and judgment that can occur.
- **Offer support:** and follow up by providing practical assistance accessing that support. This may include reviewing the list of available on- and off- campus supports listed on the EQHR website or referring them to the office.
- **Provide options:** sexualized violence can be experienced as a tremendous loss of power and control. It is important to give people options that allow them to make choices about when and to whom they disclose.
- **Understand the importance and limitations of providing confidentiality:** as per below.
- **There is no typical response:** understand that people can exhibit a range of emotions from calm detachment to intense feelings of anger, shame, and embarrassment and/or grief in response to trauma. There is no right way to act or behave.
- **Respect personal boundaries:** following a disclosure be especially careful about respecting people's personal boundaries. Instead of offering comfort by touching the survivor, offer a comfortable place to sit and talk.

Some helpful phrases:

- "I am so sorry this happened to you"
- "How can I support you right now—is there someone I can call, or somewhere I can take you?"
- "I believe you"

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is important for creating an environment where survivors feel safe disclosing. However, there are times when staff and faculty have an obligation under the Sexualized Violence Policy to tell their supervisor or the sexualized violence resource office in EQHR about the disclosure they have received. It is important to inform those disclosing that there are limits to confidentiality under the policy. This should be done before receiving a disclosure, if possible. Instances where there are limits to confidentiality include when:

- A person is at risk of self-harm or of harming others;
- There is an imminent risk of harm to the university community and/or the broader community;
- The disclosure involves sexual harassment in their place of employment;
- A person under the age of 19 is endangered; or
- Disclosure is otherwise required by law.

In all these instances, it is important to consider whether the potential harm is foreseeable and imminent. If so, the minimum amount of information needed to meet legal or other obligations should be disclosed. In this case, the survivor should be fully informed and supported at every step in the process, recognizing that a loss of confidentiality and anonymity can have a significant long term impact on their well-being.

Deciding whether to break someone's confidentiality is not an easy choice and not one that should be undertaken without a clear understanding of the rights of the person disclosing. If you are unsure about your responsibility to disclose under the policy, you should seek advice from the sexualized violence resource office in EQHR.

Disclosures versus formal report

A disclosure is distinct from, and may or may not lead to, a formal report. Formal reports are made to the sexualized violence resource office in EQHR with the intention of initiating an investigation. This may not be the best choice for a person impacted by sexualized violence at the time they make their disclosure. They can choose at any point in their process to make a report.

RESPONSE PROTOCOL

In the case of an emergency, call 911 and then Campus Security at 250-721-7599.

People can also contact the sexualized violence resource office in EQHR during regular business hours to make a disclosure, access on- and off-campus supports, and to learn more about their collective rights and responsibilities under the policy.

Faculty and staff who are represented by a union can also contact their union representative for support.

* Please note that survivors and those impacted by sexualized violence can have a support person with them throughout the sexualized violence disclosure and reporting processes.