



Tips on Supporting a Survivor

It can be hard to know what to do to help a friend or family member who discloses to you that they have experienced a sexual assault or a violent crime. Anyone who has survived a violent situation knows that coming forward and sharing can often be the most difficult part of the experience. We understand that this can be a complicated situation for you as a supportive friend and you may not know how to respond. In light of that, we have put together these tips on how to support a survivor.

1. Believe them! The single most important factor in a person's recovery from sexual assault is whether or not they are believed. And they should be. Very few rapes or assaults are falsely reported. In fact, according to the FBI, only 4 - 8% of assault reports are false reports.
2. Assure them that they did whatever they needed to survive. Survivors often suffer from feelings of guilt and shame. Reassure them by telling them they did nothing wrong. Don't blame them and don't agree if they blame themselves. Remember that no matter what, no one deserves to be assaulted and that the only person to blame for a crime is the criminal.
3. Communication is key – ask the survivor what they want or need. This also helps them regain their power by empowering them to make choices for themselves. Allow the survivor to make choices for themselves, no matter how small. The predator/criminal took away their power to choose, so it is very healing for them to be able to make choices. Ask if they want to sit or stand, talk at your place or theirs, what food they would like, etc. Recognize that making these choices might be difficult for them. Be patient.
4. Make sure the person you are supporting is not in imminent danger. If they are, offer to assist them by accompanying them to get medical attention or law enforcement involvement.
5. Make sure the survivor is attending to their own physical needs (eating, sleeping, etc.) and if they are not, offer to assist.
6. Encourage the person you are supporting to broaden their support network with either counseling, peer support groups or online support.
7. Ask and follow their lead when it comes to physical reassurance. Ask before you hug them, hold their hand, etc.
8. Let the survivor be in charge of the conversation and always respect their boundaries.
9. Don't ask for details about the assault. Remember that your job is only to listen and support. We are friends, not investigators.
10. Respect the survivor's privacy. Don't discuss what you are told with others.
11. The assault is not about you or your ego. Do not seek revenge against the assailant. Break the cycle of violence.
12. Be silent and listen. By allowing them to talk, you let them reclaim their voice.
13. Make sure you are finding support for yourself.
14. If you find yourself unable to support this individual, either because you are yourself a survivor and are attending to your own process or some other reason, be honest about it.
15. If the survivor decides they want medical attention, including treatment of their injuries and testing and treatment for pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) take them to the nearest emergency room. There they will be able to save any evidence in the event that the survivor chooses to press criminal charges against their attacker.



16. If the survivor chooses not to get immediate medical attention for the purposes of evidence collection, they should know that they can still seek medical attention and request that their visit be confidential. They do not have to report the assault in order to seek medical treatment.

Here are some helpful things to say:

1. I am sorry this happened.
2. It's not your fault.
3. I believe you.
4. I'm here to listen.
5. Thank you for trusting me.
6. What do you need from me/us?
7. I am here for you and I support you.
8. Are you open to receiving medical attention? Professional counseling? Would you like for me to go with you?

Other resources:

National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1.800.656.HOPE

Crime Victims Helpline: 1-866-689-HELP

For resources pertaining to sexual assault on campuses: www.notalone.gov