

Sexual Assault

A GUIDE FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS



When someone you care about has been sexually assaulted it can be difficult to know what to do or say. You may have feelings of fear, anger, sadness and disbelief.

The most important thing that you can do from the beginning is to believe them. One of the most significant factors in a survivor's recovery is how those around them respond to their disclosure.

Remember, nothing a person does or the decisions they make causes them to be sexually assaulted. Your loved one needs your love and support no matter the circumstances of the assault.

Sexual assault can affect a survivor's life in the following ways:

- Physical & mental health
- Body image
- Self-esteem
- Sexuality & relationships
- Eating & sleeping habits
- How they function in social situations

How friends and family can help a survivor:

- Listen to what they have to say about what happened, but in their own time.
- Be supportive – ask what you can do to help. Do not assume you know what is best.
- Encourage them to contact a Rape Crisis and Recovery Center. Visit www.mcasa.org to locate one close to you.
- Encourage them to obtain a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) to treat injuries, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and address pregnancy concerns. The exam must be completed within the first 120 hours after the assault. After 120 hours you can still encourage them to see their primary care physician or other medical provider.
- Offer them a safe place to stay or stay with them in their home. If they would rather be alone remind them that you're available if and when they need you.
- Recognize your own anger. It is not the survivor's responsibility to address your anger.
- Remind them it was not their fault.
- Be patient – and remind them to be patient with her/himself.
- Offer to accompany them to various appointments (doctors, police, lawyers, courts). Allow them to decide the level of your involvement.
- Encourage them to engage in self-soothing activities as a way to cope.
- Remind them that the assault is something that happened to them; it doesn't define them as a person.

What to be careful of:

- Avoid taking control of the situation. Allow your loved one to have control over their own decisions and your level of involvement.

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