

SUPPORTING A FRIEND WHO IS A SURVIVOR

Whether a sexual assault happened recently or many years ago, it can affect many aspects of a survivor's life. A sexual assault can change how a survivor feels about themselves and about their relationships with friends, family, and intimate partners.

Below are basic best practices for supporting the survivor in your life. As with handling any trauma, taking these steps requires nuance. We encourage you to learn more about the impact of sexual assault and survivors' needs post-assault.

LISTEN: Listen when they are ready and wanting to talk. Avoid asking questions, especially those that begin with "why." Many survivors take years to process their experience, and asking them for details before they are ready to share can do more harm than good. [This resource](#) has even more tips on how to be a compassionate listener.

CREATE SPACE: Holding space and silence for a survivor is a powerful gift of support in itself. Tears, anger, or other uncomfortable emotions may arise when talking about an assault. Know that you do not need to make them go away or say something to make it better. Oftentimes, just the presence of a friend is enough. Get comfortable with silence, and avoid giving advice unless you are asked for it.

RESPOND: Use any of the following phrases to respond to a disclosure of sexual assault.

"I believe you." | "This is not your fault." | "I am so very sorry that happened to you." | "I know this is hard. You can tell me when you're ready." | "How can I help you?" | "Thank you for telling me that." | "You may be feeling really scared right now. I am here with you."

ACCEPT: Accept the survivor and their healing process without judgment or pressure. All trauma survivors need to be in control of their recovery, especially those who are recovering from sexual assault. Your job as a friend is to accept wherever the survivor is in their healing, acknowledge that the survivor is in control, and regularly remind them of this.

CHECK-IN: Regularly check-in with the survivor so that they know you are there to support them. Be sure to respect their boundaries if they do not want to talk, and be sure to set your own. Remember, you are there to support them, not to have all the answers.

LEARN + ACT: Find out all you can about the impacts of sexual assault and trauma. (Our [recommended resources](#) are a great place to start!) Share what you learn with a friend, on social media, and with elected officials. We need you!

