



## What To Do

### When Someone Discloses Violence or Abuse Experiences

- 1. Let them know if there are limits to your ability to keep their information confidential.**  
Tell the person if you are obligated to share their information with any individual or agency, law enforcement, or Department for Children & Families or Adult Protective Services.
- 2. Validate the person's feelings.** Let the person know that you believe them and that you are **concerned about their safety**. Helpful things to say:
  - I'm glad you told me.
  - Many people I work with have had similar experiences.
  - I'm sorry this happened to you.
  - It's not your fault.
  - You don't have to be alone.
  - It's normal to feel...angry, confused, conflicted, etc.
- 3. Talk about other people who can help.** Tell the person that there are people (advocates) who work specifically with people who have experienced violence or abuse, and **with whom they can speak confidentially**. Advocates can talk to a person privately and keep information private. Ask if they want you to help contact an advocate.

#### **IF THE PERSON WANTS TO TALK TO A COMMUNITY-BASED ADVOCATE:**

Give the person information about how to contact a hotline, support line or chat/text line. Offer them a phone or device and a private room. Offer to leave the room while they connect with an advocate.

**If the person wants you to initiate a phone call**, dial the hotline, explain who you are, why you are calling, and that you will or will not be in the room for the rest of the conversation. Tell the advocate that the person would like to speak with a confidential advocate.\* Pass the phone to the person.

\*While many advocates are not mandated reporters, some are. If the advocate who answers the hotline is a mandated reporter, she or he may be able to get a non-mandated advocate to talk to the person. The person can also call anonymously.

4. **Do not make promises or assurances that are beyond your control** (i.e., “We’re going to make sure this will never happen again,” or “You don’t have to be afraid anymore.”)
5. **If the person has immediate needs**, explore options, listen carefully, and reflect what you are hearing. Encourage the person to seek medical attention if there may be injuries (internal or external) or other medical needs.
6. **Let the person know they can contact a hotline or chat line anytime.**
7. **Accept the person’s choices about what to do next.** Remain calm, and be aware of your own personal beliefs or biases. Remember that reporting violence or abuse often does not result in positive outcomes for victims. People are the experts in their own situations. Do not confuse what a law or policy may require you to do with what is “right” or “best” for the person. Even if you have to disclose information against the wishes of the person, it may be possible for you to continue to be a supportive person in their life if you are responding to the person’s needs as they define them.
8. **If you have to make a report to Adult Protective Services or the Department for Children and Families**, give the person choices and support them to plan for their safety.

They could call APS/DCF and self-report in private. Make sure they are aware if you will also have to make a report to fulfill your mandate. They could call APS/DCF and have you there when they report. They could be present while you call APS/DCF.

Take the time to understand any concerns they have and support them to think about and plan for their safety after the report has been made.

9. **Consultation, help and support are available for you, too.** If you have questions or want information on safety planning or other resources, **find contact information at [vtnetwork.org/get-help](http://vtnetwork.org/get-help)** for local and statewide expertise.