

Helping Survivors of Sexual Assault

Follow these guidelines to respond in a way that promotes healing and recovery when someone discloses to you that they experienced sexual assault:

REMAIN CALM. Encourage discussion about the trauma to the extent that the survivor feels comfortable.

REMINDE THE SURVIVOR that they are not responsible for the assault—no matter what—and that no one asks or deserves to be sexually assaulted.

BE SUPPORTIVE. Validate the survivor's reactions to the assault.

AVOID SAYING YOU KNOW how the survivor feels. No one can ever really know how another person feels even if they have experienced the same kind of trauma.

BE A GOOD LISTENER and avoid expressing any judgment.

ENCOURAGE the survivor to seek advice and support from someone knowledgeable about the effects of sexual assault, such as a victim advocate, a rape crisis counselor, or another trained mental health professional.

HELP HER OR HIM to regain control of his or her life. That includes deciding who to tell about the assault and when. (Of course this must be guided by statutes regarding mandatory reporting for certain types of victims.)

RESPECT the survivor's need for privacy.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR OWN FEELINGS of anger, concern, and frustration. Seek counseling if you need it.

REMINDE the survivor that your love and friendship remain intact.

(Adapted with permission from the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault)

Helping Survivors of Sexual Assault – Reading List

- Barshinger, C., LaRowe, L., and Tapin, A. (1995). *Haunted Marriage – Overcoming the Ghosts of Your Spouse's Childhood Abuse*. Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Beattie, M. (1989). *Beyond Co-dependency*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
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- Davis, L. (1991). *Allies in Healing: When the Person You Love Was Sexually Abused as a Child*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Engel, B. (1994). *Families in Recovery*. Los Angeles, CA: Lowell House.
- Engel, B. (1991). *Partners in Recovery*. New York, NY: Fawcett Columbine.
- Gil, E. (1991). *Outgrowing the Pain Together: A Book for Partners of Adults Abused as Children*. New York, NY: Dell Bantam Doubleday.
- Graber, K. (1991). *Ghosts in the Bedroom: A Guide for Partners of Incest Survivors*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
- Levine, R.B. (1996). *When You Are the Partner of a Rape or Incest Survivor – A Workbook for You*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc.
- Maltz, W. (1998). *"Partners in Healing: Couples Overcoming the Sexual Repercussions of Incest"* (Video). Eugene, OR: Independent Video Services, 401 E. 10th Av., Suite 160, 97401.
- McEnvoy, A. and Brookings, J. (1984). *If She is Raped: A Book for Husbands, Fathers, and Male Friends*. Holmes Beach, FL: Learning Publications.