

# Supporting a Friend Through Sexual Misconduct

Supporting a friend who has experienced or is experiencing any form of sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking (referred to here as “sexual misconduct”), can be challenging. The following resources can help you have a conversation with your friend as you support them during this time and share appropriate resources available.

## Allow for Space and Autonomy

- **Listen to your friend and let them speak about the situation on their own terms;** their reaction may be different than you expect.
- **Be patient and do not pressure your friend to tell you anything they do not feel comfortable sharing.** It may be very hard for your friend to talk about their experience but remind them that they are not alone and that you want to help.
- **Avoid questions that require your friend to defend their choices.** These are generally questions that begin with ‘why.’ Focus instead on questions that ask ‘how.’ For example, “How did that make you feel?” is preferable to “Why did you do that?”
- **Identify their options and empower them to make the choice of what to do themselves.** Sexual or relationship violence is the ultimate violation in having control taken away from an individual. The goal is for your friend to take autonomy back. Sometimes in our desire to help a friend, we want to offer them solutions. However, this may not give them the control they need. Remember, our goal is to empower them to find their own solutions and know what resources are available to them on campus.



## Set Healthy Boundaries

Keep in mind as you support your friend or acquaintance, **setting healthy boundaries for yourself is vital.** This will help you to support them without sacrificing your own wellbeing and it will help them to receive support without becoming dependent in an unhealthy way. **Establish what you feel comfortable talking about and do not offer advice, recommendations, referrals, etc., that are beyond the scope of your knowledge or comfort level.** Additionally, this may be a difficult topic for you to discuss as well; identify that you might need someone to talk to and reach out for help if needed.

## Language that supports your friend:

- Show your support:
  - I'm sorry this happened to you.
- Demonstrate that you respect their privacy:
  - Thank you for telling me.
  - I respect your privacy in this matter.
- Offer options to support them and ask your friend what they need:
  - How can I best support you?
  - Can I suggest some possible resources to help?
  - Do you want me to help you reach out to the Title IX office?
- Listen to what they have to say and use the language that your friend is using.

## Topics and reactions to avoid:

- Phrases that blame your friend, such as:
  - What were you wearing?
  - How much did you drink?
  - You could have avoided it had you \_\_\_\_\_.
- Phrases that downplay the incident, such as:
  - It happened such a long time ago! You need to get over it.
  - It's not that big of a deal; it happens to lots of people.
  - I don't believe you.
- Reacting with anger
- Pressing for details of the incident

## Next Steps

With your friend's permission, you can talk to a **Sexual Assault Dean on Call (SADOC)** or member of the **UChicago CARES** team to get some direction about possible next steps for your friend. Most importantly, you should listen to what your friend wants and support them—whatever that is. You do not have to (nor can you) solve this problem for them, but you can support and empower them to seek their own solutions.

## University Resources

Both you and your friend can utilize the **Title IX Fact Sheet for Students** for additional information regarding Title IX, The University Policy, Disciplinary Processes, Confidential Resources, Protective Measures and Accommodations, and Individuals with Title IX Reporting Responsibilities.

### UChicago CARES (Center for Awareness, Resolution, Education, and Support)

UChicago CARES is available to speak with students about any reported incidents of sexual misconduct, and will advise all members of the community on confidentiality, options regarding receiving support services and/or accommodations, and the University's disciplinary processes.

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## Get Help for Yourself

As you support your friend, remember you may also be affected by their experience and may be experiencing a range of emotions yourself that may include frustration with the incident, confusion, guilt, and anger. These feelings are rational and justified. It can be just as important for you to seek support and to talk about your own feelings as it is for you to support your friend. **Student Counseling Services** serves as an ongoing resource to all students, which can be reached by phone at 773.834.WELL.



## Get Involved

- RSVP Programming Center **Workshops and Presentations**
- Bystander Intervention **Workshops**
- **Connect** with RSOs with vested interest in Sexual Misconduct prevention, education, and awareness, such as the **Phoenix Survivor's Alliance**
- Attend Workshops or become involved with Health Promotion and Wellness' **Peer Health Advocates & Wellczars**
- Join the **Office of the Provost's Student Advisory Board**