

Supporting survivors of sexual assault & misconduct

This guide aims to educate and equip the UQ Community with important information on how to support survivors of sexual assault and misconduct.

Additional support is available on the UQ Respect website.

www.respect.uq.edu.au

Image courtesy of the UQ Ally Network.



The University of Queensland's position

The University of Queensland is committed to the student experience and delivering an innovative, dynamic and integrated university life. It is vital that we foster a safe and respectful environment, free from all forms of sexual violence, assault and misconduct.

The University of Queensland must do more to prevent, address and respond to sexual assault and misconduct by providing more support services to survivors and taking a stronger stance on prevention.

What is sexual assault and misconduct?

Any sexual act that is unwanted, coerced or physically enforced is a form of sexual assault and misconduct.

Sexual assault and misconduct are unacceptable acts that can happen to anyone. Such behaviour is never the survivor's fault and will not be tolerated at The University of Queensland.

What is consent?

Consent is a vital part of sexual respect. Consent can only be freely and voluntarily given by a person with the cognitive capacity to do so.

For example, you do not have consent if your sexual partner is:

- under force
- unconscious or asleep
- under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- under threat or intimidation
- in fear of bodily harm

This is not an exhaustive list.

Emergency contacts

If you are experiencing an emergency you can call:

- **000** for immediate police or ambulance assistance
- **UQ Security** 07 3365 3333 for on campus assistance
- **1800 Respect** 1800 737 732 for 24/7 counselling support

How can I support survivors of sexual assault and misconduct?

When someone experiences sexual assault or misconduct, the people they choose to talk to play a vital role. It can be difficult to know how to respond and you may be unsure about how to help.

Read the steps below to make sure that your response is non-judgemental, compassionate and supportive.

1. Listen

You should provide a safe and supportive environment for the survivor to tell their story.

You should always

- give them your full attention
- ignore external interruptions
- nod occasionally to show understanding and support
- use verbal cues like *yes* and *I understand*

You should never

- interrupt them
- ask why questions
Why were you walking alone?
Why were you wearing that?
Why did you go see them?
- talk about your own experiences

The experience and impact of sexual assault and misconduct is personal, traumatic and different for everyone.

It's important to recognise that some survivors may be very open about their experience, while others may be closed. All of these reactions are normal and it's important to support a survivor in making choices that feel comfortable to them.

Contact the Sexual Misconduct Support Unit

sexualmisconductsupport@uq.edu.au
www.respect.uq.edu.au/sms-unit
+61 7 3443 1000

You can contact the SMS Unit Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm.

How can I support survivors of sexual assault and misconduct?

2. Support

Acknowledge the survivor's experience and the difficulty they faced in disclosing it. You should thank them for telling you and check that they are safe.

Remember that survivors may not be ready to discuss all the details of what has happened and they do not need to do this in order to access appropriate support.

Use phrases like

I'm here for you

Thank you for telling me

You're not alone

These phrases help show support for the survivor without pressuring them to speak further about the details of what happened.

3. Refer

The best thing you can do is to outline the support services that are available to the survivor so that they can make their own decision about their next steps.

It's important you don't provide a survivor with misleading advice and instead, put them in touch with experts who can help them.

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Where can I refer?

There is support available at UQ and externally to support survivors of sexual assault and misconduct as well as the wider UQ Community. Support services are outlined below.

UQ Information line

If you're not sure where to refer a survivor you can call the UQ Information line. The line is open during business hours, Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm.

Phone: +61 7 3443 1000

UQ Sexual Misconduct Support Unit (SMS Unit)

The SMS Unit is a safe and supportive place for students to receive guidance around sexual assault and misconduct.

Email: sexualmisconductsupport@uq.edu.au

First Responder Network (FRN)

The FRN is made up of members of the UQ Community who can answer questions about UQ's reporting process and support options.

Web: www.respect.uq.edu.au/first-responder-network

Community Specialist Support Groups

There are support services in the community that provide specialised support to vulnerable groups. You can show survivors different community groups available to them so they can choose to contact a support group they feel comfortable with.

Web: www.health.qld.gov.au/sexualassault/html/contact

What about the police?

The SMS Unit can provide support to survivors to help them report the incident to the Queensland Police Service.

Never force a survivor to go to the police. It is important that they make the choice about their next steps.

How can I support survivors of sexual assault and misconduct?

4. Report

If the survivor gives you permission to share their experience, you or the survivor can submit a confidential online form to the Sexual Misconduct Support Unit.

www.respect.uq.edu.au/report

Why make a report?

To improve our policies and support services, UQ needs to track and report on incidents of sexual assault and misconduct.

Reports can be kept anonymous and no further action needs to be taken. The choice is with the survivor on how they intend to proceed.

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Remember to look after yourself

Hearing another person's experience of sexual assault can be difficult and it's normal to be impacted by the experience.

It's important to be able to recognise signs you are being impacted so that you can also take care of your own wellbeing.

Vicarious Trauma is when we experience negative changes in our internal experiences as a result of exposure to other people's trauma.

You may be experiencing vicarious trauma if you

- find it difficult to manage your emotions
- feel helpless and powerless
- lose a sense of hope or meaning
- have difficulty sleeping
- feel unusually irritable or angry

Help manage the impacts of vicarious trauma by engaging with our Sexual Misconduct Support Unit and First Responder Network.

You can also manage the impacts of vicarious trauma by seeking comfort from your own support network and by participating in grounding activities such as exercise or mindfulness.

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Future initiatives and feedback

The Sexual Misconduct and Support Unit is newly established with a long-term commitment to ensuring the UQ environment is safe, respectful and free of all forms of sexual assault and misconduct.

Over the next 12 months the SMS Unit will tailor its focus to deliver activities that contribute to the following goals:

- Providing a supportive and safe place for students.
- Ensuring appropriate psychological and academic adjustments are made for survivors.
- Raising student awareness and engagement around sexual assault and misconduct.
- Delivering training and support to the UQ community.
- Developing strategic prevention techniques.
- Liaising collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders to ensure best practice.

If you have feedback or would like to find out how you can support these initiatives please contact the SMS Unit.

sexualmisconductsupport@uq.edu.au