



**rape and abuse
crisis center**

advocacy. counseling. education.

If Someone You Know is a Victim of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault not only affects the person who has been violated, but also the victim's friends, family, and significant others. In addition to giving support and getting services to the victim, it may be important for those who care about the victim to get help and support for themselves. We are all affected differently when someone we love and care about is sexually assaulted.

Being helpful and supportive when a loved one has been victimized is not something we all automatically know how to do. Here are some suggestions for you:

1. Learn all you can about sexual assault. This will help to dispel sexual assault myths and give you a greater understanding of the effects of sexual assault.
2. Allow the victim to talk about the experience of victimization and the feelings that follow, without judgment. However, some victims withdraw and don't want to speak of the assault. Respect whichever decision she or he makes.
3. Many victims of sexual assault blame themselves for what happened. As a support person, you can help the victim place responsibility with the perpetrator by reminding them often that what happened to them was NOT their fault. Remember, no matter what a person does or does not do, NO ONE has the right to violate them. Assist the victim in holding the assailant accountable for his/her actions.
4. Don't try to "rescue" the victim from his/her feelings. It is often hard for us to see our loved ones in pain and not try to "fix" things or make them better. We encourage you to remember even though your friend or loved one just experienced a terrible act of violence, she/he is a strong, courageous person. Even though the victim may rely on you for support and understanding, she/he needs to be in control of her/his own life.
5. Respect the time it takes for a victim to recover from the trauma of sexual assault. Telling someone to "get over it and get on with life" may just cause the victim to feel bad because she/he still feels affected by the assault. There is no prescribed timetable for recovery.
6. Don't be surprised if the victim experiences any or all of the following:
 - Irritability, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, panic attacks, or changes in personality
 - A fear of people and a heightened sense of vulnerability
 - Concern or compassion for the assailant
 - Anger or rage at the perpetrator, society, or themselves

24-hour Crisis Line (701)293-7273
www.raccfm.com

07/12

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F: Education/Revised Handouts/If Someone You Know is a Victim of SA

Be supportive and encourage the victim to seek professional counseling or a sexual assault victims' support group.

Taking care of yourself will help you continue to be a supportive person in the victim's life. You may also need a listening ear and supportive people to help you deal with your own feelings regarding the assault.

Some common feelings experienced by support persons include:

- Guilt- you somehow should have been able to prevent the assault
- Blame- placed on the victim or yourself
- Fear- of another assault, what people will say, medical repercussions, etc.
- Anger- toward the assailant, but sometimes also toward yourself and/or the victim
- Depression- brought on by feelings of helplessness/hopelessness
- Loss of intimacy- feeling the victim is distancing him/herself from others
- Frustration- toward the assailant, victim, yourself, and the system
- Overprotection- a desire to protect the victim from further pain/danger
- Retaliation- against the attacker
- Shame- especially if you have believed the myths about causes of sexual assault
- Weariness- there will be times when you will need to take a break from the victim, or a break from talking about sexual violence issues. Allow yourself time away when needed.

It is possible that seeing your friend or family member go through the recovery process may stir up issues from your own past experiences. If this should happen, it is important to seek help for your own abuse issues.

It is important to know that any or all of these feelings are completely normal.

Remember that crisis lines and counseling are appropriate options for you as well as for the primary victim. By taking advantage of these services, you can help yourself as well as your loved one.