

# Supporting Responding Students as a Means of Prevention

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# The SAFE Office at Rice University

The SAFE Office offers care management and resource navigation to students who have experienced/are experiencing interpersonal violence and to students who have been accused of perpetrating interpersonal violence.

The Office also provides prevention education to the Rice community on sexual and relationship violence, sexual harassment, stalking.



**Rice campus,  
HTX**

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Title IX regulations tell universities that they need to provide equal access to services to support responding students. Apart from being a mandated responsibility, this can also be viewed as a means of prevention.

# Responding Student

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Any student who has been accused formally or informally of perpetrating a behavior that is deemed by another student or faculty/staff member to be inappropriate, whether that is sexual harassment or assault, relationship violence, or stalking.

# Bias Check-In

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What thoughts come to mind when you hear the term “responding student”?

Who do you picture in your mind?

What feelings come up for you when you have been told that a student has harmed another?

What have you been taught through socialization and trainings about those who sexually assault/abuse others?

*“And if we are correct in our argument that many instances of assault were not interactions in which an assaulter intended to commit an assault, then it is essential to find ways to provide feedback to the assaulter, feedback that says, “The ‘sex’ you’re having with others is a problem. Your partners are finding it less than consensual. You need to think through and work on this. Here is how...””*

**-Sexual Citizens, p. 269**

# The Importance of Working with Responding Students

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- Unless there is a finding of in violation, the student has to be seen as not having done the behavior they are accused of.
- Accused persons have rights.
- Accusations have the ability to spiral out when others get involved. For example, any accusation of non-consensual sexual touching may be perceived by other students that the student committed a rape.
- It can contribute to recidivism prevention.
- Helping the student find their responsibility in the problematic encounter can be a means to prevent future events.
- Giving the student a safe place to speak about their feelings of being accused can lessen some of the shame, isolation, and depression, which may interfere with school work.

# Types of Interventions

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## Informational/Preventative

- Student has been reported by another student for behaviors that do not rise to the level of an investigation, but could, should they continue the behaviors.
- Student makes complaint that they were placed on a “whisper network”.

## Informal

- Student has been reported for behaviors that do rise to the level of an investigation but the reporting student wants to seek an informal resolution.
- Student has been reported for behaviors that do not rise to the level of an investigation but the reporting student wants an informal resolution.

## Formal

- Student has been reported for behaviors that do rise to the level of an investigation and the reporting student is making a formal complaint.



# Humanizing the Responding Student

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- Everyone has strengths. What strengths do you see in the student and what do they see in themselves?
- Empathy and accountability can occur the same time.
- The student most likely has positive relationships and people who care about them.
- Working with students in the misconduct system should respect their individualism, diversity, and humanity, and not flatten their identity and neglect their capacity for growth.

# Starting the Conversation

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- Prior to meeting with the student, be clear about the complaint and what the reporting student hopes the goals of the meeting will be.
- Send a gentle reach out to the student and respond swiftly.
- Meet the student where they are--allow them to share their reaction to the allegations and feelings they are experiencing.
- Answer questions and share their rights and responsibilities with the student.

# Acknowledging Difficult Feelings

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1. Turn toward the emotion instead of trying to fix or dismiss the feeling.

“I know that this can be hard to hear that someone thought of you in this way.”

2. Allow the student to identify and label the emotion.

“Do you want to talk to me about what worries /upsets you most about what we are talking about?”

3. Acknowledge that this will feel difficult for awhile and that it may cause disturbances for which they may need help.

“Sometimes when a student is going through this process, it may cause some issues with school, work, and sleep.”

# Acknowledging Difficult Feelings, Cont.

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4. Share that there are supportive services that will assist them through this process.

“I am here to help you with supportive measures, some of which are...”

5. Share your availability and those of others who may be able to help manage this difficult time., i.e. therapy resources.

“I am here during standard business hours, but if you need to talk to someone in the evening or overnight, you can call our counseling center.”

6. Encourage the student to find a friend they trust to confide in.

“Is there anyone you feel comfortable telling about this?”

# Continuing the Conversation

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- Provide ongoing support and check ins
- Assist with resources and supportive measures
- Offer to attend upcoming conduct meetings with the student
- Continue to acknowledge their feelings
- Ask open-ended questions about their experiences since having been accused

# Supportive Measures

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- Academic Adjustments
- A Navigator/Support person throughout the process
- Moving to a different college or dorm
- Mutual no contact orders
- Reimbursement of housing/meal plans if they are found in violation and must leave the university
- Mediation (rare) or Restorative Justice
- Assistance with speaking with parents
- Therapy/Counseling Services

# Types of Prevention

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- **Primary Prevention:** Approaches that are employed *before any* sexual abuse has occurred to prevent initial perpetration and victimization. Primary prevention includes building an environment that encourages well-being and healthy choices.
- **Secondary Prevention:** An immediate response after a complaint has been made. Secondary prevention deals with the short-term consequences of the complaint and subsequent adjudication-if needed.
- **Tertiary Prevention:** A long-term response *after* the complaint has been resolved. Tertiary prevention addresses the lasting consequences of the incident.

# Primary

Include educational programs that include all students--potential victims, potential perpetrators, potential active bystanders

Create a culture on campus where healthy relationship dynamics are valued

Offer continued programming

Create Student Peer Advisor programs

# Secondary

Teach bystander intervention skills

Include responding students in your support services model

Offer students a safe space to talk when they have concerns about their own behaviors around consent and healthy relationship behaviors

Create guidelines/procedures that require systems of both empathy and accountability

# Tertiary

Have a referral specialist on campus who can provide resources to students who want to/are required to go to offender treatment programs/therapists who are trained to work with people who have assaulted/abused others

If a student returns to campus after a violation/suspension, continue to provide support services



# Case Example #1

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A student was reported to the University judicial program for sexual harassment by 3 students. Reports included excessive staring, following them around campus, asking them out repeatedly, and peeking into the women's restroom in the residential college. The student was assigned a Navigator who met regularly with him and provided:

- emotional support, academic accommodations, assessed and referred him during a mental health crisis
- education on healthy relationships
- information on the investigation process
- accompaniments to the judicial meetings
- support as he received his decision letter and helped him understand and process it

The Navigator helped him with a plan as he decided to acknowledge his concerning behaviors, take off a semester, and get treatment. The student later returned to complete his degree and there were no further reports on him, and he continued to seek supportive services, reflect on his behaviors and how to engage in healthy relationships.

# Case Example #2

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A student was reported to the judicial program for sexual assault. He adamantly denied the charges and was very distressed. He was assigned a Navigator who met with him and provided:

- emotional support
- service linkage including counseling
- academic accommodations
- accompaniments to judicial meetings and file reviews
- intervention with issues related to leadership position-feeling as if rights were being violated

The student was found not in violation and the Navigator continued to support him as he processed the experience and graduated from the University.

# Case Example #3

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A student asked The SAFE Office to speak to another student about his concerning behaviors. The student was reported to have continually commented on female students' bodies in a sexual way and was observed making what other students considered "rape jokes". The SAFE Office reached out to him and asked him to meet voluntarily, and he agreed.

The Navigator:

- let him know what was reported (without interrogating/investigating/making assumptions)
- provided emotional support
- facilitated conversations on healthy relationships, communication, and boundaries
- encouraged him to reflect on his behaviors/interactions with others
- offered ongoing support as he processed

The student met with the Navigator a few more times and asked questions about how to flirt and date. He was at the University for 2 more years and there were no further concerns reported about his behavior.



Thank you for joining  
us!

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**Questions?**

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