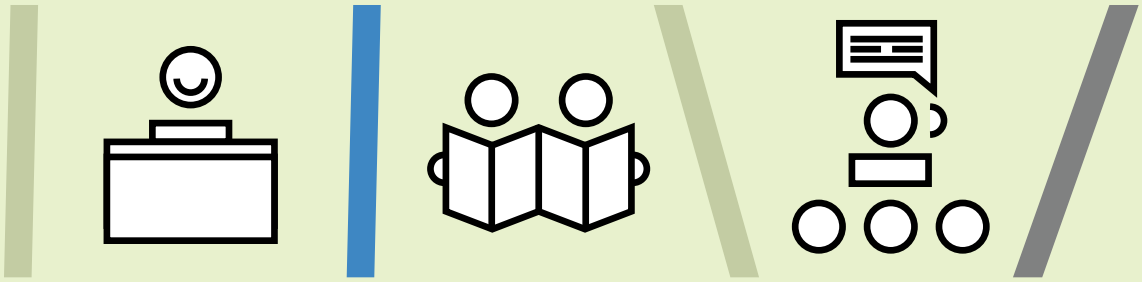
SANS VIOLENCE FREE



Activity sheet

Helpful and harmful reactions to disclosures of sexual violence

SANS VIOLENCE FREE
Resources to fight sexual and gendered violence

An initiative by: YWCA Y DES FEMMES MONTRÉAL

Funded by : Québec

Graphic design by : pilondesign

Helpful and harmful reactions to disclosures of sexual violence

Topics covered

Harmful responses to a disclosure

Helpful responses to a disclosure

Target age

16+

Total time for activity

70 min

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. Learn examples of helpful and harmful responses to disclosures of sexual violence
2. Recognize the power we have to drastically help or hinder the healing process for the person who has confided in us
3. Practice helpful responses through role-play

GENERAL ACTIVITY STRUCTURE

Introduction . . . 3
Quiz . . . 5
Role-playing . . . 6
Closing discussion . . . 7

EQUIPMENT

Based on the facilitator's preferences:

Option 1

Screen-based quiz and presentation

- Computer
- Screen
- Projector

Option2

Paper-based quiz and scenarios

- Paper handouts
- Pen or pencil

Option 3

Paper-based quiz and scenarios

- Computer
- Screen
- Projector
- Internet connection
- Speaker

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Part 1

Introduction and icebreaker

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Set the groundwork regarding the activity

ACTIVITY TYPE
Short presentation

LENGTH
15 minutes

Procedure

1. SETTING THE CLIMATE

At the start of the workshop, it would be helpful to establish a few guidelines and provide some information:

- Acknowledge Indigenous territory
- Create a safe space where participants are encouraged to exchange ideas and listen respectfully

2. INTRODUCING THE WORKSHOP

Explain what a disclosure is and emphasize the importance of responding in a helpful way:

- A **disclosure** is when someone confides in you that they have experienced sexual violence, whether or not they intend to submit a report to the authorities.
- This is a very vulnerable moment for the person. If somebody is confiding in you about having experienced sexual violence, this means that they **TRUST YOU**
- In that moment, your response can either drastically **HELP** or **HINDER** the healing process of the person who confided in you.
- It is important to recognize the **POWER** you have to help the person in this crucial moment.

3. INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Introduce yourself to the participants to create a climate of trust

- Name, pronoun(s)
- Professional and/or personal background
- Why you're presenting this workshop / why you feel this content is important

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4. TAKE THE PULSE OF THE GROUP

Let each participant take their turn to share with the group:

- Their name (and pronoun(s) if they so choose)
- A word that comes to mind regarding a helpful response to a disclosure
- A word to describe their current state

Facilitation notes

To find out which Indigenous territory you are on, you can text the name of your location to **1 855 917-5263**.

For some examples of statements of Indigenous land acknowledgements, go to: https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory

The facilitator must be knowledgeable about issues pertaining to sexual violence and harassment (definitions, statistics, myths and realities, the concept of rape culture, how to respond to disclosures, long and short-term impacts, etc.). The participants might have questions during the activity which the facilitator should be prepared to answer.

The facilitator should also be aware of the local resources to support people who have been subject to sexual violence or harassment.

Avoid gendered language when talking about people who have suffered sexual violence. Try to avoid the term “victim”. People who have experienced sexual violence or harassment should be allowed to decide how they want to self-identify.

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Part 2

Quiz on reactions to disclosures

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Learn examples of helpful and harmful responses to a disclosure of sexual violence

ACTIVITY TYPE
Interactive quiz

LENGTH
30 minutes

Procedure

The quiz is divided into two parts: harmful responses and helpful responses. The quiz can be found in **Appendix 2** and the answers are **Appendix 3**.

