

# TRAUMA-INFORMED MEETINGS & SEEKING SURVIVOR INPUT

## A RESOURCE GUIDE



### A Trauma-Informed Approach

#### WHY

Given prevalence rates, there will be survivors in most meetings and spaces

Want meetings to be a place where survivors feel comfortable and participation is not re-traumatizing

These strategies help everyone feel comfortable

#### HOW

Ensure meeting spaces, programs, & services:

- attend to survivors' physical and emotional safety
- promote clear communication
- respect survivors' choices regarding engagement

### Planning With a Purpose

Considerations for meetings on issues related to relationship violence and sexual misconduct (RVSM)

### FOR MEETING PLANNERS

#### GOALS

What are the specific goals and purpose of your meeting?

#### ATTENDEES

Who will be in the room, and whose voices may be absent?

Are you inviting survivors of RVSM to the meeting? If so, what are you specifically hoping to learn from survivors' input?

Why are survivors' perspectives important for your purpose?

Keep in mind that the perspective of one survivor does not represent how all survivors may feel.

#### COMMUNICATION

Is this a one-time request to meet, or are you anticipating ongoing communication and feedback?

#### COMPENSATION

What are potential benefits to survivors in participating, and is compensation appropriate for their expertise?

#### PRIVACY & USE OF INFORMATION

Will you be able to provide any assurances to survivors about how their information will be used and whether all meeting attendees will respect survivors' privacy?

### FOR SURVIVORS

#### GOALS

What are your expectations and goals for the meeting? What would you like to have happen as a result?

#### TERMS

What boundaries and agreements might need to be in place in order to ensure your safety and control?

#### COMMUNICATION

How/when can meeting planners or attendees communicate with you outside of the meeting?

#### PRIVACY & USE OF INFORMATION

What are your expectations regarding privacy and the sharing of information you provide?

Given that meeting attendees may choose to share your presence, stories, and/or input publicly (e.g., in meeting minutes, with the press, on social media), what measures might you take to establish guidelines for the use of your information?

If privacy is a concern, both parties may consider: \_\_\_\_\_

**A formal agreement** | legal advice may be sought to create legally binding privacy and information use agreements that are acceptable to all attendees.

**An informal agreement** | survivors may convey concerns before agreeing to meet and express a request to keep what is shared private. The group may also be asked to sign an informal agreement that expresses how survivors wish to have those in attendance handle privacy-related matters. Note that this may not be legally binding - some attendees may honor an informal request for privacy, without potential legal consequences, while others may not.

# A Trauma-Informed Approach to STRUCTURING MEETINGS

## 1. Plan the physical space and plan for the physical safety of the attendees

- Use a large enough room to accommodate all comfortably
- Consider the seating arrangement and how the arrangement might be perceived by survivors (e.g., what arrangement will facilitate conversation)
- Provide appropriate ADA accommodations
- Check to ensure exits are clear and accessible

## 2. At the beginning of the meeting (and in advance if possible), provide attendees with information on:

- Goals/objectives of meeting & key questions/topics to be covered
- Who is invited to the meeting (including any press/media if applicable)
- How information will be collected during the meeting (i.e., note-taking, audio/visual recording)
- Plan for the use and/or dissemination of information outside of the meeting, including whether any informal or legally binding agreements will be put in place to protect the privacy of survivors and their information
- Mandatory reporting: all MSU employees must report incidents of sexual misconduct to the Office of Institutional Equity and MSU Police (see Additional Resources below for links to University Policy on RVSM and RVSM Mandatory Reporting Guide)

## 3. Plan for survivor supports during the meeting if appropriate. Options include:

- Allowing support persons and/or advocates to accompany survivors during meeting
- Creating a separate Safe Space: this is a private room near the primary meeting space for survivors to go if they become distressed (for example, from hearing disclosures, details of trauma, triggers/reminders of assault). MSU Sexual Assault Program crisis counselors can be requested to offer support & resources in a confidential setting.

