

What to do when someone tells you they have experienced violence or abuse



If someone has taken the difficult step of telling you their experience of violence or abuse, it is important you respond in a supportive and appropriate way.

To 'disclose' an experience of violence is to tell another person about this experience.

This factsheet is to help you best support people who have disclosed their experience of violence or abuse to you.

An easy way to remember what to do is to think of the 3 Rs: recognise, respond, refer.

Important first steps to take when someone discloses an experience of violence or abuse:

- Believe the person
- Make sure they understand it's not their fault
- Listen without judging the person
- Be supportive, encouraging, open and honest
- Ask if they need help from a support service and discuss their options
- Help them get advice and support by calling 1800 RESPECT or visiting their website
- Offer to go with the person if they meet with a support service
- Keep in touch with the person to see how they are going



There are many State, Territory and national services that you can refer people to when they need help. You can find details of support services on the White Ribbon website. Some national support service phone numbers and web addresses are listed at the end of this factsheet.

NOTE: You may be required by law to report disclosures of violence when children are involved. Check with your State/Territory Police for more information on your obligations.





Things to remember

If someone discloses violence to you, they are showing enormous trust in you. It is important to show respect and maintain this trust.

If you are worried about someone's safety, you must consider helping them take action. However, sometimes just listening to someone and acknowledging their experience is enough.

It is important that someone making a disclosure is not forced into taking action. It is also important to think about the 'one chance rule': don't dismiss the opportunity for a person to share their story as they may not share it again. When talking about their options, safety must be the main priority and they must feel in control of the situation and what happens next.

Unless you have a qualification, you can't offer counselling. However, there are some important and helpful things you can do:

- Listen to the person
- Show you believe them
- Take the disclosure seriously
- Let them know about local services
- Offer them practical support

It can be difficult hearing about a person's experience of violence. After hearing their story, take time to observe your own feelings and look after yourself.

Remember: a woman may be worried that she is putting herself in greater danger from the man using violence by sharing her experience with you. You must respect her concerns and reassure her that she did the right thing by telling you about the violence. Do not force her into making any decisions and keep all information confidential unless children are involved and you have an obligation to inform Police in your State or Territory.

National Services

For details of State and Territory services, please refer to the White Ribbon website.

National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service – 24/7 service

www.1800respect.org.au
1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)

Lifeline – 24/7 service

www.lifeline.org.au
13 11 14

MensLine – 24/7 service

www.mensline.org.au
1300 78 99 78

Kids Help Line – 24/7 service

www.kidshelp.com.au
1800 551 800

Translating and Interpreting Service

www.tisnational.gov.au
131 450

