

How Family, Spouses & Close Friends Can Help Sexual Assault Survivors

1. Having your loved one experience a sexual assault can itself be experienced as trauma. You will have your own reactions to hearing about or seeing what your loved one has survived. **Take care of yourself** or you will not be of any help to the survivor. **Get support for yourself** from others, **but not from the survivor**. It will be important for you to keep in touch with your own friends, family, members, or supportive people, but please be selective with who you share with, as this is your loved one's story to tell.
2. When first interacting with your loved one, **try to respond as calmly as possible**. Let your loved one know that what happened to her/him is in **no way their fault and that they are not alone**.
3. **Learn as much information as you can about trauma and its impact**. Read or talk to a professional to gain a better understanding of the survivor's reaction. We are here for you!
4. **Ask the survivor what you can do to be helpful**, and then really try to do it. Remember that everyone's response to trauma is different. Everyone's needs following a trauma will be different. Try not to assume that you know better than they do what they need.
5. Do not try to fix the person's problems, or make the feelings go away. The survivor is likely to think you are uncomfortable and cannot tolerate her/his struggles. **She/he may try to conceal their feelings**, which may simply create more distance in your relationship. **Reassure your loved one that you are here for support and that she/he is not alone**.
6. If you live with the survivor, **try to follow normal routines** around your home. Your loved one is still the same person as before and may need to have constant reassurance of this fact. If you do not live with the survivor, try to keep some connection even if it's just an occasional supportive phone call or note.
7. If you are the parent or spouse of the survivor, you may be dealing with some very difficult feelings of your own. If your feelings of anger and sadness are very intense, the victim's/survivor's role might change to one of comforting you. If you need it, do not hesitate to seek professional assistance. **It is hard to help your loved one if you are too upset yourself**.
8. **Help the survivor find other support systems**, such as a support group or counseling through your local Sexual Assault Support Center (**YWCA Counseling Center**). If you know of someone who had a similar experience, you might suggest that speaking with that person may help. You might also mention supportive people in the survivor's existing social network with whom it might be helpful to talk, such as a trusted friend or family member. Provide suggestions and offer to assist in any way you can, but **do not push**. Remember # 4 above.
9. **Empower the survivor**. Let her/him decide whom to tell of the assault. Sexual Assault is about **power and control**. By you empowering your loved one, you are helping her/him begin the healing process.
10. **Believe the survivor without question**.
11. **Listen without making judgments**. Allow her/him to talk about it in her/his own time.
12. Tolerate her/his mood swings. **Your loved one needs time and support to work through their feelings**.
13. **Whenever you can, just listen**.
14. **Try to be patient**. Healing from trauma occurs over time and takes time.