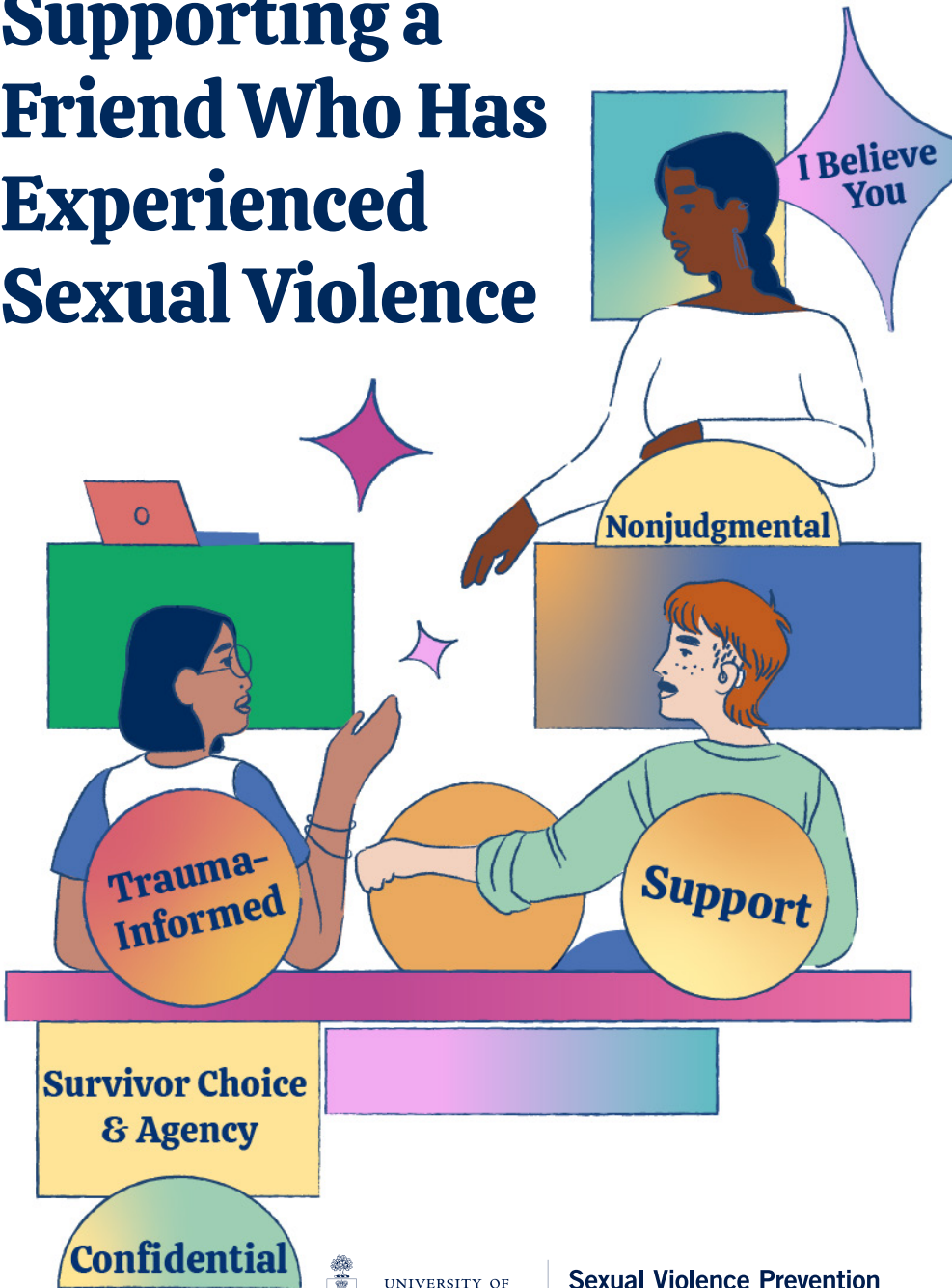


Students:

Supporting a Friend Who Has Experienced Sexual Violence



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Sexual Violence Prevention
and Support Centre

Disclosures of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

Survivors often choose to disclose to someone who seems able to provide a caring response. For your friends, that could be you—and there are resources available at U of T so that you feel supported in your response.

