**Staff/Friends/Family Assisting with a Disclosure of Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination or Sexual Misconduct**

A disclosure can happen anywhere at any time and to anyone. It is normal to feel that you do not know what to do if someone discloses an incident of bullying, harassment, discrimination or sexual misconduct. If you have recently received a disclosure and want to ensure the student feels heard and is safe, the following advice will be of help to you now.

**DISCLOSURE**

**What to consider | Key messages**

Let them know that you’re glad they felt able to talk to you, and you accept what they are saying and want to help. Acknowledge there is help and support for them and it may feel overwhelming, but they’re not alone and you and others are available to help them, step-by-step. It’s important that they have as much choice and control about what happens next as possible, and who else, if anyone, you may need to share information with. There may be some circumstances in which you might have to tell someone or take action, for example if the student is under 18 or at risk, but you will make every effort to let them know beforehand.

Additional support regarding incidents of sexual misconduct can include the following;

Abuse and violence are caused by the perpetrator – the perpetrator is responsible, not them. (This can be very hard for survivors to accept, as they may feel if they had acted differently, it wouldn’t have happened. However, you can hold their feelings whilst letting them know that you believe it wasn’t their fault.) However, how they feel at that moment is OK – people respond very differently, and this can change over time. They deserve to be safe, and you want to help them to take care of themselves.

**ACT**

**How to communicate during and after the disclosure**

**DO:**

* Create safe space: confidential space, calm enough, calm empathy, taking your time.
* Listen without judgement, believing at face value (and let them know).
* Use the same language that they use to refer to the incident.
* Regulate your own stress or emotion, for example noticing breathing and taking deeper breaths, grounding by holding chair or noticing feet on the floor.
* If they are unsure whether what happened to them constituted bullying, harassment, discrimination or sexual misconduct, it’s OK to explain that any inappropriate behaviour is unacceptable and can be dealt with.
* If they are unsure whether what happened to them constituted a crime, it’s OK to sensitively explain that any sexual contact which they didn’t consent to is sexual violence and is a crime.
* Provide a response that is respectful, focused, and un-interrupted.
* Give priority to their immediate safety.
* Have relevant information available for them and in a format that is safe for a person at risk to take.

**DO NOT:**

* Ask for details or explanations, except to clarify your understanding of what they’ve said, or to identify any safety issues.
* Try to offer any explanation or justification for the actions of the person who perpetrated the abuse.
* Comment on the likelihood of the outcome of a report to the university or the police.
* Judge or make assumptions.

Once you have received a disclosure and have listened, it is important that you get help for the student and do not try and deal with all yourself. There is specialised support available through the University and with external bodies. The student decides what they want to do next, however it is good to have some information to hand if they are open to getting further support.

**OPTIONS**

Options can include the following. These options can be communicated to the student, however meeting an adviser to discuss all options would be the advisable next step.

1. Student speaks to perpetrator directly.
2. Student meets with a [University Dignity and Respect Ally or Sexual Misconduct Adviser](https://www.dcu.ie/students/bullying-sexual-consent-assault-harassment)
3. Student logs the incident anonymously via [SPEAK OUT](https://dcu.speakout.ie/)
4. Student requests informal resolution between both parties via the University
5. Depending on severity of incident, formal complaint to the University or Police could be made.
6. Student meets with doctor or nurse in [Student Health Centre](https://www.dcu.ie/health).
7. Student attends a [SATU (Sexual Assault Treatment Unit – HSE)](https://www2.hse.ie/services/satu/)
8. Student seeks counselling.
9. Student decides to take no action, incident can be logged with the University in case of future incidents.
10. Staff/University can put precautionary measures in place.

**CARE**

A student’s wellbeing is the utmost priority. All disclosures should be met with **integrity, calmness, kindness, and empathy**. Students have control of their decision making and can use their agency **which** refers to the feeling of control over actions and their consequences. Professional and caring follow up can be made to reiterate options available and give space for them to respond in their own time. If you need to speak to a DCU staff member before giving a student any advice, call Deirdre Moloney, Student Policy Officer at 01 700 6157 or email studentreport@dcu.ie .

Reference: It Stops Now Campaign 2023