The quiz consists of reactions that are often used during a disclosure of sexual violence. The goal of the quiz is to identify the type of reaction.

Facilitation notes

Option 1: You can present the quiz questions on a large screen, explaining the answers as you go through each of the questions.

Option 2: You can hand out a paper version of the quiz to each participant. The participants can circle their answers. You can then share and explain the answers.

When you read out the different sentences, try to do so in a manner that is realistic, and not exaggerated. These scenarios attempt to illustrate the interactions that can occur in real life with a person who has been sexually assaulted.

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Part 3

Practicing helpful reactions

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Give participants the opportunity to put helpful responses into practice

ACTIVITY TYPE
Role-play

LENGTH
15 minutes (5 minutes per situation)

Procedure

1. INTRODUCING THE ROLE-PLAYING ACTIVITY

- Introduce the 3 different disclosure statements, which can be found in **Appendix 4**.
- Ask participants to take turns practicing helpful responses to the disclosures.

An alternative could be to divide the participants into groups of three. Each person takes a turn reading a disclosure statement, and the others practice their helpful responses.

Facilitation notes

Warn participants that the situations contain descriptions of incidents of sexual violence. The content could trigger difficult emotions in the participants. Let the participants know that they have permission to leave the room or to not participate in the activity.

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Part 4

Closing the activity

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss what everyone has learned.
2. Take the time to answer questions.

ACTIVITY TYPE
Closing discussion

LENGTH
10 minutes

Procedure

1. REVIEWING WHAT WAS LEARNED

Ask participants:

- What they have learned
- Their biggest takeaway
- If they still have any questions

2. PRESENTING THE RESOURCES

Remind participants about the support resources available, as well as those that can be found within their school or organization.

Facilitation notes

Make sure you have pamphlets with different resources and support services for survivors of sexual or intimate partner violence (local support organizations, 24/7 helplines, etc.) Leave the pamphlets at the door so participants can take them on their way out.

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Appendix 1

Information sources

THE ACTIVITY WAS DEVELOPED BASED ON INFORMATION FROM PAGES 34-35 OF THE FOLLOWING GUIDE (PAGES 36-37 IN THE PDF FILE :
https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/SCF/publications/documentation/brochures/Guide-AS-2018-EN.pdf

Reference: Table de concertation sur les agressions à caractère sexuel de Montréal (2018). Information guide for sexual assault victims, 3rd edition. Accessed January 2022 from https://www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/ministeres-et-organismes/secretariat-condition-feminine/publications/guide-dinformation-a-lintention-des-victimes-dagression-sexuelle-3e-edition

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Appendix 2

Quiz questions

IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF HARMFUL REACTION.

1. Are you sure that's what happened?
    a. Victim blaming
    b. Doubting
    c. Turning the page

2. Well you stayed late at the party, and you drank a lot... What did you expect?
    a. Ignoring the problem
    b. Minimizing events
    c. Victim blaming

3. You can't do much about it now. It's no use staying stuck in the past.
    a. Judgemental
    b. Overprotective
    c. Turning the page

4. I'm friends with both of you. I don't want to get involved.
    a. Ignoring the problem
    b. Finding fault
    c. Overprotective

5. Why didn't you call a cab?
    a. Finding fault
    b. Overprotective
    c. Dramatizing

6. Oh my God! I'll never let you go to a party without me ever again!
    a. Minimizing events
    b. Overprotective
    c. Judgemental

7. Wow, so I guess that means you cheated on your boyfriend? What will you tell him? Were you flirting with the other guy? Maybe he thought you were single.
    a. Trivializing
    b. Minimizing events
    c. Judgemental

8. Yeah, but it's not really assault. It's not as though he was physically violent or whatever
    a. Minimizing events
    b. Turning the page
    c. Doubting

9. That's terrible! I can't believe that happened to you! You must be freaking out. Things like this can ruin a person's life...
    a. Overprotective
    b. Dramatizing
    c. Finding fault

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Quiz questions

IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF HELPFUL REACTION.

10. I'm so sorry this happened to you.
    a. Listening to the person
    b. Believing the person
    c. Highlighting the person's strengths

11. I hear you. Take your time telling me what happened.
    a. Being supportive
    b. Alleviating guilt
    c. Listening to the person

12. I'm grateful you came to me to tell me about this. What you're doing takes a lot of courage
    a. Highlighting the person's strengths
    b. Alleviating guilt
    c. Encouraging independence

13. None of this is your fault. Nobody deserves to be assaulted.
    a. Alleviating guilt
    b. Being supportive
    c. Validating emotions

14. You can call me whenever you want to talk. I'm here to help you find the support you need and deserve.
    a. Encouraging independence
    b. Validating emotions
    c. Being supportive

15. Thank you for telling me about this. I can see that you're struggling to make sense of what happened to you yesterday.
    a. Validating emotions
    b. Being accepting
    c. Encouraging independence

16. No need to apologize, you have every right to be angry. Your feelings are totally valid
    a. Encouraging independence
    b. Validating emotions
    c. Listening to the person

17. Take as much time as you need to figure out the next steps. It's up to you to decide what you want and need for your life.
    a. Being supportive
    b. Alleviating guilt
    c. Encouraging independence

Appendix 3

Quiz answers

HARMFUL REACTIONS — ANSWERS

1. **B — Doubting**
Showing that you are skeptical and doubt what the person has told you.

