

Empathize

- **DON'T** tell victims what to do. Our goal is to help victims regain the power they lost and take back control in their lives. By telling victims what to do, it might have the opposite effect or even make the victim defend the abuser.
- **DON'T** respond with judgment and criticism. Victim blaming, which includes responses such as “Why did you stay?” can guilt the victim into feeling like they are responsible for their own abuse. Instead, let the victim know they deserve safety and respect.
- **DON'T** make excuses for the abuse. The bottom line is that abusive behavior is a choice that someone makes.
- **DO** carefully consider why the disclosure was brought up. Something may have triggered the victim into revealing current or past abuse.

Listen

- **DON'T** interrupt. It can be difficult for victims to come forward and you should show them that you are willing to listen to their story.
- **DON'T** be nosy. Respect their boundaries; understand that some disclosures will not reveal everything about a relationship. Don't force a victim to reveal more than they are comfortable telling you and consider whether the information you are asking for is regarding their safety or if you are just being curious.



Examples of statements of support



For more information on how to respond to disclosures and access other resources visit hscadv.org

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HAWAII STATE
**COALITION AGAINST
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

How to Respond to Disclosures of Domestic Violence

Victims are more likely to first talk to someone they know rather than a professional such as an advocate or law enforcement officer. This guide will help you navigate a conversation and provide trauma-informed care when domestic violence is disclosed.

Encourage Privacy

- **DO** move the conversation to a private space where it is safe to speak if someone starts to disclose abuse in a public area.
- **DON'T** stay near the abuser if being in public is the only option. Make sure the abuser is unable to overhear the conversation.
- **DO** hold the victim's information with care. Depending on your role and relationship to the person, you may be required to report their disclosure - you should be upfront about that. If you don't have a reporting obligation, refrain from sharing the information without the victim's consent. This is not only to respect them and their experiences but can also be a matter of safety.

Believe

- **DO** respond with statements of support. People are more likely to seek help if they feel like they are believed.
- **DO** take the abuse seriously, even if the abuse occurred months to years earlier. Whether abuse is currently happening or has been dormant for a period of time, the victim still suffered from abuse.



Respond

- **DO** give the victim options and refer to professional resources. There are domestic violence services in each county in Hawai'i. Visit hscadv.org/get-help for resources.
- **DO** focus on the victim's needs. Show support and empathy and put the focus back on the victim and go at their pace. They may not be ready to leave their relationship and you have to respect their decisions even if you disagree. They are the expert in their relationship and know their situation best.
- **DO** check your organization/employer reporting policies. Depending on the age of the victim and your occupation, you might be a mandated reporter.

- **DO** create a safety plan! A safety plan can be something simple like checking in periodically, reviewing areas at home where they feel safe or where they can go during or after an abusive episode, and knowing whom to call in times of need.
- **DON'T** feel responsible for solving the victim's situation. You don't have to know all the answers.

