

An Act of Courage:

Supporting Survivors of Sexualized Violence Workshop

Our Responses Matter

Victims / survivors who receive a positive social response:

- Tend to recover more quickly and fully
- Are more likely to work with authorities
- Are more likely to report violence in the future

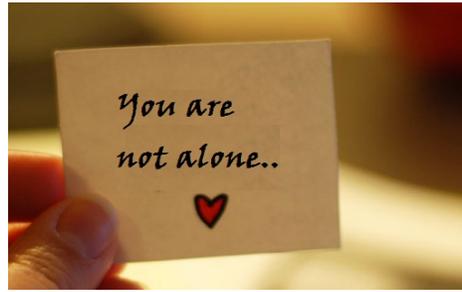
On the other hand, victims/survivors who receive a negative social response:

- Are less likely to cooperate with authorities
 - Are less likely to disclose violence again
- Are more likely to receive a diagnosis of mental illness

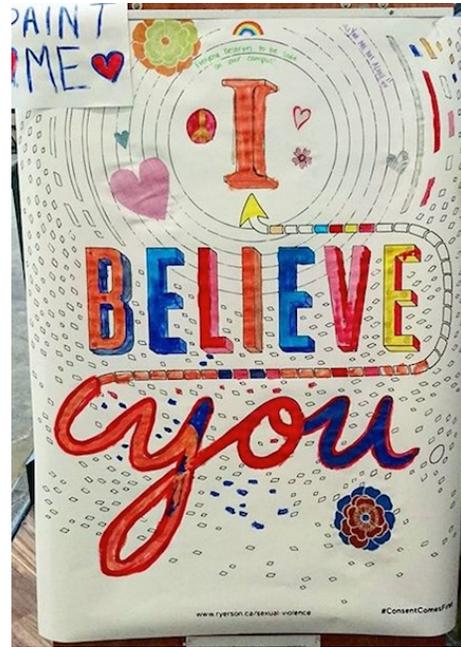
**Given this information,
what can we do to improve our social responses?**

Listen ♥ Believe ♥ Empower

Listen



- Find a private place to talk.
- Be patient and let them tell you as little or as much as they want, at their own pace, without interrupting. Talking about how they feel can be as helpful or more helpful than talking about the details. Take their lead on this.
- Show them that you are actively listening through your body language (e.g., nodding, facing in their direction, sitting down at eye level) and words (e.g., "I hear what you're saying")
- Be aware that some people may find themselves flooded with emotions. If they are getting increasingly upset while telling you about what happened, they may be reliving the experience. There are several ways you can help to ground them if they are overwhelmed: Encourage them to take slow deep breaths while gently planting their feet into the floor and holding on to their knees. Ask them to keep their eyes open, even if just momentarily. This helps to bring them back to the present. Alternatively or in addition, you may offer to walk them through the following exercise:
 - Name 5 things you can see around you right now (this could be a chair, a pencil, a clock on the wall)
 - Name 4 things in the room you can touch, and describe the sensation (hard, soft, smooth)
 - Name 3 things that you can hear right now.
 - Name 2 things you can smell. It may be helpful to provide a prompt, like hand lotion or their sweater.
 - Name 1 thing you can taste. These simple exercises can be repeated until the victim/survivor identifies that they are ready to move on with the conversation.
- Respect their personal space, and do not touch them. Even if you think they want a comforting touch, resist your urge to do so. Always follow their lead. Sometimes our bodies respond to traumatic events by getting colder, shivering or shaking, so you may offer them something to keep them warm, like a blanket or your jacket.
- Encourage the victim/survivor to pay attention to their body as they are telling their story, and to stop or take breaks whenever they need to.



- Validate their feelings and assure them that these are normal responses to a very traumatic event, and avoid making promises that you cannot keep. This might include your assumptions about how the legal system, law enforcement or University will respond to the event.
- Assure them that it was not their fault (many survivors struggle with blaming themselves) and that the responsibility for sexual assault lies solely with the perpetrator. This is true regardless of whether they were drinking, got into the perpetrator's car, brought the perpetrator to their home, or what they were wearing. It does not matter what the victim/survivor did or did not do before, during, or after the assault – it is never their fault.
- Reassure them they are not alone, that there are supports on and off campus that you can help them get connected to.

Empower



- Sexual Assault can result in a profound sense of loss of power and control. You can help them regain control over their life by trusting them to make their own choices about what to do next. You do not need to do everything for them; it is your role to inform them about the supports available, and to offer support to getting connected to those services.
- Talk to them about their safety. There are resources on and off campus who can help with safety planning and emergency housing, including the Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre, the Y Women's Emergency Shelter and TRU's Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Manager.
- Find out if they need medical assistance. Encourage them to seek medical care at the hospital, or with their family doctor or a nurse practitioner. If they access medical attention at Royal Inland Hospital, they can request that the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) attend. SART is a team of volunteers trained by the Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Center to provide support to victims of sexualized violence.
- Let them know that SVPRM can provide supports even if they don't want to report their experience. The SVPRM can provide emotional support, support with safety planning, referrals to supports on and off campus, support through reporting processes, as well as support with academic accommodations.
- Offer them options and resources, rather than telling them what to do or giving them advice. A comprehensive list of supports available on and off campus can be found at tru.ca/sexual-violence.
- Keep your initial information simple and straightforward. Reassure them that, even if they feel overwhelmed by decisions, they can take their time. Feeling overwhelmed is a normal response to a traumatic event.
- Respect their decision about which (if any) of the options they choose.