

HELPING SOMEONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

The following guidelines were developed to educate members of the University of Manitoba community on how to provide a compassionate, supportive, and consistent response to those disclosing an experience of sexual violence. We recognize that people may feel unsure of how to respond when finding out about an experience of sexual violence, and as a result, may unintentionally not be as helpful or supportive as the person disclosing needs. An example of this would be making decision(s) for the person rather than supporting them in making their own decision(s), such as contacting police before understanding the situation and what the person's wishes are. The University of Manitoba strives to be a safe place for people to disclose an experience of sexual violence and receive the best care and referral possible.

Sexual violence is a prevalent and traumatic issue that is highly stigmatizing and can be life altering. People struggle to come forward for a variety of reasons such as shame, fears of not being believed, and fears of being re-victimized. Because of this, it is crucial that all people disclosing be treated in a sensitive and respectful way. How a person responds when being told about an experience of sexual violence can have a dramatically positive or negative impact on the person disclosing.

These guidelines contain the following key actions and components for responding in a compassionate, supportive, and consistent way:

1. Respect & Confidentiality
2. Listen & Believe
3. Ask Them What They Need
4. Connect to Supports
5. Check In

Please refer to "**Resources for Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Assault**" for additional information or visit: umanitoba.ca/sexual-violence/

1: RESPECT & CONFIDENTIALITY

Remember to respect the person's confidentiality and right to privacy, and provide them with a safe and comfortable space. Inform them about limits to confidentiality prior to them disclosing to you.

PROVIDE A SAFE AND COMFORTABLE SPACE

Providing a safe and comfortable space ensures privacy, a sense of safety, and conveys to the person that they matter. This is an important first step in restoring a sense of dignity and to begin the healing process for the person. Consider how you can maximize privacy and safety (e.g. do not touch the person without their permission, choose a room where other people can't overhear the conversation, limit distractions, etc.). Ask questions and say things such as:

- "Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?"
- "Where would you like to sit?"
- "It takes a lot of courage to talk about difficult experiences like this."

MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY

An occurrence of sexual violence is a very intimate and personal experience that impacts the entirety of a person. The trauma that someone might experience can include feelings of humiliation, degradation, embarrassment, shame, self-blame, fear, and feeling out of control. Given this and the stigmatization that sexual violence carries, it is critical to be very clear about what you're going to do with the information that is shared, as the person will be very concerned about what you will do with it.

You should assure the person that you will not disclose any information that they do not wish to be disclosed, except under specific circumstances. For example, in situations where there are safety concerns, appropriate steps would need to occur to reduce the risks of harm to self or others. This could include contacting counsellors, medical staff, or security personnel. In cases where the perpetrator is also a member of the University community, certain University administrators may need to be contacted in line with applicable University policies. It is important to emphasize that any such steps would involve disclosure of only the

HELPING SOMEONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

minimum amount of information necessary to address the risk, and would only be disclosed to people on a 'need-to-know' basis. Wherever possible, this information is shared without disclosing any identifying information about the person who has experienced sexual violence. In addition, any personal information acquired or released would be bound by both provincial privacy legislation and applicable University policies related to confidentiality.

Remember, if you are unsure about whether or not you need to inform someone about the disclosure you received, you can always consult with the **Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management** without breaking confidentiality.

2: LISTEN & BELIEVE

Practise active listening and be mindful of your tone and body language. Let them control the pace of the conversation and be sure to acknowledge, validate, and believe the person disclosing and their experience.

VALIDATE & ACKNOWLEDGE THE PERSON'S EXPERIENCE

Often when someone experiences sexual violence they fear they will not be believed, or that their experience will not be seen as important. It is imperative to believe the person regardless of how they are behaving or what they are describing. Use phrases such as:

- "I believe you."
- "I'm really glad you told me."
- "I'm sorry this happened to you."

BE NON-JUDGEMENTAL

People experiencing sexual violence usually blame themselves for what happened. No matter what the person did or didn't do, they are not responsible for what happened to them.

- Do not suggest in any way that it was the person's fault;
- Avoid "why" questions (e.g. "Why didn't you scream?"; "Why did you drink so much?");
- Avoid words such as "should", "must", "ought", "never", "always". Use of these words assumes there is one right way to feel about, deal with, respond to, and/or experience sexual violence.

- Avoid advice giving (e.g. "you should report to police because you have a duty to protect society and other people:").

BE EMPATHETIC

People who have experienced sexual violence often experience feelings such as anxiety, guilt, and vulnerability, which can leave them sensitive to feeling judged and/or misunderstood. Because of this, it is important to never make assumptions. The best way to seek to understand what has happened and the impact of the experience on the person is to listen effectively using empathy as they share their experience. Empathy is listening without judgment to try to understand another person's point of view, thoughts, and feelings.

