Tip Sheet: What to Do and Say When a Survivor Discloses GBV

A GBV incident is disclosed to you

By the survivor
look and listen
Introduce yourself. Ask how you can help. Practice respect, safety, confidentiality and non discrimination.

Is a GVB actor/referral pathway available?

Yes
Follow the GBV referral pathway to inform the survivor about available GBV services and refer if given permission by the survivor.

No
communicate accurate information about available services.

By Someone Else...
Provide up-to-date & accurate information about any services and support that may be available to the survivor. Encourage the individual to share this information safely and confidentially with the survivor so that they may disclose as willing.

Note
Do NOT seek out the GBV survivors.

Does the survivor choose to be linked to a service?

Yes
Communicate detailed information about the available resource/service including how to access it, relevant times & locations, focal points at the service, safe transport options etc. Do not share information about the survivor or their experience to anyone without explicit & informed consent of the survivor. do not record details of the incident or personal identifiers of the survivor.

No
Maintain confidentiality. Explain that the survivor may change his/her mind & seek services at a later time. If services are temporary, mobile, or available for a limited time, provide information on when the services will cease to exist.

Examples of helpful things to say:

→ “You seem to be in a lot of pain right now, would you like to go to the health clinic?”
→ “Does this place feel OK for you? Is there another place where you would feel better? Do you feel comfortable having a conversation here?”
→ “Would you like some water? Please feel free to have a seat.”

Ethiopia PSEA Network. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation & Abuse Communications Campaign. 2021

Listen

- Listen more than you speak.
- Control your curiosity and don’t press with questions.
- Comfort with words of support. Reinforce that what happened was not the survivor’s fault.
- Express sympathy and understanding.
- Let her know that you will hold the information she shares with you in confidence.
- Stay focused on the survivor and her experience, even as you may have concerns about the perpetrator or the wider context or security situation.

Examples of helpful things to say:

- “I’m glad you told me.”
- “I know this is happening to other women in the community. You are not alone.”
- “I’m sorry this happened to you.”
- “What happened was not your fault.”
- “Everything that we talk about together stays between us. I will not share anything without your permission.”
- “Please share with me whatever you want to share. You do not need to tell me more than you want to.”

Link

- Respect the survivor’s rights to make her own decisions.
- Use the GBV referral pathway and share information on services available.
- Ask if she would like any specific support from you.
- Tell the survivor she does not need to make decisions now and can access services in the future.
- Ask if anyone in her family is aware and supporting her.
- Offer to help strengthen her family support—but only if she wants this help.
- Offer to accompany the survivor for services.
- Maintain confidentiality and don’t share information about her situation without her consent.
- Make a plan to talk again with the survivor if she likes and let her know you are available.

Helpful things to say:

- “Our conversation will stay between us.”
- “There is a special program that supports women and girls in similar situations. Would you like to know about them?”
- “How can I help you?”
- “I can help to connect you to services if you like?”
- “I want to be sure your family is supporting you. Is there anything I can do to help? Do you want me to talk to anyone?”
- “Do not feel pressure to make any decisions now. You can think about things and always change your mind in the future.”
- “I want to be sure you’re okay and receiving the support you want. How can I check in with you?”