



OFFICE FOR
**SEXUAL VIOLENCE
RESPONSE, SUPPORT
and EDUCATION**



To attend or request a “how to respond to disclosures” workshop, please visit
<https://involvement.mcgill.ca/>

Support a Survivor

You may be the first person to whom a survivor discloses. Your response can have a significant impact on their healing process and their access to resources.

Listening/Setting Up The Space: Consider privacy and your non-verbal signals (eye contact, posture, if you look distracted). Let the survivor decide what to share. Don't press for details.

Attend to Safety: Ask if the person is in danger and/or if they want and/or need medical attention. Consult <https://mcgill.ca/osvrse/survivors/additional-resources>.

Believe/Validate: Let them know what happened to them is not their fault and that their reactions and feelings are valid. Key statements include: “Thank you for sharing this with me,” or “it takes a lot of strength and courage to talk about this.”

Be Aware of Your Own Boundaries and Limitations: Be transparent with what you can or cannot support someone with. Direct them to further resources and offer to accompany them, if appropriate.

Communicate Without Judgement: Be mindful of the questions you ask. Avoid statements like “you should have known better” or asking “why” questions that convey judgement or blame.

Be Non-Directional/Empower Survivors: Explore options and encourage individuals to identify their needs and make their own decisions about next steps. Avoid smothering or overprotecting the survivor.

Tip: When possible, follow up with the survivor.

Tools for Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Violence

Their Reaction:

Know that there is no one way to react to experiences of sexual violence. Reactions are also shaped by culture, race, gender, age, class, ability and other aspects of identity. A survivor may be very sad or upset, they may be stoic and calm, or they may exhibit anxiety and experience panic attacks. They may remember the incident vividly or they may have trouble remembering and focusing. All of these are natural reactions. Survivors may experience impacts immediately or years later.



As a support person, resources are available for you. Please contact the OSVRSE. We are here to help.

Your Reaction:

Responding to a disclosure can be an emotionally and physically demanding experience. It can have an impact on your well-being and your sense of safety. Taking care of yourself is essential and it will help you help others. Practice self and community care and know that it is okay for you to ask for help.

Be Prepared:

- ▶ Learn more about sexual violence and consent.
- ▶ Know the major misconceptions about sexual violence
- ▶ Inform yourself on trauma, and possible reactions.
- ▶ Educate yourself about the warning signs of suicide and offer to help access supports (Suicide Action Montreal has a 24/7 help line: 514.723.4000).
- ▶ Organize a workshop for you and your peers on how to respond to disclosures.
- ▶ Brush up on your active listening skills (Counselling McGill & The Peer Programs Network offer workshops on active listening. Check their websites and/or MyInvolvement to register!)
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with on and off campus resources by visiting our website for more information.
- ▶ Learn more about discrimination and critically reflect about messages you have received and/or integrated about gender norms, sexuality, (dis)ability and more.



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