

Title IX Guidance for Faculty and Staff: How to Compassionately Address Disclosures by Survivors of Sexual Harassment

Sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, *quid pro quo* harassment, and hostile environment harassment are all considered forms of sexual harassment, and are prohibited at NEIU. While the University makes extensive efforts to provide prevention education about sexual harassment and eliminate it as a campus-wide effort, members of our campus community experience incidents on and off campus. The following is guidance for how faculty and staff can compassionately handle situations where a person shares sensitive information about being a survivor of sexual harassment.

How to Handle a Disclosure

Students or co-workers at NEIU may disclose sexual harassment to you for many reasons, including:

- The person is looking for help (most common).
- The incident has negatively affected the person's academics or employment.
- The person has safety concerns and may want support in talking to law enforcement.
- The person needs someone to confide in but isn't seeking action.

Here are ways to address a disclosure as compassionately as possible in light of your mandatory reporting requirements.

The Gentle Interruption

The goal of a gentle interruption is to let a person know of your mandatory reporting duties during a one-on-one conversation. If it feels as if a conversation may lead to a disclosure, gently interrupt to inform the person of your reporting duties so that the person can decide if they would like to share more information with you. Some sample language includes:

- "It sounds like you want to talk about a sensitive situation. Can we pause so I can share my role as a mandatory reporter with you? Then I can share safe reporting."
- "Before we go further, I want to let you know I'm a mandatory reporter, and this is what that means ...Let me tell you about the Confidential Advisor and how they can help."
- Talk in hypothetical situations.

If the person decides not to share anything further with you, that is okay. Provide confidential resources in case they are interested in talking with someone without the concern of reporting. If the person is a student, you can refer them to NEIU's Confidential Advisor or direct them to Student Counseling for an emergency appointment. The Ombuds provides a confidential space for students and employees and offers emergency appointments. You should provide the person with the [Notice of Rights and Options](#), which includes community resources. Not everyone wants to share a sexual harassment incident with anyone, even in a safe space, at NEIU.

Making a Report

If the student or co-worker does share information that activates your mandatory reporter obligations, you should contact the Title IX Office to report any relevant information that is shared (titleix@neu.edu). This includes the name of the Complainant, name of the Respondent (if you know), and any incident details shared. There is no need to ask for more information.

The Title IX Office is not permitted to share any information about the situation with you after you submit a Title IX report. This is to protect the privacy of Complainants and Respondents. The Complainant may share any information with you, but please be sensitive in not pressuring them for further information. For helpful guidance on your mandatory reporter obligations, please see this [video](#).

Supporting a Survivor

The following are supportive ways to respond to a student or co-worker who has disclosed that they are a survivor of sexual misconduct.

Say Thank You

Disclosing can be scary. It is important to acknowledge the person's courage and vulnerability to share with you. Things you can say are "thank you for trusting me" and "thank you for sharing with me."

Mirror Language

The fear of not being believed is a real concern for people who have experienced an assault or interpersonal violence. Mirror the language of the person disclosing to you. If they label their experience as "harassment," it can be harmful to use another word like "flirting." Similarly, asking certain types of questions about the situation (i.e. "why" questions) may be viewed as judgmental, disbelief, or victim-blaming. Use their language.

Empathic Listening

Pay attention to the person speaking and respond with compassion, feeling, and insight. Listen non-judgmentally. Try these tips to practice empathetic listening:

- Let the person guide the conversation and choose what they'd like to talk about.
- Try to see things from the other person's point of view.
- Acknowledge and validate the other person's perspective.
- Be aware of your biases and attitudes.
- Pay attention to the person's verbal and nonverbal cues.

Questions to Ask	What to Say	What Not to Say
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you safe?• How are you feeling?• What can I do to help?• What kind of support do you need?• How are you doing in classes/at work?• Do you have friends/family/loved ones who are supporting you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thank you for sharing this with me.• This sounds upsetting/difficult/hard.• I hear you.• I see that you're feeling...• You are not alone.• I'm here for you.• I care about you and your experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions about the incident or investigation.• Questioning the validity of the person's experience.• Why/how did this happen?• Promising outcomes.• Promising accommodations that are out of your control.• Sharing information related to the incident with other parties.• Placing blame.

Offer Resources

You should provide the person with the Notice of Rights and Options, which includes community resources. Offer to make a phone call or go to a non-profit with the person if you are comfortable doing so.

Respect the Person's Decisions and Privacy

There is no wrong way for a person to react and process a traumatic experience. It is important to empower a survivor to make their own decisions about what to do following an incident, including decisions about reporting and seeking help. The person's decision to report or seek support is the survivor's alone, but your involvement can be encouraging and positive.

Get Support for Yourself

It is important to take care of your needs as well. Supporting a survivor can take an emotional toll. Make sure you take the time to take care of yourself and process your feelings, but please be careful not to violate the survivor's privacy or confidentiality. The Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) is available and free to employees: Magellan - 866-659-3848, <https://www.magellanascend.com/>.

Provide Assistance

There are many ways that you can support a student or co-worker after an incident. Needs will vary from person to person. If the person has contacted the Title IX Office, they may be provided with supportive measures. Here are some effective approaches for you:

For Students

- Reschedule appointments or extend deadlines if possible.
- Give an extension on an assignment.
- Excuse an absence.
- Provide an alternate workspace for an exam.
- Arrange remote participation in class.
- Approve an incomplete for a course.

For Co-Workers

- Reschedule a meeting or presentation.
- Assist with a project.
- Accompany your co-worker to University events that might be stressful.

The goal is to provide compassionate help. Thank you.

References

<https://titleix.utexas.edu/mandatory-reporters>
<https://titleix.utexas.edu/supporting-a-survivor>