

Sexual Violence Disclosures – Guidance for Staff

Introduction

As a member of staff who works with students at Imperial, it is possible that a student may disclose an experience of rape or sexual violence to you. This is likely to be a very difficult decision for the student to make and a sensitive and supportive response is vital. The guidance below is intended to assist you in managing the conversation and making the appropriate referrals to specialist support services.

Information and Guidance

Imperial has a team of [Sexual Violence Liaison Officers \(SVLOs\)](#) who are available to provide impartial, confidential support and referral to specialist services to students who have experienced sexual violence. A student can self-refer to the Sexual Violence Liaison Team or you can make a referral on their behalf (with their agreement). If you are working with a student who does not wish to refer themselves to the service, but you would like advice on how to support them, you can also contact an [SVLO](#) for guidance.

The [Sexual Violence](#) webpages on the Imperial website contain information about internal and external support services for students who have experienced sexual violence. You may also wish to discuss the case with your Senior Tutor or Faculty Senior Tutor for further advice and guidance. This must be done on a “no name” basis unless the student has given their explicit consent for you to identify them.

Report Vs Disclosure

A *disclosure* is where someone tells you about their experience but does not necessarily want action to be taken.

A *report* is a way of officially lodging a complaint with the police and/or the College, to be followed up with potential action against the alleged perpetrator. Note that the College can only take action where the alleged perpetrator is a member of the College community.

A disclosing student should be given time to make an informed choice about whether or not to make a formal report to the police and/or to the College. Information about making a report to the police or the College can be found on the [Sexual Violence](#) webpages.

Confidentiality

You should listen to any disclosure sensitively and respect the decisions that a student makes. In normal circumstances confidentiality should be maintained, but you should not promise absolute confidentiality. There are circumstances in which confidentiality must be broken: where there is serious risk to a student’s safety or that of someone else, under our legal obligation in relation to terrorism and radicalisation, or because of a safeguarding issue. If you believe that there may be grounds to break confidentiality, you should contact the Director or Deputy Director of Student Services, or the Head of Security for advice on a “no-name” basis.

Managing the Conversation

- Acknowledge their courage in disclosing the incident. Listen calmly and show your concern.
- Clarify the boundaries around confidentiality (see the “Confidentiality” section above).
- Allow them to talk at their own pace.
- Sensitively establish whether an incident has taken place in the last 7 days, to ensure a student does not miss the chance to have forensic evidence captured if they wish.
- Sensitively establish whether the student is currently safe - for example, does the student live with the alleged perpetrator and do they need alternative accommodation.
- Encourage them to explore the different support options available to them as outlined on the [Sexual Violence](#) webpages.
- Ask them what they would like to happen next; whether they are wanting to make a report, or simply wanting to access support.

Things to avoid:

- Don’t interrupt them or ask for details of what happened, as they might not want to tell you everything.
- Avoid “what or why” questions that might be interpreted as blame or judgement, for example about what they were wearing or why they didn’t stop it from happening.
- Avoid expressing your own shock/upset/anger, as this may be misinterpreted by the survivor as something directed at them.
- Avoid putting pressure on them to follow a particular course of action, even if you believe it is the best thing to do.

Keeping a Record

Make a confidential record of the conversation in writing, for example a dated word document. Keep the summary factual and avoid recording any subjective views. Store the document securely where it cannot be accessed by others.

Note: The record of the conversation may be used as evidence at a later date if the student chooses to report the incident to the police or the College, so it is important that it is factual and accurate. However, it is not expected that the record of the disclosure is taken by an expert in sexual violence or someone experienced in taking statements.

Immediate Risk

In an emergency situation where there is immediate risk to the student or others you should contact [College Security](#), giving your name, the student’s name, your contact telephone number and exact location. College Security will take over management of the situation from that point, including contacting the appropriate emergency services. *Staff in Halls of Residence should follow their local arrangements for contacting the emergency services.

Looking after Yourself

Hearing a disclosure of sexual violence can be difficult. If you are in need of support, you can contact [Confidential Care](#), the College’s employee assistance programme, talk to one of the [Mental Health First Aiders](#), or contact one of the [Staff Supporters](#).