## 4. Close the meeting by:

- Thanking attendees for their input and willingness to share
- Offering options for people to suggest additional ideas that occur to them later
- Reminding attendees what will be done with the information collected

# A Trauma-Informed Approach to LISTENING & RESPONDING

**NO**

phone use  
crossed arms  
other distractions  
Avoid negative, hurtful language

“You need to stop talking about it.”  
“Are you sure? Maybe it was...”  
“Don’t tell anyone else.”  
“You need to move on.”  
“I do not believe you.”  
“Do you have proof?”  
“Put it in the past.”

**YES**

attentive  
eye contact  
open body posture  
Use positive, helpful language

“I will support you no matter what.”  
“I’m sorry this happened to you.”  
“Thank you for telling me and trusting me.”  
“This was not your fault.”  
“You are not to blame.”  
“How can I help you?”  
“I believe you.”

## Additional Resources

### Information on MSU Policies & Best Practices

University Policy on RVSM [\[link\]](#)

RVSM Mandatory Reporting Guide [\[link\]](#)

### RVSM Supports & Services

MSU Sexual Assault Program  
[www.endrape.msu.edu](http://www.endrape.msu.edu)

MSU Safe Place (relationship violence & stalking)  
[www.safeplace.msu.edu](http://www.safeplace.msu.edu)

MSU Office for Civil Rights, Title IX Education & Compliance  
[www.civilrights.msu.edu/](http://www.civilrights.msu.edu/)

# RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE & SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

## MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES



*What follows are suggested guidelines<sup>1</sup> for **public statements and responses** on matters related to Michigan State University relationship violence and sexual misconduct reports, lawsuits, investigations, or other related matters.*

### RVSM Communication Guidelines

#### RVSM experts on campus recommend that communications:

- Reflect the educational mission of the University;
- Are consistent with University values of integrity and serving the community;
- Convey respect for all affected parties, being particularly careful to not make statements that will cause harm to survivors;
- Are affirming, rather than defensive.

#### Examples of language and concepts to avoid:

- Use of labels, such as referring to survivors as “damaged,” or “snowflakes,” or calling abusers, offenders or perpetrators “evil,” “monsters;” or either party, or trauma-responses, as “mentally ill;”
- Using language that can trigger survivors and minimize RVSM misconduct, such as “alleged” crime, or “accused” party, which are examples of language not typically used to refer to non-RVSM crimes;
- Commenting on the credibility of a claim or a related party;
- Highlighting status, credentials, or role of accused (e.g., “valued athlete,” or “respected faculty member”);
- Reinforcing rape culture or minimizing RVSM violations through use of concepts like “he said, she said,” referring to the context of incidences as being “gray areas,” or using language such as, “boys will be boys,” or “it takes two to tango;”
- Making excuses for those who are accused.

#### Examples of empowering and trauma-informed language, terms or concepts:

- “Survivor” rather than “victim”;
- Person-first language that describes behaviors or roles, rather than labels people, such as “person found to be responsible” rather than “rapist;”
- Acknowledging that survivors come from all different backgrounds, identities, histories and roles on campus and do not have the same experiences;
- Recognizing that survivors do not owe the public their stories;
- Belief in the University process;
- Taking RVSM violations seriously;
- Belief in the good work of the Sexual Assault Program, MSU Safe Place, and others at the University;
- Campus and community member safety is important.
- Highlight positive change and improvements.

Guidelines finalized, July 2018, by Michigan State University Violence Free Communities (VFC), Relationship Violence Sexual Misconduct Expert Advisory Workgroup to Interim President Engler; and Sexual Violence Advisory Committee (SVAC)

<sup>1</sup> Nothing in this document should be interpreted to contradict the University's obligations under HIPAA, FERPA, and other applicable laws and regulations, including federal VOCA funding guidelines related to maintaining survivor confidentiality.