- Without judgment, imagine yourself in the other person's situation.
- Clarify feelings (e.g. "What I'm hearing is that you feel _____, is that right?").
- "What you're feeling is normal and okay."

LISTEN EFFECTIVELY

Listening effectively shows support and encouragement and provides an open and safe space for people to talk about their experience.

- Use open body language (e.g. be aware that having crossed arms and legs can convey a lack of openness).
- Use a soft tone of voice and low volume.
- Be patient. Let the person set the pace and do not rush them.
- Focus on WHAT the speaker is saying (content) and HOW they are saying it (feelings).

U of M appreciates the input from members of the previous Sexual Assault Working Group, which has since been replaced by the Sexual Violence Steering Committee, both of which include(d) staff, students, and faculty representatives. U of M also appreciates the expertise provided by Klinik Community Health Centre in the creation of these documents.

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U of M acknowledges the Fredericton Sexual Assault Centre's Empowerment Project, whose materials informed the development of these guidelines. Accessible at fsacc.ca.

HELPING SOMEONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

page 3

3: ASK WHAT THEY NEED

Rather than give advice, empower the person to make their own decisions and help them explore their options.

SUPPORT THE INDIVIDUAL TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS

Sexual violence is about power and control; no one chooses to experience sexual violence. Supporting the individual to regain power and control is a necessary and important step for healing and recovery. Remember, it is the person's experience and their decisions to make. The University of Manitoba recognizes that individuals have the right to make choices for themselves and have these choices respected. This may include but is not limited to:

- Reporting or not reporting to police;
- Informing University of Manitoba Security Services, other departments, or staff;
- Deciding whether or not to seek medical attention;
- Deciding whether or not to seek counselling services (e.g., Klinik, Student Counselling Centre, etc.);
- How much information is shared;

Statements/questions you can use to support the individual to make their own decisions include:

- "What would you like to do?"
- "Where would you like to begin?"
- "How best can I help?"
- "What's your biggest concern right now?"

4: CONNECT TO SUPPORTS

Share a few resources with the person based on what they've expressed they need rather than overload them with information. Offer to help make the connection or go with them to access supports.

RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN LIMITATIONS AND PROVIDE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

While you can provide the initial supportive and compassionate response, no one person has the skills, training and/or knowledge to provide everything the person needs and/or wants. There are services available that have people with in-depth knowledge and training around the issue of sexual violence.

Please refer to "Resources for Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Assault" to assist a person in making informed decisions and to learn about available resources.

Due to the complexity of sexual violence and the time sensitivity around some of the medical and legal decisions the person may face, here are some things to be aware of:

LEGAL

- In cases where an individual may want to proceed with initiating a police investigation, forensic evidence can be collected. In Winnipeg, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program can do this up to 120 hours after a sexual assault (and only if the sexual assault occurred within Winnipeg). Outside of Winnipeg, evidence collection is available through the RCMP and is possible for up to 120 hours after the sexual assault.

MEDICAL

- Emergency Contraception for pregnancy prevention can be taken up to 120 hours after a sexual assault.
- Prophylaxis can be provided for the following sexually transmitted infections: Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, HIV and Hepatitis B. Please note that the time frame that certain medications can be given varies (72 hours up to 2 weeks), so it is best to seek treatment as soon as possible for maximum effectiveness.

SAFETY

- In emergency circumstances, you may need to contact Campus Security and/or 911 if someone requires immediate medical attention and/or physical safety is compromised and/or threatened. For example:
 - You come across someone who is unconscious;
 - You are informed that someone is sexually exposing themselves in the tunnels on campus;
 - You learn that someone living in residence has threatened to sexually assault someone.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA POLICIES

Any person who believes that any member of the University, including themselves, has been subjected to sexual violence in the course of University-related employment, study, training, or activities may discuss concerns and/or make a complaint under the Respectful

HELPING SOMEONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

page 4

Work and Learning Environment and Sexual Assault Procedure. For more detailed information on making a complaint, including a link to the policies, please visit: umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/community/230.html

The University of Manitoba is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, positive, and productive working and learning environment and will not tolerate threats, intimidation, or violence. Individuals who are found to have engaged in such activities will be subject to disciplinary action, which may result in termination of employment, expulsion from educational programs, and a ban from University property, under the University's Violent or Threatening Behaviour Policy and Procedure: umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/community/669.html

Note: "Resources for Responding to a Disclosure of Sexual Assault" includes specialized sexual assault services that provide more in-depth information on the above points.

5: CHECK IN

If appropriate, you can check in with the person after the initial disclosure. Additionally, take the time necessary to care for yourself by accessing supports and practising self-care.

