

# Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence



# Definitions

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Carleton recognizes that anyone can be harmed by sexual violence and that it is a violation of human rights. Racialized and marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by sexual violence (i.e. trans women, Indigenous women, racialized women, women with disabilities, sex workers, members from the 2SLGBTQ+ community, etc.)

These identities impact how someone experiences sexual violence, their access to support and how others may respond to these disclosures. Regardless of one's identity, all survivors who disclose their experience should be supported and treated with compassion.

## Disclosure

A disclosure is when someone shares information about an incident of sexual violence, to learn about and/or receive support in their experience. A person affected by sexual violence is not required to make a formal complaint in order to obtain support, services or accommodations for their needs.

## Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is any unwanted sexualized act, which can be physical or psychological in nature. Sexual violence is not about passion: it is an abuse of power and includes threats or acts of sexual assault, harassment, indecent exposure or voyeurism.

# Impacts

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There is no single "right" way to respond to an experience of sexual violence. Responses may include:

- shock, disbelief or fear
- flashbacks or memory loss
- isolation or loss of interest in regular activities
- sleeping difficulties, nightmares or easily startled
- anger or self-blame
- inability to concentrate or focus

## Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment means engaging in a pattern of sexualized behaviour that is known, or ought to be known, to be unwanted.

This includes:

- unwanted sexual attention
- a promised (implied or explicit) reward for engaging in sexual behaviour
- a threat (implied or explicit) of reprisal for not engaging in sexual activity

## Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any unwanted touching or physical contact of a sexual nature imposed on one person by another. This includes coerced or physically forced touching or a sexual act.

## Consent

Consent is an active, direct, voluntary, unimpaired and conscious choice to engage in sexual activity.

Consent:

- cannot be given when impaired under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- cannot be assumed or implied
- cannot be given by silence or the absence of "no"
- can be revoked at any point

**Intoxication does not excuse a failure to get consent.**

## Implications for the Classroom

The impacts of sexual violence are likely to affect a student's academic performance including:

- inability to concentrate, affecting completion of assignments or ability to study for exams/tests
- experiencing fear when in group settings or in close proximity to others, deterring attendance
- flashbacks or intrusive thoughts affecting all aspects of a student's life
- absenteeism, decreased quality of school work, skipping or dropping classes, or dropping out entirely

Being willing to accommodate a student's needs and enabling them to complete their academic obligations is crucial to their educational success.

# How to Respond to a Disclosure

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If someone discloses an experience of sexual violence to you, your reaction can impact what they choose to do next.



## Believe

No one ever deserves to be sexually assaulted. It does not matter what the survivor did or did not do before, during or after the assault.

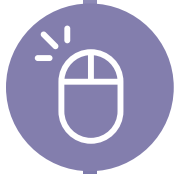
- Tell them that what happened is not their fault.
- Avoid asking “why” questions.
- Validate the feelings they are expressing (i.e., “It is normal to feel this way”).



## Listen

It takes tremendous courage to speak out. Give the survivor space to talk and try not to interrupt.

- Reassure them that the information will remain confidential.
- Silence is okay. People need time to process an overwhelming situation.
- Actively listen through body language (i.e., nodding, maintaining eye contact, etc.) and through your words (i.e., “It took a lot of courage for you to tell me this”).

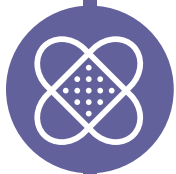


## Explore Options

Let the survivor know that supports are available to them, if they want them. If it is an emergency, refer them to Campus Safety Services. If it is not an emergency, refer them to Equity and Inclusive Communities.

- Give them back as much control as possible to make decisions regarding what to do next. Survivors are the experts in their own lives.
- Remember, the student may or may not access the supports that you have suggested.

**Remind them that your door is always open if they need additional support.**



## Self-Care For You

If you have received a disclosure, practice self-care by seeking support if you need it.

Equity and Inclusive Communities can assist in referring you to supports and to debrief if needed. Do not share the story with your colleagues, friends or family members. Confidentiality is important for the safety and well-being of the survivor.

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For more information and to view Carleton’s Sexual Violence Policy please visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-policy](https://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-policy)

# Resources

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## Disclosure in an emergency

In an emergency (i.e., imminent threat of sexual violence or sexual violence actually occurring, and/or of harm to a person) a report can be made in the following ways:

**On-campus: 613-520-4444**  
(4444 from any on-campus phone)

**Off-campus: 911**  
(Notify Campus Safety Services)

**In person: Campus Safety Services**  
203 Robertson Hall

When a person discloses an incident of sexual violence to **Campus Safety Services**, they will inform the survivor of the supports available through **Equity and Inclusive Communities**.

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## Disclosure in a non-emergency

If the individual is comfortable with you doing so, contact Equity and Inclusive Communities regardless of whether the sexual violence has occurred on or off campus.

Equity and Inclusive Communities will provide information about available supports and services, including information about interim measures that may be available to address immediate needs.

Equity and Inclusive Communities is the point of contact for a person affected by sexual violence to request academic, employment or other accommodations.

## On-Campus Support Services

**Sexual Assault Support Centre**  
613-520-5622  
[carleton.ca/equity](http://carleton.ca/equity)

**Counselling Services**  
613-520-6674 (press 2)  
[wellness.carleton.ca/counselling](http://wellness.carleton.ca/counselling)

**Campus Safety Services**  
General inquiries: 613-520-3612  
Emergencies: 613-520-4444  
[carleton.ca/safety](http://carleton.ca/safety)

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## Off-Campus Support Services

**Ottawa Police Service**  
General inquiries: 613-236-1222  
[ottawapolice.ca](http://ottawapolice.ca)

**Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre**  
24 hour crisis line: 613-562-2333  
General inquiries: 613-562-2334  
[orcc.net](http://orcc.net)

**Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa**  
24 hour crisis line: 613-234-2266  
General inquiries: 613-725-2160

**Sexual Assault and Partner Abuse Care Program at the Civic Campus of the Ottawa Hospital**  
613-798-5555 ext. 13770

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## Additional information

For additional information about supporting students and for a comprehensive list of all resources, please visit our website: [carleton.ca/equity](http://carleton.ca/equity)

## Equity and Inclusive Communities

3800 Carleton Technology & Training Centre

[carleton.ca/equity](http://carleton.ca/equity)  
[equity@carleton.ca](mailto:equity@carleton.ca)  
613-520-5622

**Office Hours:** Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.