

"Healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness." – Wendell Berry

Your response matters. When someone confides in you that they have been sexually assaulted, your caring response can make all the difference. More than anything else, your loved one needs your support. However, it can be intimidating to sit in such emotionally fragile moments. This fact sheet offers suggestions for how to best support the victim.

SUGGESTIONS OF WHAT TO SAY TO A VICTIM

*I'm sorry this happened to you.
It wasn't your fault.
Thank you for telling me.
I'm always here if you want to talk.
Can I do anything for you?*

WHAT TO NEVER SAY TO A VICTIM

*It was your fault.
You could have avoided it if you ____.
It's been so long, get over it!
It's not a big deal, it happens to lots of people.
I don't believe you.*

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

One of the most crucial things you can do is listen to the victim. Let them talk about the assault in their own time; do not force the conversation. They may want to go into detail about the assault, or they might be vague. Do not push them for details. Reassure your loved one that you will be by their side no matter what. You may feel inadequate to help, but your listening ear does more good than you know.

Don't be afraid of silence. If you don't know what to say, that's okay. The most powerful statement a friend can make is by simply being there, not by trying to fix everything or pretending everything is normal. Silence often says more than words.

It is tempting to want to solve all problems, large or small for the victim. It is important to remember that sexual assault takes away the victim's control and autonomy. A large part of the victim's healing is in reclaiming that autonomy. Let them make their own decisions, but make sure the victim knows you are always available to help with whatever they personally choose. Keep learning about how to help a victim. This fact sheet is a great place to start, but there is more to learn. Check out the WSR fact sheet "Sexual Assault Recovery Resources" to find more information.

BREAK THE SILENCE

There is no reason to feel guilty or selfish for taking care of yourself and your many emotions. It is normal to feel the following: helplessness, guilt, shame, loss of intimacy, loss of routine, frustration, need for retaliation, overprotection, and anger. It is important to acknowledge these emotions and work through them. Remember that these feelings can be used to create a deeper empathy for the victim. For help processing these emotions, it may be helpful to call a crisis hotline or meet with a therapist. As you explore how to take care of yourself, you'll learn different techniques that might also be helpful for the victim. Keep trying! You're doing better than you know.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

startbybelieving.org

rainn.org

nsvrc.org

**National Sexual
Assault Telephone
Hotline**

800-656-HOPE (4673)

WSR Info Sheets
*Sexual Assault
Recovery Resources*

Title IX
titleix.byuh.edu

**BYUH Women's
Services & Resources
Confidential
Reporting Area**
wsr.byuh.edu