

Respond and Support a Survivor

When someone you care about shares they have been sexually assaulted or abused, it can be a lot to handle. A supportive reaction can make all the difference, but that doesn't come easy.

WAYS YOU CAN RESPOND AND PROVIDE SUPPORT:

- “I believe you.” These three words can make all of the difference. Believe the survivor. Validate the story they are telling.
- Foster a safe, non-judgmental and private environment.
- Listen to the survivor and show empathy. Do not interrupt, allow them to share their story with you.
- Help the survivor understand that this is not their fault. It will never be their fault. They are not to blame.
- Remind the survivor that they are valued and tell them how much they matter. Remind a sister that she is a **real, strong woman**.
- Keep their story confidential. If they don't want to tell anyone else, respect that decision.
- Don't dictate how they should feel. Survivors can and will express emotions in a variety of ways.
- Understand that individuals from different cultural backgrounds may express or experience their reactions to an assault in different ways.
- Remember that there is no right or wrong way to respond to trauma.
- Respect the language the survivor has used to identify what has happened and don't force unwelcomed labels.
- Allow for tears and expression of feelings but understand that trauma may affect a person's response and that there is no “normal” way for them to act or feel.
- Offer your presence, whether that be as a listening ear or accompanying them to available resources.
- Ask the survivor if they are open to seeking medical attention and/or counseling services. If so, offer to go with them.
- Help them identify safe individuals within their existing support system.
- Allow the survivor to make their own decisions and ASK what you can do to be supportive.
- Continue to show your support in the hours, days, weeks and months following.

PROVIDE RESOURCES AND OPTIONS AVAILABLE NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY:

- National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (4673): You'll be connected to a trained staff member from a local sexual assault service provider in your area.
- Online.rainn.org: You can chat anonymously with a survivor's advocate.
- Campus Sexual Assault Resource Center: _____
- Campus Counseling Center: _____
- Campus Women's Center: _____
- Campus Conduct Office and Title IX Coordinator: _____
- Campus Police Department: _____