

Supporting Survivors

Page address: <http://www.mnsu.edu/here4you/assault/support.html>



If Someone You Know Has Been Assaulted

Sexual assault hurts not only survivors but also people who care about them. Common reactions of friends and family are shock, sadness, anger, guilt, helplessness, and a desire for vindication. It's difficult to accept the fact that no one can change what has happened and take away the survivor's pain.

Support persons help in these ways:

- Believe the survivor. They need to be in a supportive and trusting environment. Giving support means listening, asking how you can help, encouraging the survivor to ask for what she/he needs, being sensitive and patient, and not trying to "fix" or avenge the victim or the situation.
- Listen without giving advice or "taking matters into your own hands." Survivors need to regain their sense of control over their own lives. If you become agitated, make threats, or act as if you'll do something rash, the survivor may feel guilty about making you upset or causing more violence.
- Gently provide options and [resources](#). Survivors need to make their own decisions based on what will help them heal.
- Avoid victim-blaming or judgmental comments. Most likely the survivor already feels enough shame, guilt, and self-blame. Nothing the survivor said or did excuses the assailant.

- Respect the survivor's comfort level. The highest priority of survivors should be what they need to do for themselves. This may mean a certain amount of distance, or certain conditions on being together with a partner or close friend. Sometimes physical contact or sexual contact can trigger discomfort and flashbacks. Recovery of self-control and equilibrium may take a while. Communicate sensitively, even if you feel awkward bringing up the subject. Be patient.
- Take care of yourself. Seek support for yourself and your feelings, but keep in mind that the survivor should remain in control of information about the assault. Seek information to help you better understand sexual assault. The Sexual Violence Resource Center's 24-hour toll-free Safe Line can help you: 800-630-1425.

Educate Yourself

If you want to be a helpful and effective support person for a survivor you care about, educate yourself on the issues surrounding sexual assault. Seek to cultivate empathy for how deeply this may have affected the survivor. Learn how to help her or him feel okay with the confusing and conflicting emotions associated with coping and healing. Learn about advocacy and policies. Start paying attention to the way sexual violence is handled in our society. Look at the underlying attitudes about men and women, and examine how these social attitudes affect the way society approaches sexual violence.

Explore the [Educate Yourself](#) page for links that will help you learn more.