

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

1. Always make your first response sympathetic to the survivor's feelings: "That must have felt awful," or "I'm sorry that happened to you."
2. It is okay to ask, "What do you need from me?" when you do not know what to do or say.
3. Stick with the topic of abuse until the person gives a clear indication that he or she wants to stop talking. If in doubt, ask: "Do you want to stop talking now?"
4. Share your outrage, compassion, and concern with appropriate comments.
5. At the end, you may want to ask the survivor how he or she is feeling now.
6. You may have a delayed reaction to hearing their story, so be sure to notice and meet your emotional needs in the next week or two.
7. Do not request further information with first responding compassionately to the initial disclosure. Especially avoid asking, "How old were you?" or "How much younger were you than the abuser?"
8. Do not say anything positive or understanding about the perpetrator!
9. Do not ask, "Are you sure?"
10. Do not change the subject. Do not take this opportunity to disclose or speculate on your own abuse issues.
11. Do not get into your own feelings at the expense of the survivor. Keep the focus of attention on the survivor.
12. Do not hug or approach the person physically. If you feel it may be appropriate to hug or pat the person, ask permission first. Remember that the survivor may not be able to say no even if he or she does not want to be touched.

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