

What to do if someone tells you about sexual harassment / abuse

# RECEIVING DISCLOSURES



**WHEN A PERSON EXPERIENCES SEXUAL HARASSMENT OR ABUSE THEY COMMONLY EXPERIENCE A LOSS OF:**

**TRUST-SAFETY-CONTROL-SELF ESTEEM**

If someone tells you about sexual harassment / abuse, you can focus on increasing their sense of trust, control, safety and self esteem with everything you do.

## TRUST

Say affirming statements like:

- 'It's not your fault'
- 'I believe you'
- 'You didn't deserve that'
- 'I'm so sorry this happened to you / that this was your experience'

Believe them. Don't ask 'why' questions (e.g. why were you drinking? why didn't you just say no?). Don't express disbelief or suspicion.

You don't need to have all the answers, but you can say 'I don't know how best to give you the support you need, but together we can find the right service'.

## CONTROL

Don't push people to take action. It is up to them to decide what they want to do.

Consider why someone is telling you. Is it for support? Empathy? Do they just want to get it off their chest? Do they want help to report it?

Remember, people haven't had control over the abuse they experienced, and they need to have control over their healing.

Respect confidentiality. Debrief with someone you trust about your own feelings, but remember the survivor's story should be treated with respect and care.

When debriefing, remember to focus on how you feel rather than the information the survivor shared with you.

# SAFETY

A person can feel unsafe long after the abuse has occurred. You can ask:

- 'Are you safe now?'
- 'Do you feel unsafe?'

Keep your own emotions under check. Keeping your voice calm and kind can help give a sense of safety for someone disclosing abuse.

If someone feels unsafe, listen to them and take their feelings seriously.

You don't have to fix the problem or counsel them, but you can gently let them know that there are services that can help (them to make a safety plan, manage flashbacks etc.) and ask if they would like their contact details.

# SELF ESTEEM

Normalise what the person is feeling and experiencing.

You can say:

- 'What you are feeling is understandable'
- 'You are brave for speaking up'
- 'You deserve support'

## IF SOMEONE TELLS YOU ABOUT THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR

If someone who has harmed another person (or is thinking about harming someone) tells you about their situation you can:

- Respond calmly
- Commend them for coming forward
- Affirm their choice to do something about the problem, and;
- Refer them to a support service.

If you are uncomfortable talking with them about it, you can always say 'I can't talk with you about this, but I can give you the contact for a service which can'.

Remember, you can support them for coming forward without minimising the seriousness of what they have done. Try to think of the behaviour as bad, rather than them as a bad person.

## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



If someone has talked to you about sexual harassment/violence, debrief with someone. You can call one of the support services below to discuss what you heard. There is no experience that is too small to ask for help with.

## SERVICES

- Equity New Zealand <https://equity.org.nz/> 0800334470
- HELP: Specialist sexual harm crisis support call 24/7 0800 623 1700 or [www.helpauckland.org.nz](http://www.helpauckland.org.nz)
- Safe To Talk sexual harm helpline 0800 044 334 or TXT 4334 or [www.safetotalk.nz](http://www.safetotalk.nz)
- NZ Police call 105 (non-urgent) or 111 for emergencies
- Human Rights Commission 0800 496 877
- Employment Relations Hotline 0800 209 020