

## RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE

The response a survivor gets when s/he discloses has a significant impact on his/her ability to cope and heal, as well as on whether s/he will feel comfortable making a disclosure in the future. If the survivor feels s/he was not believed, or that the person s/he told did not care, or if the disclosure brought about unwanted consequences (removal from living situation or work, etc.), s/he may be very reluctant to continue seeking help. On the other hand, if the person making the disclosure feels validated and believes as though the person hearing the disclosure is willing to help, the healing process can begin.

When listening to a disclosure, it can be tempting to find out as much information as possible, but that is not your job at that moment. Your job, at this time, is to LISTEN, carefully and without judgment and to communicate that you understand. Let the survivor guide the direction of the conversation. It is important to tell the survivor that s/he is believed, that s/he did the right thing by telling someone, and that s/he will be helped. Contacting a rape crisis center or law enforcement or medical professionals are great next steps. Describe all of the survivor's choices and let him/her decide what to do next. S/he may not

want to do anything, and that is okay. Tell him/her that s/he can change his/her mind at any time, and that someone will be available to talk if s/he needs to do so. If you are a required reporter, it is important to tell the survivor this as early in the conversation as possible and to explain that you cannot keep the conversation confidential and are required to report to the Office of Inspector General (OIG). Explain what will happen if s/he discloses abuse to you, and find out if that is what s/he wants to happen. That way, s/he can choose whether or not to continue the conversation with you. If s/he does not want to continue, explain that there are other people s/he can talk to who are not required reporters, such as a rape crisis worker. Then help him/her get in touch with those people as quickly as possible.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DONATE, PLEASE CONTACT:

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## A brochure especially for Service Providers



**...healthy relationships  
for individuals with  
disabilities.**



## BARRIERS TO SERVICE

Survivors with disabilities face many of the same barriers to seeking help that survivors without disabilities do, but there are also a range of issues that are unique to survivors with disabilities. It is important to remember that each individual assault is unique. A survivor with a disability may face some, all or none of the barriers listed here;

- **FEAR**-Because the perpetrators of abuse towards people with disabilities are often caregivers, a survivor may fear being punished by the caregiver for speaking out. A survivor may also fear loss of resources and/or services if s/he reports the caregiver, or may fear a new caregiver may be even worse.
- **STIGMA AND PREJUDICE**-The stigma associated with having a disability may greatly decrease the perceived credibility of the survivor. People with disabilities are often patronized and not taken seriously.
- **LACK OF AWARENESS AMONG RESPONDERS**-A lack of awareness, education and training about people with disabilities among advocates, law enforcement, medical staff and others too often result in inappropriate or inadequate services.

## BARRIERS TO SERVICE CON'T.

**LIMITED RESOURCES TO ACCOMMODATE NEEDS**-The limited resources of many non-profits and state agencies make it increasingly difficult to provide safe and appropriate services and accommodations for people with disabilities.

### TIPS

Below are good tips for working with a survivor of sexual violence:

1. Talk with the person in a quiet, private place that is free of distractions or excitement. Make sure the person feels safe.
2. Speak directly to the person. Put yourself at eye level and make eye contact.
3. Interact in an adult manner and use adult language; avoid condescending language or behavior.
4. Be respectful and patient. It may take more time than for other survivors of sexual violence with whom you work. Allow time for the survivor to respond. You may also need to take frequent breaks.
5. Use first names and plain language. Avoid bureaucratic language or jargon.
6. Establish rapport. It may be helpful to “chit-chat” first until a connection is made between you and the survivor.
7. Ask about any assistance needs and what they would be.

## TIPS CON'T.

8. Do not make assumptions about abilities or guesses about needs. For example, a person with slow or difficult speech may not be cognitively impaired.
9. Identify and accommodate the person's needs to the best of your ability. Be open to communicating in new and creative ways. Acknowledge and take responsibility for limitations.
10. Always use people first language. For example, say “People with disabilities,” not “disabled people.”
11. Offer choices as often as possible.
12. Respect boundaries. Remember, chairs and other support aids are part of a person's being, so don't touch or move support aids without permission.
13. Reflect and normalize feelings.
14. Provide facts and options.
15. Remember that certain disabilities may impact emotional affect. For example, just because a person is smiling doesn't necessarily mean s/he is happy, or a seemingly angry grimace may not mean the person is mad. Be calm and do not fear possible appearance.

**ADV&SAS HOTLINE**

**1-800-892-3375**