

Parents, carers & other trusted adults

Speaking to young people about sexual violence

Sexual violence or sexual harm is any form of sexual behaviour that you don't want or freely agree to. This may include rape and sexual assault but also, for young people especially, may be unwanted sexual comments, bullying, and harassment (both online and off), or being shown sexual imagery and content that they didn't want to see, such as pornography or nude pictures.

Creating a safe environment where children can feel heard and know they can come to adults with problems.

We have experience of working with young people who have not felt able to share what has happened to them with their family. Survivors of sexual violence often experience feelings of shame and self-blame; this can make it hard for them to get the support they may need.

They may be afraid of the consequences of speaking to someone or afraid of the reaction and how knowing this could change the person's perception of the young person.

As a society, it would be incredible if everyone affected by sexual violence knew that they had someone to turn to for help. Something we can all do is to create spaces where young people can feel seen and heard. This might sound like a difficult thing to do but by having an open mind and a non-judgemental attitude, you can begin to open up conversations with the young people in your life.

We can lay the foundations for this by talking to young people about issues such as consent, safety and personal boundaries. These are conversations that young people will be having in their education setting through the various workshops that we deliver through our prevention programme in secondary schools. However, making this link with home life is the ideal way to ensure that if something does happen the young people in your life know where to turn. This can also help to reduce stigma for getting help and for the young person to know what your reaction would be to a disclosure.

For more information on sexual violence and consent please follow this link to our website www.compasscentre.org/information

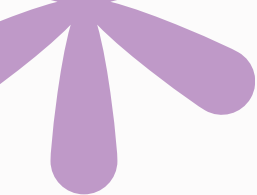
*“How important it is
to speak to
someone you can
trust”*

*-A quote from our research
with young people*

Responding to disclosures

A disclosure, is when someone chooses to share something with you that has happened to them. Responding to disclosures about sexual violence sounds scary. It is a very serious thing, that takes a lot of bravery and courage for someone to speak about. We, as adults, can do our very best by the young people in our lives to respect their decision to tell us and recognise their courage in our reactions.

We can do this by setting the scene. Create a space and time to hear what they have to say. Make sure the space is private and that you will not be interrupted. Be fully present and not respond to your mobile phone. This will show the young person that you are present and want to hear what they have to say, for as long as it takes.



Responding to disclosures - continued

Young people have reported to us that having difficult conversations where they have to sit in front of the person and use eye contact, can make a difficult conversation feel worse. For some people going for a walk or drive might work better for them and allow them to be fully honest.

Then the most important thing we can do is believe what they are telling us. Try not to minimise their experience or explain away someone's behaviour. Don't place blame on the young person, they did not consent to what has happened to them and we all respond differently when faced with traumatic events. The blame always lies with the perpetrator.

The key is to really listen to what they have to say, notice the feelings they are exhibiting and try to understand how this has been impacting them.

“How to talk to parents/carers about experiencing sexual violence”

-A quote from our research with young people

They will be watching for your reaction too. In this moment, try to stay calm. Show the young person that you hear them by reflecting back what they are saying. Ask clarifying questions that aren't too intrusive. Try not to push for more details than they are willing to give at this time.

Take the time to understand what their wishes are as to what happens next. What happened to them was not their choice and one way of giving some power back to them is to be involved in decision making about what happens next.

And thank them for telling you. Take the time to recognise their bravery and to reassure them that they have done the right thing. Ensure that they know the door is open to talk about this again any time that they need to.

Support for young people

The first thing to think about when seeking support for the young person is your duties around child protection. If the young person is under the age of 16, they cannot legally consent to sexual acts. If they are under 18, they legally cannot consent to some sexual acts such as intimate images. As a trusted adult it is your duty to the young person to take action.

If the young person is in immediate danger call 999.

If you are concerned about a young person or they have made a disclosure to you, you can call Shetland Duty social work for advice. This may lead to a child protection report being made. From there the social work team will make a decision on next steps and provide support to the young person. For more information see the [Safer Shetland website](#).^{*1}

You can also speak to the young person's school. Teachers will be aware of the support available for the young person and may be able to put measures in place to make sure school feels like a safe space for them.

You may also consider making a referral to our service. We provide free & confidential help to non-abusive people of all genders (age 13+) in Shetland who have been affected by sexual violence, no matter what happened or when. This includes specialist information, resources, emotional and practical support, counselling, and advocacy. For more information [please see here](#),^{*2} where you can also find a self-referral form.





Support for young people - continued

If the young person is under the age of 13 you may wish to consider a referral to **Shetland Women's aid**.^{*3}

If an assault has happened in the last 7 days and the young person is over 16, you may wish to discuss a self referral for medical examination. Information about this can be found **here**.^{*4}

Support for you

Handling a situation like the above can be very stressful. You may find yourself asking how did I let this happen? If it happened a while ago you may ask yourself, why didn't I know? And why didn't they tell me at the time? These are common questions that are completely understandable.

It can take a long time for someone to feel able to make a disclosure and some never do. Some people feel the need to pretend it didn't happen to allow themselves to survive. For some people, they may struggle to find the words for what happened to them. Whatever the reason, they are sharing this with you now.

Caring for yourself is important too. While we primarily support survivors, we can also support parents and loved ones affected by sexual violence. However, we do have a policy that we only support one person per household at any one time. If the young person is accessing support with us, we may be able to offer you resources and advice.

We are a branch of Rape Crisis Scotland. Nationally Rape Crisis Scotland runs a helpline that offers confidential short-term, crisis and initial support by phone, email, webchat and text. More information can be found **here**.^{*5}

If you do make a child protection report you will also be offered support along the way.

Self-care is also very important. Take space for yourself during this time. Think about what your needs are and what you need to be able to cope with the situation.

For more information and advice see our **website**.^{*6}

You can email us on contact@compasscentre.org or call us on 01595 747174

“Normalise it, it is okay to speak up, like, there is no need to be embarrassed”

-A quote from our research with young people

Websites referenced in resource

*1 - www.safershetland.com/child-protection/for-parents-and-carers

*2 - www.compasscentre.org/help-support/

*3 - www.shetlandwa.org/children/how-can-we-help/

*4 - www.compasscentre.org/help-self-referral/

*5 - www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-helpline/

*6 - www.compasscentre.org/

