

When Someone You Care About Has Been Sexually Assaulted

At The Turning Point, we frequently receive calls from people who are close to someone who was raped and want to know how they can be of assistance to the victim. Here are some things keep in mind when someone you care about has been sexually assaulted.

Do be supportive. Experience tells us that a victim who receives emotional support from those she/he is close to will make a much healthier recovery. Really listen to her/his feelings without trying to talk her/him out of any feelings she/he may have that you feel uncomfortable with. Comments such as “Try to keep busy and think about something else,” and “There’s nothing to be afraid of now” make her/him feel discounted and misunderstood. Your goal is not to solve problems for her/him but to allow her/him to verbalize any feelings she/he may have about the assault. Her/his feelings may range from:

- Fear and concern for her/his physical safety to
- Helplessness and powerlessness
- Guilt
- Embarrassment
- Worthlessness and low self-esteem
- Isolation, alienation, and withdrawal.

Don’t pry and ask for details and specifics. Give her/him the opportunity to talk about her/his feelings and reactions as she/he chooses. Let her/him know you are willing to talk with her/him about her/his feelings without pushing her/him into it.

Don’t be a “rescuer” by telling her/him what to do and what not to do. It is very crucial that she/he feels like she/he is in control of any decisions made about her/his police case, living situation, etc. Your attempts to rescue and doing these things for her/him serve merely to reinforce her/his feelings of loss of control and power that occurred during the assault. Any ideas you have that affect her/him should be posed as suggestions for her/his consideration rather than advice that she/he “should” follow. If possible, have the victim involved in as much of the process as possible. Example: “Do you think you might feel better having someone stay with you tonight? Can you think of someone we could call who could do this?”

Recognize you own limitations in dealing with her/him and encourage her/him to seek counseling with someone trained and experienced in rape counseling. Although the support you provide as a friend is crucial and irreplaceable, professional counseling is often needed. Rape victims often need specific information about police and courtroom procedures as well as assurance that their emotional reactions are within normal range. Encourage her/him to talk with someone experienced in rape counseling to address those needs.



You have a right to be angry and may need to talk about your frustrations. Since the victim is someone you care about, you may also experience a whole range of emotional reactions. Remember to focus any anger and frustration you may have where it belongs – on the assailant not her/him. Your own personal revenge against the rapist won't help her/him and may even add to her/his anxiety. Find another outlet for this rather than talking to the victim about it. She/he needs you to be gentle, patient, and sensitive to her/his needs rather than having to deal with your problems and frustrations. Your feelings are important and it is important that you have someone to discuss your with. Feel free to utilize the counseling services at the Rape Crisis Center. By talking through your feelings about the assault, you may be better able to provide the continuing help she may need.

Keep in mind that she handled a life-threatening situation the best she/he could and avoid any comments that imply judgment about her/his actions. Rape victims are often besieged with advice about how they “should” have better handled the situation in the first place. Remember that the ultimate responsibility for the crime lies with the assailant and that she/he is not to be blamed for being in the “wrong place at the wrong time.” Comments such as “Why didn't you scream?” and “What were you doing taking a ride with someone you didn't know?” serve only to make her feel uncared for and misunderstood.

Thanks for inquiring about how you can be of assistance to your friend or relative. Remember, it is reasonable to expect that there will be some disruption to the victim's life for a while. Unfortunately, there is nothing that any of us can do to totally relieve her/his trauma. However, your support and caring can make a significant difference in her/his return to her/his previous life pattern.

