



How to Respond When Someone Discloses a Traumatic Experience



Developed by: Kayleigh N. Watters, Zara Joykutty, Marley Fradley, Madi Edwards

Do's

- Provide support (e.g., "That sounds really hard." "Thank you for sharing that with me." "I'm so sorry that happened.")
- If they are interested, connect them with local support resources (e.g., "Would you be interested in talking to someone about this?" "I know of a few resources that might be helpful. Would you be interested in that? We can do it together.")
- Be comfortable in silence. Sometimes, people need just the presence of a supportive friend or family member.

Don'ts

- Attempt to take control (e.g., "I am calling the police right now." "I'm going to your house to pack a bag. You're coming to live with me today.")
- Blame (e.g., "How could you put yourself in that situation?" "Didn't they tell everyone to evacuate the area? Why would you have stayed?")
- Force the person sharing to take care of you (e.g., "I'm so mad, I could go over there and punch him in the face. I can't believe that. I'm so upset right now.")

What to do when you feel like you said the wrong thing

- Breathe, and offer compassion to yourself. Often, there is no perfect response when someone shares about a difficult experience. Having an emotional reaction is normal.
- If appropriate, reach out, recognize the fact that you may not have had a productive response. Apologize.
- Seek support for yourself. Hearing about a difficult experience from a loved one can have impacts on your own mental health. We are better able to support others when we are receiving support ourselves.