

BELIEVE: *Avoid denial and blame*

It takes a great amount of bravery for a survivor to disclose. Survivors experience a range of emotions including shame, worry about not being believed or being blamed, and even fear of being seen as a damaged person. Be careful not to assume that a survivor's calm demeanor means that the disclosed event did not happen—trauma shows up differently for every survivor.

- Speak slowly and calmly. The survivor may interpret your reaction as being shocked/horrified and may shut down.
- Recognize that you were chosen by the survivor because they see you as a trusted person. "It took a lot of courage to tell me about this."
- Reassure the survivor that they did nothing wrong. You may need to do this more than once. "This is not your fault. You didn't do anything to deserve this."

EMPATHIZE: *Listen without assumptions*

Even though the survivor may disclose terrible things, they may still feel loyalty or respect for the person who harmed them and may only be at the beginning stage of recognizing that what happened to them was wrong.

- Tell them you are willing to listen if they are comfortable sharing.
- Do not judge or question. Leave the questioning and investigating to the experts.
- Acknowledge that this experience has impacted their life. "This must be really tough for you."

SUPPORT: *Provide reassurance*

Survivors are often worried or fearful about the repercussions of disclosing. When supporting someone through disclosure, listen more than talk and avoid advice-giving or problem-solving.

- Let the survivor know you are there for them without making promises. "I'm so glad you felt brave enough to share this with me."
- Assess if there are other people in their life that they would trust going to.
- Remind them that there are helpers and service providers who will be able to support them as they heal.

