

# Disclosures (Part 2): Responding to Student Disclosures

## Trauma-Sensitive Educator Responses

The point of initiation of disclosures is of the utmost importance for whether disclosure will take place. With the following suggestions, educators can ensure safety for a young person in trauma-sensitive ways:

- Withhold from expressing visible shock, anger, or sadness during the disclosure, so the child/youth does not experience additional worry from the situation.
- The child should not be led to believe everything disclosed will be kept secret.
- Do not overpromise or step outside personal/professional boundaries.

It is important to communicate in a similar manner as the student disclosing and to use developmentally appropriate language/vocabulary. Some examples of appropriate responses include, but are not limited to:

When a student mentions something to you discreetly in a private setting but doesn't fully initiate a disclosure	→	"You mentioned something had happened outside of class/school. Would you like to tell me more about what happened?"
When the disclosure is finished or at any point when a student uncomfortable	→	"It is good that you have confided in me. I hope you don't feel as though any of this is your fault."
When a child appears to be unsure, take back information told, or change narratives	→	"You do not have to tell me everything right away, but I believe you, and I am glad you are sharing it with me."

When supporting students through disclosures the SK Child Abuse Protocol, 2019 is congruent with the broader literature in its application of active listening skills (Holden, 2009). Many acronyms and tables have been used to share the proper steps and explanations on what to do during a disclosure. The following summary of the Receive, Reassure, Report (RRR), an approach created from a synthesis of many approaches, including the CAP, can give educators some practical suggestions for the successful facilitation of a student disclosure (CAP, 2019; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2015; British Council, 2019).

## RECEIVE

- Move to a suitable environment where the student is free to say what they desire comfortably, away from areas with other students or staff, but that is still comfortable to them (e.g. classroom during lunch hour).
- Be patient and assume the position of someone who is open and ready to listen, rather than of someone who is anticipating what they may hear. Allow for the student to control the start of their process, and for the student to use the language of their choosing.
- Actively listen - Reframe using the child's own words to confirm listening, and understanding. Refrain from asking questions unrelated to what you have heard.
- Keep consistent eye contact with the child throughout the disclosure.
- Use open-ended questions and speak with appropriate vocabulary for the child's level of comprehension.
- Maintain poise and emotional regulation regardless of how difficult it may be as the child/youth sees you as a trusted adult.

## RESPOND / REASSURE

- Reassure the child that they are safe and that this is not their fault.
- Reassure them that it was admirable and societally correct to share with you and that you are proud of that ability to talk about the topic.
- Verbally acknowledge you believe the child; avoid only implying belief.
- Address any concerns about the student's immediate safety.
- Avoid asking the same question more than once or probing for more detail.
- Listen openly; do not respond in an emotionally elevated or distressed fashion.
- After disclosure, immediately write down all details to ensure accurate information. Avoid any biases and try to write down event details exactly as how the child described them.
- Avoid making any promises that cannot be kept (e.g. I won't tell anyone).

## REPORT

- Report **immediately** to the closest Ministry of Social Services Child Protection Line and/or to the police. (Do not wait for any reason including feeling like you do not have all the information.)
- Report even if you think someone else might be reporting or already has reported this abuse.

Responding to disclosures is one of the many ways school personnel interact with and support students. Being able to approach the process in a trauma-sensitive way allows for the best experience for the child/student who finds themselves in what can be a very frightful situation. When educators are aware of and feel confident in the ways to respond, they are better equipped to support the young person.

For more information on disclosures and the duty to report, it is encouraged that educators continuously review the *Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol 2019*. A physical copy is always available to educators at their institutions. Online access can be found at:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/justice-crime-and-the-law/child-protection/child-abuse-and-neglect>

## Saskatchewan Child Abuse Protocol 2019



A commitment by the Saskatchewan Government, police, professionals and organizations to collaborate in an effort to prevent and investigate child abuse and provide support to child victims of abuse.

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