



Tips for Responding to a Disclosure

Conversations around sexual harassment and misconduct are sensitive in nature and require care and compassion. If a student approaches you to talk about something difficult that happened, it shows that the student is comfortable with you and trusts you. It is important you let the student know you are ready to listen and assist, but that he/she understands your reporting obligations. This is a tricky balance – you want to communicate that you are not a confidential resource while still inviting the student to share and feel safe!

An example of how to say this is....

“I’m here to help and I’m ready to listen. I know that it takes courage for you to share this with me and before you go forward, I need you to know there are certain things I have to share. If I need to share information, I will do that in a way that maintains your privacy. I can help you find a confidential person to talk with if you would prefer. I hope you will talk to someone – whether it’s me or a confidential resource.” (The way you deliver this message is just as important as the words you say. Be sincere. Have an earnest face and a posture that conveys openness.)

When a student shares information with you, your verbal and nonverbal response is very important.

Some **helpful** things to do and say are.....

- Listen without interrupting.
- Remain calm and concerned. Maintain eye contact.
- Do not worry about having to say just the right thing – just being there can help!
- Respect the language the student uses to identify what’s happened.
- Remember that this is a time to allow the student to vent whatever emotions, thoughts or beliefs they have connected to their experience.
- Allow for tears and expression of feelings.
- Allow silence as silence means that the student is thinking and/or processing. This may also be an opportunity for you to think about how you can help and be there for the student.
- Believe and support the student. (Reflect what you are hearing: “That must have been tough/frightening/scary for you.”)
- Help the student identify one to two trusted support people. (“Even if you don’t know what you want to do right now, it can be helpful to talk to someone about your options.”)
- Ask what you can do to be supportive. (“Would you like for me to go with you to talk with someone?”)
- Ask if they want to get medical attention – no matter how long ago the assault occurred.
- Have an appropriate behavioral response (Hugging or touching may be inappropriate. You can always ask “may I give you a hug?”). If this feels awkward to do, then it will be awkward.
- Ask yourself, “Am I doing everything in my power to create an intentionally safe environment for this student with my verbal and non-verbal language?”

Some things that are **not helpful** to do or say are....

- Asking “why” questions or questions that may imply blame and put the student on the defensive (“What were you doing there?”).
- Asking questions to satisfy your own curiosity never assist the process.
- Blaming or judging the student’s actions (“You shouldn’t have had so much to drink”).
- Dismissing the student’s feelings or minimizing his/her experience (“It could have been worse”).
- Trying to “fix” the problem (Telling the student what to do, such as “you need to talk to a counselor”).
- Saying, “It will be OK.” This is only allowed if you are indeed a certified psychic and can predict the future 100% of the time. You don’t know it will be “OK”, but you can be there with them in the present moment where it is safe.

If a student discloses information that you need to report, let him/her know you have to share the information with the Title IX Coordinator. You can assure the student that every effort will be made to respect his/her privacy and that the information may not go any further than the Title IX Coordinator. Let the student know what will happen next.

An example of how to say this is....

“I need to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator. They will do everything possible to maintain your privacy. The Title IX Coordinator or the Office for Equal Opportunity will contact you to discuss options. They will also explain what it would look like if you choose to file a complaint with the University, file a criminal complaint, or not file a complaint. In addition, they will provide information on support services and ways the University can help.”

After the conversation, you need to share the following information with the Office for Equal Opportunity:

- Name of the student.
- Information about the incident (date and nature of the incident).
- Helpful information (for example, “the student wanted to talk with a counselor, so we called CAPS from my office”).

You can share this information with the Office for Equal Opportunity in three different ways:

1. Over the phone (916-278-5770).
2. By scheduling a meeting (you can call to schedule a meeting at 916-278-5770).
3. Send an email to equalopportunity@csus.edu. The Title IX Coordinator or their representative will call you to discuss the information in the email.

It is important that this information is shared in a prompt fashion. Please call, schedule a meeting, or e-mail immediately after talking to the student.

Title IX Coordinator Contact Information:

Office for Equal Opportunity
Sacramento State
Del Norte Hall 2005
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819-6139
916-278-5770
equalopportunity@csus.edu
csus.edu/oeo