

# Responding

## to Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence

1

Safety

2

Confidentiality

3

Listen

4

Refer

5

Take care

## In an emergency

---

**If the student — or anyone else  
on campus — is at imminent  
risk of harm:**

Contact:

**OCAD U Safety & Security Services Emergency Line**  
at 416-977-6000, Ext. 511

**Health & Wellness Centre**

416-977-6000, Ext. 260

Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Purpose</b>	4
<b>Your roles and responsibility</b>	5
<b>If you receive a disclosure of sexual violence</b>	6
<b>Steps</b>	8
<b>Step 1:</b> Ascertain safety	10
<b>Step 2:</b> Inform survivor of limits to confidentiality	12
<b>Step 3:</b> Listen without judgement	14
<b>Step 4:</b> Discuss and refer to appropriate support resources	18
<b>Step 5:</b> Follow up & take care of yourself	22
<b>Aknowledgments</b>	24

## Purpose

---

This guide is intended to give OCAD University staff, faculty, student peers and other campus leaders direction on how to respond effectively to a student disclosure of sexual or gender-based violence, and how to provide survivors with accurate, timely and supportive referrals.

Remember:

*These are survivors' rights and anyone, regardless of gender, sexual identity, disability status, age or race can be a survivor of sexual violence.*

## Your role and responsibility

---

Faculty, staff and student peer leaders at OCAD U have a shared responsibility to:

**Listen:**

Ascertain safety

Listen without judgement

**Inform:**

Outline limits to confidentiality

**Refer:**

To Health & Wellness Centre for support

## If you receive a disclosure of sexual violence

---

**Understand** that you may be the survivor's first disclosure, and that they trust you with this information. This interaction could determine how the survivor processes the event or accesses supports.

**Your role is** to lend a caring ear and refer the survivor to supports that will meet their needs.

**When in doubt**, *ask* the survivor what they need from you.

**It is not your role to document the incident, or to ask probing questions.**

**Be careful about physical contact. Only make limited physical contact with consent (e.g. a touch on the shoulder, a gentle hug). Survivors may be upset or anxious about physical contact after an assault.**

**Do not push the survivor into taking a specific action, try to take control or make any decisions for them.**

You do not have to have all the answers. Your goal is to be an active listener rather than assume an expert role. You may feel shocked, overwhelmed, angry or frightened in receiving this disclosure. You may feel compelled to do something to immediately ease the situation, calm the survivor or make the situation go away. This is not your job and may cause the survivor harm. Stick to providing information and options while allowing the survivor to be autonomous in their choice to take the next step.

# STEPS

**1** Ascertain  
Safety

**2** Inform Survivor  
of Limits to  
Confidentiality

**3** Listen  
Without  
Judgement

**4** Discuss & Refer  
to Appropriate  
Support Resources

**5** Follow Up &  
Take Care  
of Yourself

Ascertain  
safety

1

## Ask the survivor if they are safe now

---

Make sure you and the survivor are in a safe and private setting. Confirm with the survivor that they feel comfortable in the space by asking them.

**If the survivor — or anyone on campus — is at immediate risk of harm:**

**Contact OCAD U Safety & Security Emergency Line:**  
416-977-6000, Ext. 511  
or pick up any **red phone** to be immediately connected

For more information on assessing risk of suicide and harm, please see the *Guide to Supporting Students in Distress at OCAD University*.

Ask the survivor if they would like to continue. Inform them that you are required to outline the limits to confidentiality.

Inform survivor  
of limits to  
confidentiality

# 2

## Limits to confidentiality

---

It is important to maintain confidentiality with respect to your interaction with the survivor. At the same time, avoid making sweeping promises of confidentiality, particularly if there are indications that the person — or the wider community — is at immediate risk of harm.

**You can say something like:**

*“Everything you say is confidential unless I become concerned about your safety or the safety of others. If that is the case, I may want to talk with someone else at the university to ensure I’m helping you the best way possible and meeting my responsibilities.”*

Ask the survivor if they wish to continue. If no, refer them to Health & Wellness and the *Guide for Student Survivors* for support (Step 4), and make a plan to follow up (Step 5).

Listen without  
judgement

3

## When listening to a disclosure of sexual or gender-based violence:

---

**Take the disclosure seriously.** Provide the survivor with your complete attention and a calm appearance. It is important to believe the survivor.

**Understand** that survivors dealing with threatened, attempted or online assaults/harassment are equally deserving of support.

**Allow** the individual to determine the pace of your interaction. Be mindful of verbal and physical cues provided by the survivor that may indicate their anxiety level. Allow them to choose between periods of talking and silence and let them speak without intervention or direction.

**Recognize** that disclosing can be traumatic and the survivor's ability to recall events may be limited. This can be a natural way of processing a traumatic event. They might use ambiguous words like, "I think" or "I'm not sure", and this is a very typical response in survivors. Understand that immediately following a traumatic event (and up to several weeks), the mind (and body's) executive functioning has been compromised. These do not negate the survivor's validity.

**Listen actively** and be mindful of your own biases.

**Do not** dismiss the individual's claims, minimize the assault or discourage them from talking further.

**Never trivialize** the experience: believing it could not have been "that bad." This reaction is a common way of avoiding the emotions of fear, guilt and uncertainty that may follow a disclosure.

**Do not** press for specific details about the assault as this can re-traumatize a survivor.

**Avoid** asking "why" questions or making statements that may feel judgmental or blaming to the survivor (e.g. "What were you thinking going there or having that much to drink?" and, "Why didn't you fight back?").