A disclosure is when a survivor of sexual violence shares their experience. They may be looking for support, connections to resources, or just to share openly and honestly as a part of their healing process.

It's important to respond to disclosures of sexual violence by listening to the survivor and validating their experience. When we respond with compassion, survivors are more likely to be able to heal and seek-out the supports they need. Ultimately, we want to restore choice to the survivor in our response.

It may be a good idea to check-in with your friend if you notice that:

They're saying things like:

- ✦ I don't feel comfortable there/with that person
- ✦ I don't want to make a big deal about it, but...
- ✦ I just don't feel like myself lately

They seem to be:

- ✦ Constantly cancelling plans, and keeping to themselves
- ✦ Anxious, unsure, or exhausted
- ✦ Hanging around until they're alone with you
- ✦ Experiencing a sudden change in behaviour

Remember — when you receive a disclosure you are never alone, and staff at the Sexual Violence Prevention & Support Centre can support you around what to do next.



Tools for Responding to Disclosures in a Trauma-Informed Way

A trauma-informed approach to disclosures of sexual violence recognizes that survivors are the experts of their own lives, and puts the emphasis on creating an environment where they can feel empowered, have agency, and are aware of their options.

A Supportive Response

There's no one way to respond supportively to a disclosure of sexual violence, but here's an example of what your response could sound like:

Thank you for sharing this with me. You are not alone. I know the university has specialized supports and a dedicated, confidential office that could assist you. Can I share more information about the Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre?

Remember to listen without judgement, and without interrupting to ask questions. Be sure to keep your own reactions in-check — appearing angry or shocked could negatively impact the survivor.

Examples of supportive phrases:

- ◆ I believe you
- ◆ I want to support you the best way I can
- ◆ This is not your fault
- ◆ Help is available
- ◆ You are not alone

The C.A.L.M. Model

C – Create a Safe Environment

- ◆ Consider if there are any safety concerns that need to be addressed in the moment.
- ◆ Ensure privacy.
- ◆ Demonstrate that you believe the person with your words and actions.
- ◆ Avoid touching the person without their consent.
- ◆ Familiarize yourself with any limits to confidentiality and communicate those.

A – Ask

- ◆ Ask “How can I best support you?” Don't assume.
- ◆ Allow them to share at their own pace. Avoid intrusive or detailed questions about the person's experience.

L – Listen and Validate

- ◆ Thank the person for disclosing.
- ◆ Validate their feelings.
- ◆ Follow their lead.
- ◆ Ensure that they have choice.
- ◆ Reassure them that they are not alone.

M – Make Connections

- ◆ Tell the person about the University's *Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment* and the Sexual Violence Prevention & Support Centre (SVPS Centre).
- ◆ Explain that support services are available.
- ◆ If they are comfortable, help facilitate a connection to the SVPS Centre with their consent.

Self-Care:

A disclosure can bring up your own difficult experiences, and it can be hard to know what to do to help. Notice your feelings and take steps to care for yourself, including accessing support. When possible, take regular breaks to practice self-care and relaxation techniques – try going for a walk, making a cup of tea, or doing some breathing exercises.

**It's OK to Ask
for Help**

If you've received a disclosure, you can and are encouraged to contact the SVPS Centre for confidential support.

The SVPS Centre Provides:

- ◆ Emotional support and connection to counselling
- ◆ Coordination of academic, workplace, and financial accommodations
- ◆ Support and assistance connecting with resources (i.e., medical, legal, housing services)
- ◆ Assistance with navigating institutional, judicial, and medical systems
- ◆ Personal safety planning related to sexual violence
- ◆ Information about reporting options and assistance making a report
- ◆ Educational initiatives, workshops and training, awareness campaigns, and programming for survivors
- ◆ Consultation and support for members of the University who receive a disclosure

On-and Off-Campus Resources: svpscentre.utoronto.ca/resources/



Contact us at: svpscentre@utoronto.ca | (416) 978-2266

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