

# How Can I Help a friend or loved one who has been sexually assaulted?

The most important part of supporting a friend or loved one who has sexually assaulted is to let the victim guide your actions. It is essential for control to be restored to a victim of sexual assault, so providing your loved one with choices and offers about ways that you can help is the first step. It's a difficult time for all of you and your offers may be refused. It's important for the victim to be able to say yes or no, depending on her/his wishes at the time, so try to be understanding even if there aren't many ways that your loved one will accept help at first. Being there is the most important part.

## **Believe and support.**

One of a victim's biggest fears is that people will not believe what they're saying. It's essential to believe your friend or family member and not argue the details of what happened.

## **Don't blame her or him for the sexual assault.**

Often we want to have someone to blame when something so tragic happens, but it is critical that all the responsibility for what happened be placed on the perpetrator. Victims do not cause their attackers' behavior, and no matter what the victim did, she or he did not deserve to be raped. Be careful not to question her actions or choices prior to or during the attack.

**Be patient as she or he tries to get through it**—victims don't just “get over it” or “forget it”. It may take a lot of listening and repeating of your support before it really sinks in that you're there for the victim. You can't make it go away or get through it for your friend or loved one—you have to allow the healing journey to take its own course.

## **Let her or him tell the details in their own time, or not at all.**

Often victims are not ready to explain all of the details of what happened, especially if they have reported to police and have been interviewed with lots of questions already. Let your friend or loved one tell you what happened when it is comfortable and when he or she is ready. Pressuring a victim may make her or him less likely to want to seek support from you.

## **Deal with your own concerns about what happened.**

You are bound to have reactions and fears of your own about your safety and other peoples' safety after someone you love has been raped. Counseling and support are available to you through educational groups as well as individual or family appointments with counselors. Services are free and confidential

## **Avoid speculations about why this happened.**

Lots of survivors have questions about why this happened to him or her. There are no satisfactory answers to this question—it is just because a criminal committed a crime

against her or him. It doesn't have to do with any punishment for past sins. It isn't because she or he asked for it. There is no good reason. It just happened.

**Encourage your friend or loved one to get some help.**

Survivors who seek help sooner after the assault may have an easier time getting through their recovery. Your support in seeking counseling for the rape may provide the extra motivation for someone to call for help.