

Campus Conversations—Be Ready to Support Sexual Assault Victims with these Best Practices

Compiled by the NatSci Council on Diversity and Community in collaboration with the Consortium on Gender-based Violence.

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Campus conversations about a number of topics, including culture change and diversity, may touch upon the issue of sexual assault. When beginning a conversation, it's difficult to know where it may end up. The best practices listed below may be used when planning a town hall, classroom discussion, department discussion, etc. to support sexual assault victims. They may also be useful in policy development.

1) Event best practices:

Before you begin: Presenters should be clear about their knowledge regarding topics to discuss and consider the need for guest presenters. Attendees should be given prior knowledge regarding the topic and allowed the opportunity to opt-in to the discussion.

a) All meetings should begin by outlining the general topic to be discussed and establishing the topic as a possible trigger, always assume a survivor is present. Mandatory reporters must make their status known ([MSU Title IX Mandatory Reporter Guidelines](#)) but keep in mind that campus policy allows for some events to be exempt from mandatory reporting requirements.

Example: "We will be discussing rape and sexual assault, including institutional responses to victims of sexual assault. This is a sensitive topic which may trigger distressing reactions in some individuals"

Example: "Many people in this room have experienced sexual trauma or knows someone who has. If you feel overwhelmed or panicked, please do whatever you need. There are exits (note exits) if you need to step outside at any point, remember that focusing on your breathing can be very helpful."

Example: "Per university policy I am a mandatory *reporter* and must report specific RVSM incidents to Title IX Office of Institutional Equity and MSU police, however, we may discuss this topic hypothetically."

Mandatory Reporter Policy: "Public awareness or activism events and other public forums at which students or employees disclose experiences with relationship violence, stalking, or sexual misconduct are not considered notice to the University for the purposes of this Policy unless the victim also initiates a complain under this Policy (e.g. Take Back the Night, town hall meetings, focus groups, open forums, protests)."

b) The following information should be made available on flyers and projected during the entire meeting. *Italicized resources are confidential (non-mandatory reporting).*

-MSU sexual assault program 24 hour crisis hotline: [517-372-6666](tel:517-372-6666)

-MSU Sexual Assault Program [Crisis Chat](#)

- Rape abuse incest national network information and crisis hotline: [1-800-656-4673](tel:1-800-656-4673)
- Individual and group counseling: [Sexual Assault Program Resources](#)
- Contact information to continue conversations with presenters

c) A crisis intervention advocate can be present at discussions and their presence made known during the introduction. These individuals are volunteers that have received training to assist those who may need support during these conversations and are NOT mandatory reporters. Example: “Today we have [advocate name(s)] to provide crisis intervention should anybody feel triggered or overwhelmed by our discussions today. If you’d like to speak with an advocate outside the room, make eye contact or tap them on the shoulder as you exit.”

-To request an advocate: At least one week before your event, fill out the online form from the MSU Sexual Assault Program (check the “Safe Space” box): [Advocate Request](#)

2) **Policy development Best-Practices:** On-campus discussions of sexual assault policy should proceed with continuing input from or in the presence of researchers or workers in the sexual assault field.

In the emotionally charged public discourse about sexual violence, it is often the case that assertions are made without reference to research data. Such assertions not only undermine rational discourse but also damage individual victims of sexual violence. -Lisak et al., 2010 ([PDF](#))

Input from all members of our community is important at this time but deductive reasoning about sexual assault by non-experts is almost always influenced by acceptance of rape myths. There is a brand new entity on campus whose job is to inform conversations and provide feedback from across campus.

-Future conversations can utilize their guidance regarding topics to cover and topics that distract from moving forward. Any future policies can be vetted by these group to ensure they align with current and accepted research and university practices:

[MSU RVSM Workgroup](#)

[Consortium on Gender-Based Violence](#)

-NatSci member: Apryl Pooley, PhD, Neuroscience Program, pooleyap@msu.edu

-The Title IX Office of Institutional Equity can provide information on current campus policies:

[MSU Title IX](#)

If you are interested in starting the journey to becoming knowledgeable in this field, here is a large review of many concepts essential to sexual assault conversations:

[Literature Review](#)