

# Responding to disclosures of sexual assault in the context of family violence: guiding principles

## Safety considerations

Assess **immediate risk concerns**. For example: Is the sexual violence current? Is the person at risk of suicide or self-harm?

Refer to **internal policies and procedures** that your organisation may have.

## Confidentiality

Offer confidentiality but **be clear about your professional responsibilities** and mandates. For example: *'What you tell me is confidential - that means I won't tell anyone else what you share with me. There are some situations when I would need to share information...'*

## Self-awareness

**Be aware of your own reactions and responses.**

You may want to problem solve, but it may be more appropriate to allow space and listen, or simply acknowledge and validate their experience.

## Information, referral & support options

**Be clear** about your role and what you can do.

**Provide information** regarding referral, support and reporting options.

**Obtain consent** prior to making any referrals.

## Listening without judgement

Allow the person to **share their experience in their own time** and offer breaks as needed.

**Validate** and **acknowledge** the courage it took for them to share their experience.

Respond with **empathy**.

Be mindful of **language**.

**Do not pressure** or impose any decision on next steps.

## Communication

Use **active listening skills** with **minimal interruptions**; for example, head nods and positive facial expressions that signal attention and understanding.

**Maintain eye contact**, as appropriate (be mindful of cultural differences).

Watch and listen for **non-verbal cues**.

**Seek clarification** as necessary, particularly regarding risk and safety.

Consider the use of **open and closed questions**.

**Summarise** what you have heard to show understanding and allow opportunities for them to correct any misunderstandings.