Disclosures: What to consider

Key messages

You’re glad they felt able to talk to you, and you accept what they are saying and want to help.

There is help and support for them. It may feel overwhelming, but they’re not alone and you and others are available to help them, step-by-step.

It’s important that they have as much choice and control about what happens next as possible, and who else, if anyone, you may need to share information with. There may be some circumstances in which you might have to tell someone or take action (refer to safeguarding policy) but you will make every effort to let them know beforehand.

Abuse and violence is caused by the perpetrator – the perpetrator is responsible, not them. (This can be very hard for survivors to accept, as they may feel if they had acted differently it wouldn’t have happened. However, you can hold their feelings whilst letting them know that you believe it wasn’t their fault.)

However they feel at that moment is OK – people respond very differently and this can change over time.

They deserve to be safe, and you want to help them to take care of themselves

Do:

- Use the same language that they use to refer to the violence or abuse.
- If they are unsure whether what happened to them constituted a crime, it’s OK to sensitively explain that any sexual contact which they didn’t consent to is sexual violence and is a crime.
- Provide a response that is respectful, focused and un-interrupted.
- Give priority to their immediate safety.
- Have relevant information available for them and in a format that is safe for a person at risk to take.

Don’t:

- Ask for details or explanations, except to clarify your understanding of what they’ve said, or to identify any safety issues.
- Try to offer any explanation or justification for the actions of the person who perpetrated the abuse.
- Comment on the likelihood of the outcome of a report to the university or the police.
- Judge or make assumptions.