CARE FOR YOURSELF

Being an individual who responds to a disclosure can be a stressful event and can have a deep impact on the listener. It is important to care for oneself after a disclosure and seek support or speak to someone, such as a counsellor, about your feelings if needed.

- Connect with counselling and wellness resources for staff (Employee & Family Assistance Program can be found at workhealthlife.com, or 1-800-387-4765) and students (Student Counselling Centre can be found at umanitoba.ca/counselling). You can also connect with your union for support if you are a unionized employee or student;
- Meet with an Elder;
- Debrief with a supervisor, family member, friend, or another support person in your life;

- Connect with supports off campus, such as a counsellor or other support person (information on supports can be found at umanitoba.ca/sexual-violence)
- Take time for self-care.

Remember that you are always able to debrief the situation without compromising confidentiality by omitting any identifying details.

RESOURCES FOR RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

This guide can be used to assist a person disclosing a sexual assault in making informed decisions and to learn about primary resources.

Please note: in rare circumstances, you may need to contact **campus security (555) and/or 911 if someone requires immediate medical attention** (e.g., unconscious, bleeding) **and/or their physical safety is compromised and/or threatened** (e.g., you are informed that someone is currently sexually exposing themselves in the tunnels on campus).

The University of Manitoba encourages all individuals who have been sexually assaulted to consider accessing the services of the **Sexual Assault Crisis Program [SACP]** at Klinik and/or the **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program [SANE]**.

By reaching out to SACP and/or SANE, an individual will receive help from people who have extensive experience and skill in assisting individuals who have been sexually assaulted. Connecting with SACP and/or SANE can help empower the individual in their decision making process and may minimize further trauma by limiting the number of places, times, and people an individual may have to disclose to in order to receive the help they need.

If the person is interested in comprehensive and/or specialized services, where **medical, legal, and counselling information** can be addressed in one place, consider the following **two options**:

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS PROGRAM [SACP], KLINIC

- **SACP is a 24/7 provincial service.**
- SACP provides medical/legal advocacy, counselling and information to victims of sexual assault and those who care about them.
- SACP can be directly accessed; no medical or police involvement is necessary.
- Work closely with other Sexual Assault Response Team members to ensure the client receives the best possible support in the critical time following a sexual assault.
- 1-888-292-7565 or klinik.mb.ca

SEXUAL ASSAULT NURSE EXAMINER [SANE], HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE

- **SANE is a 24/7 Winnipeg service available up to 240 hours after an assault for those 17 years of age and older and up to 72 hours after an assault for those under the age of 17 who have been sexually assaulted within Winnipeg.**
- SANE provides options and choices about medical care (including medications to prevent infection and pregnancy), evidence collection and/or police reporting provided by female Registered Nurses. Assists with connecting an individual with counseling services.
- Attend Health Sciences Centre Emergency Department, call 204-932-6900 or visit hsc.mb.ca/emergencynurseexam.html

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The **Winnipeg Police Service [WPS]** and **Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP]** can either be accessed directly or through the support of **SACP**, and/or **SANE** comprehensive services (see above). If an individual is interested in speaking directly with law enforcement it is important to understand the following:

- The primary roles of police in responding to reports of sexual offences are to ensure the safety of the client and to conduct an investigation.
- When a sexual assault report is made to law enforcement, the police will try to interview the client as soon as possible.
- **Please note that police are required to lay a charge (whether or not a victim wishes to proceed with the matter) when there are reasonable grounds to believe an assault has occurred in a domestic situation, past or present.**
- WPS Non-Emergency, 204-986-6222; RCMP, call local detachment office.

If the person is **NOT** interested in above services, but wanting support for a **SPECIFIC** need, see options below.

MEDICAL HELP

For pregnancy prevention, STI / HIV testing or treatment, or other medical care suggest:

- University Health Service (U of M) (204-474-8411)
- The individual's family physician
- Any Walk-in Clinic or STI clinic
- Any hospital emergency room (if within 5 days will have the option of being transported to SANE program at HSC for care).

REPORTING HELP

For reporting help suggest:

- University of Manitoba Security Services (Emergency – 555; Non-Emergency – 204-474-9341)
- Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management (204-474-6348)
- WPS Victim Services (204-986-6350)

COUNSELLING HELP

For emotional support and healing suggest:

- Student Counselling Centre - University of Manitoba students only (204-474-8592 or drop-in)
- Employee and Family Assistance Program - University of Manitoba staff only (1-800-387-4765)

SAFETY AND SUPPORT PLANNING HELP

For coordinated safety planning on and off campus and/or academic planning if studies have/will be affected:

- Student Support Case Manager (204-474-8196)

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Support the individual's decision including if they decide to not use any of the above services at this time.
- Remember to get support for yourself.



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