

# 6 Ways to Create a Safe Space for Survivor Stories

## BE PRESENT

Show interest and empathy for what they are saying. This includes being mindful of your body language. Offer distance if they are feeling uncomfortable and ask before offering physical contact such as hugs. React calmly to what they tell you, and validate their thoughts and feelings.

## ESTABLISH TRUST

Survivors most often disclose to people they trust such as friends and family members. Fostering a sense of trust with the people in your life will make them feel more comfortable coming to you if something is wrong. Establishing trust throughout the disclosure is important. Start by thanking them for trusting you, and telling them you believe them and that it was not their fault.

## ASK QUESTIONS THAT ARE HELPFUL, NOT HARMFUL

Avoid asking 'why' questions. These types of questions can unintentionally put blame on the survivor for being assaulted, which is never the survivor's fault. Instead, ask what they need and what you can do for them. It is also important to not push for answers.

## LISTEN TO RECEIVE, NOT TO RESPOND

When someone discloses a sexual assault to you, they want their story to be heard by someone they trust. Give the other person space to share what happened and express their emotions. Being witness to what they're going through without responding immediately, will help the other person feel more comfortable disclosing to you.

## CHECK IN AND OFFER CONTINUED SUPPORT

Healing can be a long process and is different for everyone. Check in and offer continued support. This could be helping them navigate the justice system, listening to their story, or simply letting them know you are always in their corner.

## SUPPORT THEM ON THEIR HEALING JOURNEY

Everyone copes with trauma differently. While some survivors may want to report to police, others may not. It is important to help them understand their options and support them in whatever they decide. Encourage them to seek counselling and other supports.

**#NOSTORYLEFTUNTOLD**