



How to Respond and Support a Survivor

When someone you care about tells you they've been sexually assaulted or abused, it can be a lot to handle. A supportive reaction can make all the difference, but that doesn't mean it comes easy. Below are several ways that you can respond and provide support:

- “I believe you.” These three words can make all of the difference. Believe your sister. Validate the story she is telling you.
- Foster a safe, non-judgmental, and private environment.
- Listen to your sister and show empathy. Do not interrupt, allow her to share her story with you.
- Help your sister understand that this is not her fault. It will never be her fault. She is not to blame.
- Remind her that she is valued and tell her how much she matters. Remind her that she is a **real, strong woman**.
- Keep her story confidential. If she doesn't want to tell anyone else, respect that decision.
- Don't dictate how she 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. 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.
- Allows for tears and expression of feelings but understand that trauma may affect a person's response and understand that there is no “normal” way for them to act or feel.
- Offer your presence. Whether that be as a listening ear or accompanying her to available resources.
- Ask her if she is open to seeking medical attention and/or counseling services. If so, offer to go with her.
- Help her identify safe individuals within her existing support system.
- Allow the survivor to make her 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 her the resources and options available nationally and on your campus:
 - 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 Title IX Coordinator: _____
 - Campus Conduct Office: _____
 - Campus Police Department: _____