



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Awhina Hunga Whara

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How to handle disclosures of abuse

**MATES &
DATES**

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ACC's Mates & Dates programme is being delivered in your school. Its aim is to teach young people healthy relationship skills and behaviours to help prevent sexual and dating violence.



What is sexual and dating violence?

Sexual violence:

Anything sexual that happens to someone without their consent. It includes rape, the threat of rape, attempted rape, sexual harassment, sexual coercion and sexual contact with force. Sexual violence involves victims who do not consent, or who are unable to consent or refuse to allow the act. It can be carried out by anyone, regardless of their relationship with the victim, and in any social setting.

Dating violence:

Controlling, abusive, and aggressive behaviour in a romantic relationship. This includes verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, or a combination of those including stalking. It can happen in person, online and via text, and can occur in straight and gay relationships. It is a term that is often used for unhealthy relationships between young people.

Your students may want to talk to you about what they learn during Mates & Dates, or it may give them the courage to talk to you about either their own experiences, or experiences their friends have had, or are currently having. This resource will provide you with some guidelines on how to respond to students who may disclose experiences of sexual or dating violence.

How to handle disclosures of sexual or dating violence

Many young people never disclose experiences of sexual or dating violence, so if a student chooses to share this with you it is because they trust and believe that you will help them. Responding to a disclosure in an appropriate way is an important factor in stopping the violence, reducing the effects of violence and meeting the needs of the young person.



If a student discloses experiences of violence to you, it is important to:

- remain calm. By doing so you will be sending the message to them that you are a safe person to speak with
- acknowledge their experience by letting them know that you take the disclosure seriously
- listen to the student and ask them what they would like to do next, suggest that you could seek specialist support together, and, if they would like, accompany them to an agency in your community that your school has a relationship with
- provide options – rather than telling them what to do. Being abused means being in a situation that you have no control over, so it is important that the student feels like they can regain some control over how they seek help
- remain open-minded. Victims of sexual or dating violence are often afraid that they will be blamed for what has happened to them so avoid asking questions or making comments that could be considered judgemental
- acknowledge how difficult it must be for the student to share their experience with you
- only tell the people who need to be involved in seeking support for the student as privacy may be a major concern for the student
- let them know you need to talk with people about this to ensure their safety if there is an immediate risk to the student, for example if the abuser is a person at their school or someone they will have to spend time with. This may involve calling the Police or Child, Youth and Family
- refer to your school's internal policies for managing disclosures or incidents of sexual and dating violence and follow the agreed procedure
- follow the Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident Protocols if appropriate. <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EmergencyManagement/Responding.aspx>

How to handle disclosures of perpetration of harmful sexual behaviour

If a student discloses that they, or someone they know, has been perpetrating harmful behaviour or harmful sexual behaviour, you should:

- stay calm. If you react with anger they may not continue to talk to you about the issue
- acknowledge that it must have been difficult for them to tell you this and let them know that you will work with them to get them help
- let them know that it is important that you speak with someone in order to ensure their safety and the safety of others
- act quickly to seek help and support from an agency in your community that your school has a relationship with. Make sure that you keep the student informed and let them know what will happen next
- depending on the situation, ensure measures are put in place to stop the student who is perpetrating harm being left alone with other young people or children
- refer to your school's internal policies for managing disclosures or incidents of sexual and dating violence and follow the agreed procedure
- follow the Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident Protocols if appropriate. <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EmergencyManagement/Responding.aspx>

One of the best things you can do is talk to your colleagues about how you can support one another to manage disclosures safely and appropriately.

Where to go for help

- For more information on where to seek help about **sexual violence**, including local specialist services, go to the TOAH-NNEST website www.toah-nnest.org.nz
- For more information about where to seek help about **dating violence**, including local specialist services, go to It's not OK at <http://www.areyouok.org.nz/home.php>
- Following **sexual assault or abuse**, you can contact ACC's Sensitive Claims Unit confidentially on 0800 735 566 or go to www.findsupport.co.nz
- For more information about Mates & Dates please visit www.acc.co.nz/matesanddates



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