



RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES

Under the University's Sexual Harassment & Prohibited Conduct Policy, only faculty and staff identified in the Policy as the Title IX Team (page 16 of 30) are mandatory reporters of sexual harassment or assault disclosures. Even though you may not be a mandatory reporter per University policy, your response to a disclosure from a student or colleague should create a safe environment that encompasses Morgan State University's Core Values of Leadership, Innovation, Integrity, Diversity, Excellence, and Respect. This is a guide in helping you accomplish this.

When responding to someone who has disclosed that they have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, keep in mind this can be a difficult conversation for them. If they are coming to you, it is because they trust you. Remember everyone reacts differently when they are telling you what happened.

- They may struggle remembering details or they may remember everything. This is normal.
- They may be in shock or have compartmentalized the event. They also could appear angry, show no emotion at all, or even be depressed.
- When people have experienced an upsetting or traumatic event, it is important not to make assumptions about someone's experience based on how upset they may seem or the information they share.
- The experience they share may sound disjointed and will not describe the event in chronological order.

7 Helpful Tips

There is never a perfect script to follow, however, here are examples of seven helpful tips that you can consider using into your own personalized response.

I. Find a private place to talk.

- Ask the person if they are comfortable moving to a quiet place to talk.
- Suggest a quiet place, such as your office.
- Let the person make the final decision on where to talk.

Creating a private environment will make the person feel more comfortable speaking with you.

II. Be a good listener.

- Give your undivided attention.
- Listen without any interruptions.
- Do not be easily distracted; close your email; silence your cellphone.

III. Be affirming.

- Validate what they are sharing with you by nodding your head and staying attentive.
- Avoid asking questions about what happened.
- Avoid offering solutions or advise.

IV. Give non-verbal cues.

- Maintain eye contact, to show them that you are engaged and interested in what they are saying.

V. Respond without judgment.

Individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct may feel shame, may blame themselves, or fear judgment. Disclosing the experience requires courage and can make the person feel vulnerable. Showing them that you are willing to support them can be helpful and reassuring.

There is no perfect response, but here are some helpful statements to make:

- This is not your fault.
- You did nothing to cause this to happen to you, and it never should have happened.
- I am very sorry this happened to you, I can see this is painful and hurtful.
- You are not alone, and you have my support.

VI. Empower them to seek confidential assistance.

Ask them about their personal safety. It's ok to ask, "Do you feel safe on and off campus? I want to be sure you feel safe."

Ask if they need medical assistance. Encourage them to seek medical care, if needed, but do not push.

Offer to provide them with information on campus resources such as student health center or counseling.

VII. Encourage - do not force - the individual to report the sexual harassment or sexual assault.

Helpful ways to start the conversation:

- "There are many reporting options available to you here at the University."
- "You can report the incident to the police, or the University's Title IX Coordinator. Are you okay with these options?"

What NOT to Say & Do

When an individual discloses that they have been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, here are some things to not say or do:

- Respond in a shocked manner or over-react. “This is terrible! How did this Happen?!” or “You need to report this to the Police now!”
- Questioning the “truth” of the individual’s disclosure if they seem very calm or resistant to reporting the incident.
- Telling them about a similar experience you may have had or making the situation about you by focusing on your own emotional reaction.
- Questioning why they did not act in a certain way, such as, “Why didn’t you tell them to stop commenting on your looks?”, “Why didn’t you fight back?”, or “Why did you drink so much?”
- Comparing stories. For example, do not say, “Well at least you weren’t assaulted by someone that you knew.”
- If you do not have time to meet with them do not say, “I don’t have time, can you come back later?” Rather, say, “I’m on my way to teach my course, can you meet me in my office at 3:30 p.m., will that work with your schedule?” If not, decide on a specific time for you and the individual to meet. Do not end the conversation without a confirmed day and time to meet. If the individual does not show, follow up. Email and invite them to come in and talk, or if appropriate – meet virtually.
- Telling anyone else would betray their trust. However, you may have mandatory reporting responsibilities based on your profession (i.e. social work, healthcare provider). If so, let the person know about your mandatory reporting responsibilities and let them decide if they wish to continue talking to you.

University’s Title IX Coordinator and Other Information

- ✓ Know your Title IX Coordinator’s name and contact information:

Tara L. Berrien, J.D.

Assistant Vice President, Fair Practices Officer, Title IX Coordinator
Office of Diversity, EEO, & Title IX
Tyler Hall, Suite 503
(443) 885-3559
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- ✓ Be prepared to introduce the reporting party to the Title IX Coordinator, if requested.

Please refer to this link for resource information:

<https://www.morgan.edu/eo/resources>

Please refer to this link for the University’s Sexual Harassment and Prohibited Conduct Policy and applicable procedures:

<https://www.morgan.edu/diversity-and-equal-employment-opportunity/policies>