

Supporting a Friend after Sexual Assault

You may have a friend, loved one, or family member who was sexually assaulted. They may be struggling to get through this tragic event and reach out to you for help. If you are unsure of the best way to be supportive, consider these "Dos" and "Don'ts" when offering support.

DO listen.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is just be a good listener. If you are talking more than you are listening, your listening skills may need some work.

DO be patient.

Recovery from trauma does not have a set timetable. Try to avoid pressuring them to seek help or engage in activities they aren't ready to do. Ask them what they would like to do and support them in their choice (as long as it is not harmful). It is very important in the healing process for your friend to have control over what happens next.

DON'T judge.

People who were sexually assaulted can be scrutinized or even blamed for what happened to them. No one asks to be sexually assaulted. The alleged offender is 100 percent responsible for the crime.

DON'T ask for details.

You don't need to know the "who, what, when, where, how and why" of the assault. Your friend will take the lead on whether he or she wants to "get into the details."

DO use phrases such as:

- "You're safe now" (only if that is true)
- "I'm glad you're talking to me."
- "I'm sorry it happened."
- "It wasn't your fault."
- "It's ok that you're reacting this way. There's not a right or wrong way to respond to what happened."
- "It must have been really upsetting to experience that."
- "I can't imagine how you must feel."

DON'T use phrases such as:

- "What were you wearing?"
- "How much did you have to drink?"
- "You're lucky that . . ."
- "It'll take some time, but you'll get over it."
- "I can imagine how you feel."
- "Don't worry; it's going to be all right."
- "Try to be strong for your children, spouse, etc."
- "Calm down and try to relax."

DO ask if they are open to getting help.

Ask if your friend is open to seeking medical care or talking to a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) or Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Victim Advocate (VA).

If your friend has just been through the assault, you may ask your friend about going to the SANE Emergency Department or offer to take your friend there yourself. If your friend agrees, you may also contact the SARC or SAPR VA at your installation.

DON'T leave them alone.

People who are sexually assaulted are often overwhelmed with feelings, including fear, shock, helplessness, hopelessness, despair, anger, anxiety, panic, and even suicidal thoughts. Before you leave your friend, ask if you can call someone else to provide support, like a SARC or SAPR VA.

DO take care of yourself.

When we have a friend in need or in pain, it can be difficult not knowing how to help. In helping a friend through this healing process, you may experience a whole range of feelings and emotions. You may feel anger, sadness, anxiety, confusion, guilt, helplessness, or even disbelief. [RAINN](#) (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), and the [SAFE Helpline](#) have great self-care resources that can help you feel less overwhelmed.

For more information about how to help someone, visit the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response page or visit [SAFE Helpline](#) for more confidential services.

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