

How to Help a Friend

Because friends are usually the first person a victim discloses to, your role as a friend is so important in those early stages of recovery. Here are some tips to help you along the way:

- Believe what has happened. One of the most critical ingredients to a survivor's recovery is how the people s/he discloses to respond. Listen and believe the survivor. It takes a lot of courage for someone to share what has happened and they trust you to help.
- Offer safety and support. Sexual assault is traumatic. It is often difficult for someone who has been assaulted to be alone, especially immediately following the assault.
- Listen. Don't press for details. This often results in a victim feeling blamed. Let them decide how much to share and when.
- Offer Information and Choices. Seeking assistance from any resource must always be the survivor's choice. Sexual assault victims experience an extreme loss of control and part of their recovery involves regaining control over their choices, even if they are different than your own. Empower them with options and respect their decisions.
- Respect privacy. It is important not to share information about the assault with others who are not involved. If you do need to share information, get the survivor's permission by letting them know who you will speak to and what you intend to say.
- Take care of yourself. Supporting a survivor is hard work. Be sure you get plenty of rest and some time for yourself. Seeking counseling to get support for yourself can be a real help and keep you from "burning out" on your friend.