

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS: HOW TO HELP A FRIEND

People who have been sexually assaulted often experience a range of emotions and reactions, and no two survivors of assault will feel exactly the same. As a friend, family member or partner, your help during this process is essential. Survivors need a great deal of support and caring as they begin to address and work through surviving this very frightening experience. Remember that your primary role is to be a friend. You are not a counselor, or a lawyer, or a doctor; your friend should turn to professionals for the best information on emotional, legal and medical issues.

Steps you can take to help:

Believe them

Believe your friend unconditionally. Expect a friend in crisis to be confused and don't criticize. It's not your role to question whether or not they were sexually assaulted.

Never blame them

Say clearly and with care, "It was not your fault."

Help them explore their options

Don't pressure them to do what you want to do.

Empower your friend. Let them know he or she is not alone and remind them of available resources (campus counselor, campus or community crisis center, women's center, hospital, police, peer educators, etc) .

Allow them to react

Remember, there are many ways for a survivor to respond after being raped. Don't ask a lot of probing questions.

No more violence

How would you react? It's important to remain calm and as hard as it may be, it's important to refrain from offering to "hurt the person who did this to them." Although it's natural to want to protect your friend, an aggressive reaction is not a good response.

Listen to them

Offer your support and offer your time. Let your friend know that they can talk to you about their experience when they are ready.

Confidentiality

Help them identify confidential resources (confidentiality laws vary by state—visit NotAlone.gov for more info).

Let the survivor be in control

Encourage them, but let them be in control. They decide if they want to talk with someone, press charges, etc

Encourage them to seek help

Talk about the kind of support he or she needs and keep talking about it because their needs will change as they work through the crisis. If they suspect they have been drugged encourage them to go to the hospital within 72 hours to have a rape kit done and to be tested for drugs in their system.

Seek professional help

Insist that your friend seek help if the crisis escalates to the point of being worried about their safety or long-term well being.

Get help for yourself

Don't blame yourself for the feelings you may have after learning someone close to you has been sexually assaulted. It's important to pay attention to your own needs and express them to your friend and others.

If you are a survivor of sexual assault seeking assistance, please contact your Campus or Community Rape Crisis Center, Campus Advocate or Counseling Center or contact one of these national resources:

NotAlone.gov

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)
1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)
1-877-739-3895