

UNDERSTANDING DISCLOSURE

A disclosure is when a young person shares that they've experienced abuse, harm, or violence—whether it's happening now, happened in the past, or happened to someone they know. It can be:

- Direct: "My partner hit me."
- Indirect: "My friend's boyfriend gets really angry and throws things."
- Partial: Sharing only small details to "test" if you're safe to talk to.

Why this moment matters:

When a young person discloses, they are taking a big risk and showing immense courage. How you respond can shape:

- **Safety:** Whether they get help before more harm happens.
- **Trust:** Whether they will open up to adults in the future.
- **Healing:** Whether they feel believed and supported, or blamed and silenced.

Your role as a caring adult or youth-serving professional:

- Listen, believe, and validate their courage for speaking up.
- Be transparent: If you are a mandated reporter, let the youth know early in the conversation that you may need to involve others to help keep them safe.
- Reach out for guidance: You can always call SafeLink to talk through what you heard and get support on next steps, including mandated reporting.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

If a young person shares that they've experienced abuse, or if you're unsure what to do next, your first step can be reaching out for support.

SafeLink is Massachusetts' statewide 24/7 domestic violence and sexual assault hotline and resource line, operated by Casa Myrna. It's free, confidential, and available in over 130 languages.

You can call SafeLink for:

- Guidance on how to respond to a youth disclosure
- Help creating a safety plan
- Crisis support and emotional care
- Referrals to local shelters, counselors, or advocates
- Information on your mandated reporting responsibilities

CONTACT US



SafeLink 24/7 - 365

1-877-785-2020



HOW TO SUPPORT YOUTH WHO DISCLOSE ABUSE:

A GUIDE FOR CARING ADULTS & YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS

Supporting youth through the disclosure of sensitive information, such as experiences of abuse, mental health struggles, or other personal challenges, requires a compassionate and thoughtful approach.



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until every relationship is safe and healthy

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HOW TO RESPOND WHEN A YOUNG PERSON DISCLOSES ABUSE

Even with the best intentions, certain reactions can shut a young person down or make them feel unsafe. Avoid these responses so they know it's safe to keep talking.

THINGS TO AVOID:

- **Panic, cry, or act shocked.** This can make them feel like they did something wrong.
- **Interrupt or rush them.** Let them talk in their own words, even if it's slow or disorganized.
- **Ask for unnecessary details.** Avoid investigative questions like "What were you wearing?" or "Are you sure?"
- **Make promises you can't keep.** Instead of "I won't tell anyone," try "I'll keep this private unless I need help to keep you safe."
- **Blame, judge, or question their choices.** Youth may already be blaming themselves.
- **Confront the person who harmed them.** This can escalate the situation and cause more harm.



HOW TO RESPOND WHEN A YOUNG PERSON DISCLOSES ABUSE

A disclosure of abuse, harm, or violence—whether it's about dating, family, peers, or someone else—is a huge moment. Your response can shape how safe they feel, whether they seek more help, and even how they begin to heal.

TIPS ON WHAT KEEP IN MIND:

- **Stay calm and grounded.** Youth often watch your face and body language to decide if it's safe to keep sharing.
- **Listen actively.** Give them your full attention—put away distractions and show you're present.
- **Believe them.** Many youth fear being doubted. Say clearly, "I believe you."
- **Validate their feelings.** Try: "I'm so sorry this happened," or "That sounds really hard."
- **Thank them for trusting you.** Disclosure takes immense bravery. Acknowledge their courage.
- **Let them set the pace.** Don't pressure them to share more than they're ready for.
- **Reassure them it's not their fault.** Especially with abuse, youth often feel guilt or shame.
- **Be honest about next steps.** If you're a mandated reporter, gently explain what you must do to keep them safe.
- **Ask about their immediate safety.** "Are you safe right now?" is a simple but powerful check-in.
- **Contact SafeLink for support.** You can call together or on your own to get guidance and next steps.

A QUICK SAFETY PLAN GUIDE

Work through this checklist with youth to create a plan that feels safe, realistic, and doable.

SAFE PEOPLE

Who can you call or text right away if you feel unsafe?
(Write down names + numbers)

SAFE PLACES

Where can you go if you need to leave quickly?
(e.g., friend's house, community center, school office)

CODE WORD

Choose a word or phrase to signal to friends/family that you need help.

WHAT TO TAKE IF YOU NEED TO LEAVE QUICKLY

- ☐ Keys
- ☐ Phone + charger
- ☐ ID or school card
- ☐ Medications
- ☐ Cash, bus/train pass, or Charlie Card
- ☐ A small comfort item (if helpful)

