

Supporting a Survivor

Our impact on whether a survivor feels supported or not actually begins long before the survivor discloses, and often long before we even know that the person is a survivor. Survivors consider an individuals' words and actions, but they also observe how they treat and react to others. Something like an off-hand comment or absence of reaction in the face of victim-blaming has the potential to communicate not only that the we aren't a safe person to disclose to, but also that our community may not be a safe, survivor-supportive place. We lose the chance to be a supportive person before we've even begun.



Private vs. Confidential Resources

I need to talk.
Who's here to listen?

The Title IX Office is here to assist with any situation involving gender-based discrimination, including *sexual harassment and assault, rape, intimate partner violence, and stalking*. Visit titleix.mit.edu for more information.

Remember: at any point, you can disclose as much or as little as you want.

CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCES*	DIRECT REPORTING OPTIONS
VPR 617-253-2300 (24 hours) Clergy Ombuds Mental Health and Counseling <small>*These resources will not report any information to the Title IX Office.</small>	Title IX Office MIT Police

What if I talk to...?

PRIVATE RESOURCES

Office of the Dean for Student Life Residential Life Staff Academic Advisors Faculty Coaches S3	Office of the Dean for Graduate Education (ODGE) Dean for Undergraduate Education (DUE)
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They will keep your disclosure as confidential as possible, but are required to report to the Title IX Office for follow up.

What happens next?

- 1 The Title IX Office will reach out to you to provide formal and informal reporting options.
- 2 The Title IX Office will use the information disclosed to assess community safety and to help inform MIT's prevention and education strategies.

I am a "responsible employee."	
What do I need to do?	Contact the Title IX office and share what you've learned.
What do I tell the student?	You can say something like, "I'm here to support you and I want you to know that I'm called a responsible employee, which means that I have to let the Title IX office know what you shared with me. Is it okay if I explain to you what that means?"
What happens to the student once I share information with the Title IX office?	The Title IX Office will email the student to provide information about reporting options and share campus support resources. The student does not have to respond to the email. If they don't, the office will send a follow-up email a week later repeating support options.
Then what?	In most cases it's up to the student. If they don't want to meet with Title IX they won't be contacted further. They are always welcome to reach back out at any time.

Supporting a Survivor

It can feel difficult to know how to respond if someone tells us they're experiencing relationship violence, stalking, sexual harassment or sexual violence. It might seem overwhelming, or you might feel like you have to respond in the "right" way. The purpose of this handout is to offer general tips on being supportive, as well as specific examples of things you can say.



General Tips:

- There is no "normal" way to react to trauma. Any reaction is normal. Let them know that however they may be feeling is okay.
- Some people may tell you about something that happened that day, the day before, weeks ago, or years ago. Regardless of when it took place, you should communicate that you recognize the seriousness of the event and the impact it has had.
- When supporting a survivor, it's important for us to take a moment and ask if our response is based on our own feelings, thoughts, or opinions, or if it truly focuses on the survivor and their needs.

Hurtful & Helpful Responses

We all want to be supportive. We want people to know that they can turn to us and that when they do, we'll be ready to help. Our intentions are good. But sometimes, we unintentionally miss the mark. For example, we want to show that we understand, but instead make the conversation about us. Or we want to offer resources we're aware of, but instead tell the survivor what to do. The wording can be subtle, but if we're aware of possible ways to respond to survivors of gender-based violence, we'll be more prepared when someone does turn to us. We'll be the supportive person we want to be.

Blame & Doubt

"___ did this to you? Wow, he's always seemed like such a great guy. I'm surprised."

"I believe you & it's not your fault. No one has the right to hurt another person like that."

Believe

Focus on Yourself

"I know exactly how you feel. I was stalked two years ago. But I got through it & you will too."

"Thank you for sharing that with me. I can imagine that would be really scary."

Empathize

Ignore & Distract

"It isn't good to keep thinking about it. I know it's hard, but it's better to focus on good things."

"From what I hear you saying, this whole process has been difficult."

Actively Listen

Minimize

"I'm sorry that happened. I supported a student last year whose partner was really violent."

"It sounds like was really scary. It makes sense that you're still feeling afraid."

Validate

Take Control

"I really think we should call the police. They might do this to someone else if you don't."

"What would you like to do right now? I want to be here for you whatever way is best for you."

Empower

Silence

"It might be best to be careful about who you tell. Not many places here are that supportive."

"I'm not sure if you're interested, but I've met people from VPR & it seems like They could be helpful if you want their information?"

Refer