

How to support a friend who discloses they have been sexual assaulted\harassed.

Listen

"Are you okay? I'm here for you."

It takes enormous courage to disclose an experience of sexual violence. This is why simply listening is the most important first step when someone discloses to you. It is okay if you are not sure what to say in these situations, and sitting with a bit of silence can be okay too. Allow them to take their time.

Acknowledge

"I am so sorry this happened to you."

The shame and stigma of sexual violence makes it difficult to talk about, but having someone acknowledge what happened can help validate their experience. Acknowledge what happened, as well as their courage and strength for disclosing to you.

Believe

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

Make it clear that you believe them and that their feelings are valid.

Reassure

"What happened is not your fault."

It is never anyone's fault that they are assaulted. It is always the perpetrator/s who are at fault, regardless of the relationship between both parties. Assure them that what happened to them is not okay and that it is not their fault.

Establish Safety

"Do you feel safe right now?"

It is important to establish the physical safety of both yourself and the victim-survivor.

Support

"What do you want to do/what support would you like?"

First responders to disclosures of sexual violence can experience vicarious trauma. To ensure this is mitigated, make sure you establish a clear understanding of your boundaries, and how best to support the victim-survivor.

Refer

"Would it be okay if we researched some professional services you may consider?"

As a first responder, you are not expected to be their main source of support. If you feel as though you have the skills to refer them onto a professional, this can be significant in the victim-survivor's healing process. Resources are available on our website at www.thestopcampaign.org.au.