**Do not** discuss other matters unrelated to the disclosure at this time.

**Do not** over-react or over-dramatize the event. This makes the conversation about you, and can create feelings of guilt and anxiety for the survivor. It may limit their ability to talk openly for fear of burdening others.

**Avoid** making insulting comments about the perpetrator. In cases of relationship abuse or acquaintance sexual assault, the survivor may have complicated and conflicting emotions about this individual. Negative comments could inhibit their ability to seek help.

**The survivor may describe the incident as an assault, or be unsure of whether they want it be deemed as such. Let the survivor make decisions with regards to their feelings about the incident. Assure them supports are available even if they are unsure.**

Ask the survivor if they would like to hear about support resources available to them on campus and in the community that may be helpful to them at this time.

## Members of the OCAD U community have a duty to:

---

**Inform** the survivor that there are resources, supports and information available to them.

**Inform** the survivor that the university has a policy on sexual violence.

**Refer** students to the Health & Wellness Centre as the university's primary point of contact for any student affected by sexual violence.

### Health & Wellness Centre

The Health & Wellness Centre is OCAD University's primary point of contact for students affected by sexual or gender-based violence. Staff there will provide information on internal and external supports and services, coordinate academic accommodations, outline options for reporting the incident and formal complaint options through the university's *Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence Policy*.

416-977-6000, Ext. 260

[hwc@ocadu.ca](mailto:hwc@ocadu.ca) | [www.ocadu.ca/hwc](http://www.ocadu.ca/hwc)

6th Floor, 230 Richmond St. W.

Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Urgent same-day appointments are available.**

Discuss and refer  
to appropriate  
support resources

# 4

OCAD U publishes a *Guide for Student Survivors of Sexual Violence* that contains information about support available on campus and in the community, emergency services and reporting options at [www.ocadu.ca/survivorsguide](http://www.ocadu.ca/survivorsguide)

Provide this information to the survivor in addition to making the referral to the Health & Wellness Centre.

**Let the survivor know** they can access accommodations, referrals, information about reporting options and ongoing support via the Health & Wellness Centre.

**Ensure survivors know** that the university takes complaints of sexual and gender-based violence very seriously and is prepared to hold members of the university community accountable for their behaviour and ensure the safety of survivors and the OCAD U community.

**Offer assistance** in connecting with Health & Wellness. This could include walking with them to the Centre, or asking for consent to have Health & Wellness contact them. Let the staff at Health & Wellness know that the student has disclosed a situation involving sexual violence and is being referred to the Centre for follow-up.

**Respect a survivor's right** to choose services they feel as most appropriate.

**Do not** try to fix the problem or push the survivor towards a specific action, such as reporting the incident.

**Do not** try to take control or make decisions for them.

## **In the event that a survivor does not wish to follow-up with Health & Wellness, ensure that they know of the following reporting options:**

### **Police:**

Report to the Toronto Police Division (or relevant municipal police division) in which the incident occurred. If unsure of division, contact the Toronto Police non-emergency line at 416-808-2222

Incidents occurring on campus should be reported to: Toronto Police 52 Division, 255 Dundas St W.; non-emergency line at 416-808-5200

More information can be found on the Toronto Police website.

### **OCAD U Safety & Security Services**

Non-emergency line:  
416-977-6000, Ext. 366

### **Vice-Provost, Students & International**

Complaints under the university's *Policy on Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-based Violence* can be made to this office.

416-977-6000, Ext. 2850  
dfisher@ocadu.ca

## In the days and weeks following the disclosure:

---

**Take your cues** from the survivor. Do not change your behavior towards them.

**Notice** any signs of distress and communicate these to the student (refer to the *Guide to Supporting Students in Distress at OCAD University* for academic, physical, emotional and behavioural indicators).

**If they bring up the situation again**, continue to follow these protocols and encourage them to seek support either through the Health & Wellness Centre or through an external resource.

### **Remember to take care of yourself**

Supporting someone who has experienced sexual violence can be difficult. Seek support from your colleagues (without revealing details of the disclosure) or your supervisor.

### **Additional support for yourself:**

#### **Student Peers:**

Health & Wellness Centre

[www.ocadu.ca/hwc](http://www.ocadu.ca/hwc)

416-977-6000, Ext. 260

#### **Faculty & Staff:**

Employee Assistance Program

[www.ocadu.ca/employee-well-being](http://www.ocadu.ca/employee-well-being)

A large, bold, teal-colored number '5' is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping a vertical bar with horizontal stripes in shades of grey and teal.

Follow up &  
take care  
of yourself

# Acknowledgments

---

OCAD University wishes to acknowledge the following organizations and institutions, whose related policies, publications and websites provided background in the development of this resource:

**University of Ottawa; Ryerson University; McMaster University; University of British Columbia; University of Toronto; METRAC Action on Violence; and the Ontario Women's Directorate, Government of Ontario.**

OCAD U also wishes to recognize the contributions of the university's Sexual Violence Response Working Group in the development of policy, response protocols and survivor's guide resources:

**Deanne Fisher**, Vice-Provost,  
Students & International (Chair)  
**McKenna Gray**, Student Representative  
**Khadija Aziz**, OCAD Student Union  
**Pablo Munoz**, OCAD Student Union  
**Jennifer Robinson**, Health & Wellness  
**Robin Shaw**, Health & Wellness  
**Amanda Hotrum**, Office of Diversity,  
Equity & Sustainability Initiatives  
**Shamina Chherawala**, Office of Diversity,  
Equity & Sustainability Initiatives  
**Fatimah Tuggar**, Faculty of Art  
**Louis Toromoreno**, Safety & Security Services



**Produced by :**  
**The Office of the Vice-Provost,**  
**Students & International**  
**September 2017**

