How to Respond to Disclosures of Sexual Harassment and Assault
Information for Teaching Fellows and Research Assistants
Your Role

In your role as a teaching fellow or research assistant, you may receive disclosures from students regarding potential sexual or gender-based harassment. If the disclosure is a potential violation of the Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy, you must contact a Title IX coordinator. You are responsible for doing this because it is important that those seeking your assistance are fully informed of their options and resources. In addition, Title IX coordinators need this information to identify and address patterns of harassment and discrimination.

When you speak to a student, you can explain how the University Title IX officer and FAS Title IX coordinators ensure that students have access to resources and understand the Policy and available options. You can also share that reaching out to the Title IX Office is not the same as filing a complaint. It does not automatically launch an investigation, and students are not obligated to share any information if they don't want to.

Title IX coordinators:

- Discuss and, when appropriate, implement interim measures. Interim measures help community members continue with their education, research, and participation in all aspects of university life at Harvard. Interim measures may include restrictions on contact, course-schedule alteration, and increased monitoring of certain areas of campus.
- Explain the sexual harassment policy and procedures, including how to file a formal complaint or request an informal resolution.
- Discuss options, including University-based support and community-based services.

Sometimes a student may want help addressing a problematic situation on their own before it rises to the level of a formal complaint. Title IX coordinators are available to suggest strategies and techniques for confronting and stopping harassing language and behavior in a way that feels right to the student.

While Title IX coordinators handle information with utmost sensitivity, maintaining as much privacy as possible, they may need to share information with those who have a need to know.
Do Your P.A.R.T.

When a student comes to you with a possible disclosure, it is important that you approach the conversation by doing your P.A.R.T.

Privacy
If possible, delicately remind the student that you are not a confidential resource before they disclose information to you. Reinforce that you are concerned for their well-being and want to provide assistance, and that their privacy is still a priority. However, you wouldn't want them to share something with the expectation of confidentiality. Should they wish to maintain confidentiality, direct them to appropriate resources, such as OSAPR (see Sexual Harassment Resources).

Appreciate
This is a vital moment. It may be the first time the student is telling someone about this issue. You may want to use language that supports the student while avoiding judgment:

“Thank you for telling me that, I appreciate you sharing something so difficult.”

“The University takes this seriously, and so do I.”

“I’m sorry you’re going through this.”

Responsibility
You have a responsibility to consult with a Title IX coordinator: “I am going to let the Title IX coordinator know we talked so we can make sure you have access to resources and understand the options available to you. This doesn’t mean you’re filing a complaint. It doesn’t launch an investigation and you are not obligated to share any information if you don’t want to. If you’d prefer, I can talk to the Title IX coordinator for you or with you.”

Tell Someone
Agree on a plan to connect with a Title IX coordinator. If they’re interested, help them connect to OSAPR or other resources as well. Ask if they want you to follow up with them later and if so, how they would like you to contact them.
Frequently Asked Questions

What if my best friend tells me something in confidence?
If someone approaches you in your capacity as a close personal friend and not in your capacity as a representative of the University, the FAS may not require you to tell a Title IX coordinator. If you are unsure if you have a responsibility to report, contact a Title IX coordinator to discuss the issue.

How do I know if something violates policy?
University officers cannot decide for themselves whether a problematic situation or incident violates the Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment Policy. If you think that something might potentially constitute a violation, contact a Title IX coordinator to discuss the issue. You do not need to identify the parties involved during the initial conversation, as you and the Title IX coordinator work together to determine whether the situation warrants notification.

Why would someone want to make a confidential disclosure?
• If they need medical advocacy or legal accompaniment.
• If they are unsure about how to classify what happened or what steps they want to take.
• If they know they do not want to make a formal report but are in need of support.

What are some best practices?
• Focus on their feelings and concerns instead of the details of what happened.
• Offer choices, but don’t push them to make a decision.
• Use their words, allowing them to define their own experience.
• Avoid “why” questions that could be misinterpreted as judgments about behavior.
• Only make promises you can keep.
• If you don’t know the answer, it’s best to say, “I’m not sure, let me find out.”
• It’s okay to say, “This isn’t something I’m good at, but there are people at Harvard who are.”
Sexual Harassment Resources

Confidential University Resources

OFFICE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE (OSAPR)
24-hour Hotline: 617-495-9100; Office: 617-496-5636; osapr.harvard.edu

COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
Urgent 24-hour: 617-495-5711; camhs.huhs.harvard.edu

HARVARD UNIVERSITY CHAPLAINS
617-495-5529; chaplains.harvard.edu

UNIVERSITY OMBUDSMAN OFFICE
617-495-7748; ombudsman.harvard.edu

RESPONSE PEER COUNSELORS
617-495-9600, 8:00 p.m.–8:00 a.m.; osapr.harvard.edu/pages/response

HARVARD COLLEGE OFFICE OF BGLTQ STUDENT LIFE
(FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS)
617-496-5716; bgltq.fas.harvard.edu

Other University Resources

UNIVERSITY TITLE IX OFFICE
617-496-0200; titleix.harvard.edu

OFFICE FOR DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ODR)
617-495-3786; odr.harvard.edu

HARVARD UNIVERSITY POLICE DEPARTMENT URGENT
Cambridge: 617-495-1212; Longwood: 617-432-1212
Harvard Business School: 617-495-1215

Community Resources

BOSTON AREA RAPE CRISIS CENTER (BARCC)
800-841-8371; barcc.org

FENWAY HEALTH (BGLTQ-FOCUSED SERVICES)
617-267-0900; fenwayhealth.org
GSAS Title IX Coordinators

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