

# 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.