



For Loved Ones of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Survivors: How to Support the Survivor and How to Care for Yourself

We recognize that a sexual assault or domestic violence survivor may be of any gender or sexual orientation.

- ⇒ **Be clear that the rape, assault, or violence was not the survivor's fault.** No one ever asks to be assaulted or abused. Assaulting someone is a conscious decision made by the perpetrator. The survivor may feel guilty about being abused for several reasons. Help counter this by saying things such as, "This is not your fault" or "you have done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment".
- ⇒ **Believe the survivor.** Believe what they tell you. Feeling that she or he is believed by family and friends is important for a survivor's recovery. Recognize that telling you takes a great deal of strength and courage. Allow the survivor to know you are open to hearing about his or her feelings and experiences. Continue to be open to hearing throughout the healing process, which could take months, or even years.
- ⇒ **Do not question or judge what the survivor had to do to survive.** During sexual assault/domestic violence, survivors are forced to make instant decisions regarding their personal safety. These decisions should not be criticized later. Their survival is evidence that they handled the assault the best way they could. Expressing to the survivor that you are thankful that she or he is alive enables her or him to feel more secure about her or his judgments. There is not a right or wrong way to respond to being assaulted.
- ⇒ **Be respectful of the survivor's decisions.** Sometimes we think we know what is best for a friend. Don't expect them to follow all of your advice. Remember that ultimately they must be the one to make decisions regarding their own life. Respecting and supporting the survivor is very empowering and is an essential part of the healing process. An example of something you might say is, "I know this is a decision only you can make. Whatever you decide, remember that I'll stand by you," or ask the survivor how you can be helpful.

See back for more information.

SafeHouse Center can help.

Call our 24-hour HelpLine: 734-995-5444 to speak to a trained advocate about how to support a loved one in your life and/or seek support for yourself.



For Loved Ones of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Survivors Cont'd

- ⇒ **Get help if the survivor is suicidal.** Most survivors are not suicidal, but sometimes the emotional pain of the assault or abuse is so devastating that they may want to kill themselves. If you are close to a survivor who is suicidal, get immediate help for them.
- ⇒ **Resist seeing the survivor as a victim.** Continue to see the person as a strong, courageous individual who is reclaiming his or her own life.
- ⇒ **Accept that there may be changes in your relationship with the survivor.** The person you love is changing, and you may need to change in response. Patience on your part is crucial to her or his healing process. Healing is a slow process that cannot be hurried.
- ⇒ **Seek support for yourself.** Talking with someone who can help you work through your own feelings will better enable you to support the survivor. Remember to respect the survivor's privacy when seeking support from others. SafeHouse Center support is available for you. Call (734) 995-5444 to schedule an appointment with a counselor or to speak with someone on our 24-hour help line.
- ⇒ **Provide helpful resource information.** Give your friend SafeHouse Center's 24 hour helpline number: (734)-995-5444. Encourage them to call. Offer to be there when they call. Place the initial call if they wish. The helpline and other domestic violence/sexual assault educational materials may be helpful to friends and loved ones of the survivor to help understand the survivor's healing process.
- ⇒ **Protect the right to confidentiality.** Recognize their choice to disclose the abuse to you. Respect their right to tell whomever they choose. It is not your right to inform others. Protecting the survivor's confidentiality and anonymity is an important step in gaining her or his trust.

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