

An Introduction to the USVSV Brunel 'First Responder' Programme

What is the purpose of the programme?

Sexual violence and trauma are complex and there is no 'one size fits all' guide on how to respond to disclosures or support survivors. However, this programme is designed to increase awareness and confidence on these issues, provide signposts to further reading and resources, and support staff to feel equipped to provide assistance if/when a disclosure occurs. The programme may raise more questions than it answers for some participants, but we encourage them to use these questions to further interrogate their own practice and beliefs once they have left the sessions.

Over the course of the two sessions, a range of activities about how to recognise, understand and respond to sexual violence have been designed to provoke productive thought, conversation and action. The programme has been developed to cater for participants with a range of expertise and job roles, and takes account of varied professional and personal experiences.

The two sessions are separated by theme:

Session one (4 hours) is primarily intended to encourage critical reflection on social and cultural attitudes towards sexual violence. It introduces and explains the role of 'first responder', explores definitions and existing perceptions of sexual violence, and encourages reflection on how/when disclosures may occur and the differing needs and experiences of different survivors of sexual violence. It also starts to consider how a helpful response to a disclosure may look.

Session two (4 hours) provides practical advice on how to behave in a disclosure encounter. It suggests and explores some of the key skills and behaviours required by a first responder, signposts support services available to a student and how to access these, and recommends some techniques for helping to calm down distressed students. Participants will also be encouraged to think about how to look after themselves when dealing with disclosures. The content of this session will also enable staff to support students with a range of matters beyond disclosures of sexual violence.

How should the programme be led?

The programme is designed to be led by two facilitators whose roles are to keep the group on track, monitor the time, and be sensitive to the needs, emotions and voices of everyone in the discussion to try to make sure that everyone is looked after and heard. Drawing on our evaluation of the programme to date, we recommend:

- i. that at least one of the facilitators has significant experience of receiving disclosures and knowledge of sexual violence;
- ii. at least one of the facilitators has knowledge of the University's processes and policies on sexual violence, misconduct and complaints, as well as student support;
- iii. one or both facilitators is experienced in facilitation.

Who is the programme intended for?

The 'first responder' role is not an accredited or officially-assigned position. It is an interim responsibility that could fall upon any member of staff in the University at any time if a student chooses to disclose to them. For this reason, the programme should be offered to all staff within the University, but those in student-facing or frontline posts may be prioritised due to their increased probability of dealing with disclosures.

<http://usvreact.eu/>

For members of staff who are more knowledgeable in this field, the topics will act as a reminder or a refresher, and these participants (if they choose to) may be able to help others in the group by offering university-specific anonymised examples of disclosures or procedures which have occurred previously. These accounts should be encouraged and welcomed in the sessions if they feel productive and if time allows.

What else should be considered when running the programme?

Where possible, we recommend that groups are composed of staff from varied sectors and departments rather than the same teams. If some degree of selection is possible, we also recommend that groups are diverse in gender, race/ethnic background and age. We encourage consideration of accessibility in the planning of these sessions. Please host the sessions in a wheelchair-accessible building and room, and provide electronic PowerPoint slides for participants at least four days prior to the sessions. Please check with participants in advance of the session if anyone has any relevant access requirements (e.g. visual or hearing impairments, anxiety).

It is important to create a 'safer' environment where possible: provide a content note for discussions of sexual violence, victim blaming and trauma; book a nearby room which can be used as quiet space in case a participant needs some time out; and leave space in your room layout so that participants can easily leave the room or the group and do not feel confined. Remind participants that we do not know the backgrounds and experiences of people within the group, and many first responders will also be survivors of sexual violence and, with that in mind, we should treat each other with care.

Where and when should we hold the programme?

In addition to the accessibility considerations noted above we also suggest, based on our evaluation data, choosing a light and airy room. The room should be large enough to fit a semi-circle of chairs for 12 participants and two facilitators at one end for large group discussions, and four clusters of tables and chairs at the other end of the room to be used for breakout activities. If costs permit, we recommend providing water, tea, coffee and biscuits for participants to access throughout the day.

Our evaluations indicate that the two sessions are best held on separate days. Some participants preferred a break between the two days (3-7 days at most), but you may also wish to provide the option for participants to attend over two consecutive days, depending on their working patterns.

How should the Facilitator's Guide be used?

Suggested timings are included in the guide to help facilitators to keep track of the schedule, but these should be used very loosely: if an important conversation is happening, sometimes it is best to allow it to continue and then shorten a different activity later.

The documents and handouts needed for the programme have been assigned individual codes (e.g. USV6, USV10) in the Facilitator's Guide, the Resources Needed list, and in their document file name to indicate when they should be used in the sessions. The Resources Needed list provides details of the printing required for each session. As indicated, some materials will also need to be cut up in advance of the sessions (we recommend laminating these for repeated use).

The guides and slides can be adjusted according to your context, demographics and the needs of your university and participants, as well as the expertise and preferences of the facilitators.

Where possible, we recommend evaluating the programme using questionnaires before and after attendance.

