

Supporting someone who has been accused of sexual misconduct

How to Respond if Someone You Know is Accused

If someone you know has reached out to you for support after being named as a respondent in a complaint of sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, or sexual harassment, it is often difficult to process how you should respond. All students are entitled to a fair and equitable process of discovery and providing assistance to someone seeking your support is part of this process.

Know that it is natural for you to feel conflicted regarding your response, but also know that simply providing advice and emotional support in no way condones the alleged behaviour but represents a simple act of compassion and care for the person.

Here are some ways that you can help:

- **Listen.** Provide an open atmosphere for the person to share their honest feelings and tell things from their point of view. This does not mean that you need to affirm or condone your friend's alleged behaviour, but simply that you will provide compassion as they attempt to work through this difficult experience. Refrain from asking for disclosure of details about the alleged incident and focus on listening only.
- **Be honest.** Let the person know how much and what kind of support you are willing give. The accused may turn to you for support or for help - you are allowed to set healthy boundaries. Also bear in mind that you cannot and should not engage in providing advice or support that you are not qualified to give.
- **Provide resources.** Help your friend explore support options on campus that will assist in dealing with the situation. Encourage your friend to consult with our wellbeing professionals in [Bond Wellbeing Services](#). This office can provide resources to any student charged with a sexual assault. Connecting the person with these resources will help provide the support and information they need to better understand and work through the process ahead.
- **Remain neutral.** Do not blame the person or the survivor/victim for what happened. If you were not there, you do not know. Your focus should be on support, not taking sides or placing blame. Remember, as a friend:
 - You may only hear one side of the story when multiple sides exist
 - You are not expected to approve of an accused person's actions, opinions, or decisions
 - You are not expected to pick a side in these kinds of situations
 - You can be supportive of a person in general (caring for their humanity and welfare) and treat them with dignity, but also hold that person accountable to their actions, opinions, or decisions
 - You can reaffirm and state your values that sexual misconduct is not okay whilst not accusing your friend of something where you may not be fully informed
 - The HR department, and/or trained university personnel who may constitute part of a regulatory response team or board will determine whether a breach of policy has taken place, this is not your responsibility or role
 - Violence, vigilantism, retaliation or victimisation are not appropriate, nor helpful to you, your friend, or the complainant
 - Everyone will have different reactions and ways to process the situation. Allow for space, for sharing, and healing for all

- **Respect privacy.** Do not share the person's experience with others or speculate what might have happened.
- **Educate yourself.** Sexual assault, sexual harassment and other forms of abuse can be incredibly complex. Increasing your own understanding of sexual assault and sexual harassment may help you to process your own feelings about the incident as well as assist the person with the process that may lie ahead. Visit the "Building a Better Bondy" iLearn page for training content as well as our "Response to Sexual Misconduct" page for more information on managing your response effectively.
- **Get support for yourself.** Supporting anyone through a trauma can be a difficult and emotionally draining experience for those in the support role. Recognise this and do not hesitate to seek help and support for yourself when you need it. You cannot effectively support your friend without being mindful of your own health and wellbeing.

Warning signs that the person needs additional help:

- If a person is suicidal, or making credible threats towards another person, please call 000 for emergency services.
 - Increased or unhealthy use of drugs/alcohol
 - Potential threat to themselves or others
 - Current or emerging mental health issues
 - Challenges with academic schedules or obligations
 - Social stigma or rejection
 - Isolation
 - Excessive sleeping/ Not sleeping
 - Over-eating/ Not eating
 - Intense preoccupation with the case or others involved
 - Making threats to harm themselves or others, even jokingly

If you are concerned about a respondent and would like someone from our Student Wellbeing team to reach out to them, please complete a [BondCare Wellbeing Referral](#).

Further information for a student accused of sexual misconduct is located on the [Bond website](#).

Resources to share:

- [Safe & Respectful Communities eLearning Module](#)
- [Consent Matters: Boundaries, Respect and Positive Intervention](#)
- [Tackling Harassment](#)
- [Response to sexual misconduct](#)