2. **C — Victim blaming**
Blaming the person for what they did or did not do. Making it look like the person provoked the assault, or as though they were responsible for what happened to them in one way or another.

3. **C — Turning the page**
Preventing the person from expressing negative emotions under the pretext that it's not good to live in the past, or that it is useless to dwell on the situation. Strongly encouraging the person to no longer think about what happened to them.

4. **A — Ignoring the problem**
Refusing to have anything to do with the topic, under the pretext that it doesn't involve you, that it's not your problem. Ignoring a request for help.

5. **A — Finding fault**
Pointing out weaknesses or what the person could have said or done differently.

6. **B — Overprotective**
Smothering and overprotecting the person by preventing them from going out, seeing friends or from sleeping anywhere away from home; over-monitoring them.

7. **C — Judgemental**
Asking targeted/leading questions or trying to get more details. Talking a lot, without taking the time to listen to the person.

8. **A — Minimizing events**
Reducing the significance of what happened to the person, getting stuck on definitions and semantics.

9. **B — Dramatizing**
Acting as though it's the end of the world, focusing on the worst-case scenarios, being excessively pessimistic or dramatic in showing concern.

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Quiz answers

HELPFUL REACTIONS — ANSWERS

10. B — Believing the person
Believing what the person says, without a hint of doubt or skepticism. Focusing on what the person is expressing and experiencing.

11. C — Listening to the person
Listening to what the person is telling you without judgement. Letting them explain in their own words, in their own way, and at their own pace. Remembering that active body language (posture, eye contact) allows the person to know that they have your full attention and that they can be comfortable expressing themselves.

12. A — Highlighting the person's strengths
Help the person feel good about what they have done. Point out their strengths and the courage it took for them to talk about the assault.

13. A — Alleviating guilt
Help the person understand that the sexual assault was not their fault. The perpetrator of the assault is fully responsible for their actions.

14. C — Being supportive
Be available to talk to or accompany the person. If you do not feel you can help the person, it is important to tell them and to help them find another person qualified for the task. Make sure the person has a network (friends and/or family) that can help them.

15. B — Being accepting
Simply accept what the person is saying without minimizing or dramatizing the facts. Control your own reactions so that the person will feel free to express emotions that may be different from yours. You can also show your acceptance by paraphrasing what they say.

16. B — Validating emotions
Help the person express their emotions by acknowledging that their reactions, and feelings (anger, bitterness, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem) are normal.

17. C — Encouraging independence
Be there for the person and help them regain power in their own life. Provide them with the space to vent and help them return to their usual level of functioning.

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Appendix 4

Practicing helpful reactions

DISCLOSURE STATEMENTS

A. I got really drunk at a party yesterday. I think I passed out. I can't remember what happened. I woke up in a bedroom and my pants were unzipped. I'm so stupid. Maybe nothing happened. I don't know.

B. My boyfriend got mad at me yesterday when I told him I didn't want to have sex. I don't know what's wrong with me. He kept on putting his hands down my pants and touching me to try to get me in the mood. I didn't want to upset him. So, we ended up having sex, but it hurt. I feel really weird about it now, but I'm not sure why.

C. I took a taxi to get home the other day and the driver wouldn't stop telling me that I was beautiful. It made me uncomfortable, but I didn't want to insult him, so I thanked him. He stopped the car on a poorly lit street and said I wouldn't have to pay if I gave him a blow job. I didn't know what to do so I got out of the car. I should have been more direct with him when he was giving me compliments. Maybe I gave him the wrong impression. At least he drove off right away and didn't keep bothering me.

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Appendix 5

Supporting Videos

THINGS NOT TO SAY TO SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED
Examples of problematic reactions, from the perspective of survivors. *Note: the video contains some curse words.

Reference: BBC 3 (2017). Things not to say to someone who's been sexually assaulted. Accessed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySgTgJOqlgE

HOW TO TAKE A DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT
Examples of helpful reactions to disclosures of sexual assault. *Note: the video mentions support services specific to the USA.

Reference: Sexual Assault Support Services of Lane Co., OR (2020). How to take a disclosure of sexual violence. Accessed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkpjpcXjtds