

# Supporting a Friend Through Sexual Misconduct

Supporting a friend who has experienced or is experiencing any form of sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking (referred to here as “sexual misconduct”), can be challenging. The following resources can help you have a conversation with your friend as you support them during this time and share appropriate resources available.

## Creating a Supportive Space

### Set Healthy Boundaries

Keep in mind as you support your friend or acquaintance, setting healthy boundaries for yourself is vital. This will help you to be able to support them without sacrificing your own well-being and it will help them to receive support without becoming dependent in an unhealthy way. Setting and maintaining boundaries requires practice. It is not innate, and it is easy to fall out of practice because you are a good person who genuinely wants to help others. Establish what you are comfortable with and never worry about what others think of your boundaries. Establish what you feel comfortable talking about and do not offer advice, recommendations, referrals, etc., that are beyond the scope of your knowledge or comfort level.

### Language Recommendations

#### Example of What to Say to Your Friend:

- ▶ I'm sorry this happened to you.
- ▶ It wasn't your fault.
- ▶ Thank you for telling me.
- ▶ I'm always here if you want to talk.
- ▶ Can I do anything for you?

#### Examples of What NOT to Say to Your Friend:

- ▶ It was your fault.
- ▶ You could have avoided it had you \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ It's been so long! Get over it!
- ▶ It's not that big of a deal; it happens to lots of people.
- ▶ I don't believe you.

### Allow for Space and Autonomy

- ▶ Listen to your friend and let them speak about the situation on their own terms. Don't be forceful with the conversation. It may be very hard for your friend to talk about their experience but remind them that they are not alone and that you want to help.
- ▶ Avoid questions that require your friend to defend their choices. These are generally questions that begin with 'why'. Focus instead on questions that ask 'how.' For example, “How did that make you feel?” is preferable to “Why did you do that?”
- ▶ Don't make choices for them. Sexual or relationship violence is the ultimate violation in having control taken away from an individual. The goal is for your friend to take autonomy back. Sometimes in our desire to help a friend, we want to offer them solutions. However, this may not give them the control they need. Remember, our goal is to empower them to find their own solutions and know what resources are available to them on campus.

## Aftermath of Disclosure

When you are helping a friend or acquaintance in the aftermath of a disclosure, remember there is no one 'right' way to react. They may be hurt physically and emotionally and they may be confused about what to do next or where to begin. You can talk to a **SADOC** or member of the Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support team to get some direction about possible next steps for your friend. Most importantly, you should listen to what your friend wants and support them – whatever that is. You do not have to (nor can you) solve this problem for them. You can support and empower them to seek their own solutions. The physical and emotional effects of sexual violence may be difficult, but can be manageable. You are to be commended for making the effort and taking the time to learn more about the issue and available resources for your friend.

## University Resources

Both you and your friend can utilize the **Student Information Sheet** for additional information regarding Title IX, The University Policy, Disciplinary Processes, Confidential Resources, Protective Measures and Accommodations, and Responsible Employees.

### Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support

**Shea Wolfe**, the Deputy Title IX Coordinator for Students and Director of the Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support, is available to speak with students about any reported incidents of sexual misconduct, and will advise all members of the community on confidentiality, options regarding receiving support services and/or accommodations, and the University's disciplinary processes. Reporting an incident to a Title IX Coordinator is private. The person who experienced sexual misconduct does not lose control of the process. Note that in rare circumstances, the University may be obligated to proceed with an investigation based on the information received, but your friend would always be informed if/when this would occur and why.

## Get Help for Yourself

As you support your friend, remember you may also be affected by their experience and may be experiencing a range of emotions yourself that may include frustration with the incident and sometimes with your friend, confusion, guilt, and anger. These feelings are rational and justified. It can be just as important for you to seek support and to talk about your own feelings as it is for you to support your friend.

**Student Counseling Services** serves as an ongoing resource to all students.

## Get Involved

There are many ways to get involved in addressing sexual violence on campus. You can be an engaged bystander, a concerned friend, a person who is passionate about educating others on the issue, or a student who is active in campus organizations. All of these are ways to positively impact the campus environment and create the kind of community in which you want to live and learn. Some ways to get involved include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ RSVP Programming Center **Workshops and Presentations**
- ▶ Bystander Intervention **Workshops**
- ▶ **Connect** with RSOs with vested interest in Sexual Misconduct
- ▶ Attend Workshops or become involved with Health Promotion and Wellness' **Peer Health Advisors & Wellczars**
- ▶ Join the Student Advisory Board on Sexual Misconduct

**The Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support can help support, clarify, and connect with students who have disclosed any form of sexual misconduct. As you support your friend and care for yourself during this time, our office's staff and resources can assist you as you need.**

