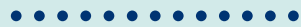


what you CAN DO

BELIEVE the survivor's account of the assault.



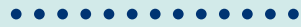
REASSURE the survivor you still love her/him and that you know the assault was not her/his fault.



LET the survivor know s/he did the right things during the assault. S/he had to make life and death decisions in an instant. Survival is evidence that s/he handled the assault correctly. Judging or questioning what the survivor did or did not do is harmful to the healing process.



ENCOURAGE the survivor to get healthcare as soon as possible, even if s/he thinks there was no injury.



GOING through a forensic (evidence collection) examination and/or the criminal justice system is difficult. It will help if you or a Sexual Assault Crisis Center advocate can be there with the survivor.



RESPECT the survivor's decision to report or not report the assault to the police. There are tremendous personal sacrifices involved in prosecuting a sexual assault that the survivor may not feel able to make at this difficult time.

ENCOURAGE the survivor to talk about the assault at her/his own pace. Talking and expressing feelings promotes healing. Be aware, however, that hearing repeated details about the assault can be upsetting for you. On the other hand, silence can be frustrating. Keep in mind the survivor's needs are most important now. Tell the survivor you are there to listen and give support whenever s/he is ready to talk, but do not push.



ENCOURAGE the survivor to take a self-defense class. This can build self-confidence and increase assertiveness skills. (The Sexual Assault Crisis Center offers these and other classes to help survivors heal.)



REMEMBER it's up to the survivor to heal. You can provide support and concern. It is important to take good care of yourself during this stressful time.



WHEN you want support or information, call the Sexual Assault Crisis Center's 24-hour crisis line at (865) 522-7273 (or toll-free at 1-888-522-5244). Professional staff and trained volunteers are available to provide emotional support and legal/medical information to anyone concerned about a sexual assault, whether it happened recently or long ago. All conversations are confidential, and you don't have to give your name.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTER

Since 1973, the Sexual Assault Crisis Center has been providing compassionate, quality care to those who have been hurt by a sexual assault, training for those who work with assault survivors and education for the community. All services are confidential and free of charge.

- 24-hour crisis counseling – (865) 522-7273 / 1-888-522-5244
- forensic exams and healthcare
- criminal justice support and advocacy
- accompaniment at area hospital emergency rooms and the SafeCenter
- police and court accompaniment
- individual, couple, family and group counseling
- support groups for survivors and their loved ones
- self-defense classes
- sexual assault awareness and safety programs
- child sexual abuse prevention programs
- professional inservice training
- lending library of books and written information
- programs in several counties throughout East Tennessee

funding SOURCES

The Sexual Assault Crisis Center is a private non-profit agency funded by the United Way; city and county governments; Tennessee Departments of Children's Services, Health, and the Office of Criminal Justice Programs; foundation grants and private donations. Gifts of money, goods and services are crucial to the Center's operation and enable the Center to provide services at no charge. All donations are tax deductible.



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if someone you love HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTER

p.o. box 11523 ▶ knoxville, tn 37939-1523
office (865) 558-9040 ▶ fax (865) 584-7872
24-hour crisis line (865) 522-7273
toll free long distance 1-888-522-5244
email: sacc@esper.com

what is SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact or sexual attention committed by force, threat, bribe, manipulation, pressure, deception, entrapment, surprise, or abuse of one's position of authority. It is a crime. Sexual assault is usually physical, but can be verbal or emotional as well. It includes rape and attempted rape, sexual touching, child sexual abuse, incest, marital rape and sexual harassment. Sexual assault is a terrifying and often brutal crime. People who commit sexual assaults can be strangers, acquaintances, trusted friends or family members. The devastating effects of sexual assault are shared by victims and by those who love them.

Sexual assault is a crime of violence, anger and power. It is not motivated by sexual desire alone. Perpetrators use sexual violence as a weapon to control, humiliate and hurt their victims. Victims are targeted for their *vulnerability*, not their attractiveness, appearance or behavior. Anyone can become a victim. Sexual assault of any kind is *never* the victim's fault. No one ever "asks for" or deserves to be sexually assaulted.

sexual assault HURTS US ALL

If someone you love has been sexually assaulted, you know how much s/he has been hurt. As a loved one you suffer too. You are probably feeling many of the same emotions the survivor* feels — powerless, angry, guilty, depressed and afraid.

Sexual assault creates a crisis for loved ones as well as for survivors. Recovery can take a long time and depends on many factors. Those closest to the survivor can influence how successful recovery will be. To best help the survivor, it is important you understand her/his reactions in addition to your own, so that you will be able to give love and support when it is needed most.

*The word "survivor" is used to recognize that a person who has been sexually assaulted is not forever a victim.

the survivor's REACTION

Sexual assault is always traumatic, and those who survive a sexual assault often have severe stress reactions similar to those of people who survive other life-threatening events, such as war or natural disaster. Each survivor's response is unique, and *there is not any one correct way to recover*. There are, however, certain stages survivors typically experience as they heal:

CRISIS STAGE

In the hours and days immediately following the assault, shock and denial are common reactions. It's hard to believe the assault really happened and difficult to understand why. Survivors may feel strong emotions and appear visibly disturbed, crying and shaking. On the other hand, they may be in shock, seem calm and composed, or feel nothing at all (not even pain from serious injuries they may have sustained during the assault). All these reactions are normal.

During the crisis stage, the most common emotion is fear — of the perpetrator returning, of being alone, of places like the one where the assault happened or of people who remind the survivor of the perpetrator. Survivors often feel nervous, jumpy and irritable, finding it hard to rest, concentrate or sleep well. They may feel hyper-alert and suspicious of common sounds, movements or activities around them. In this state, survivors can be startled easily and often don't feel safe under any circumstances. They may also feel angry, depressed or confused and unable to control their changing moods and strong emotions. Survivors can misdirect their anger towards loved ones or themselves at this time.

Physical reactions may also occur after a sexual assault, including changes in appetite, unexplained soreness, menstrual changes and sexual difficulties. Survivors may have disturbing and intense thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks of the assault, causing them to feel as though the assault is happening again. This can be very upsetting and frightening for survivors.

Many survivors also feel guilty, ashamed or "dirty" because of the things they had to do to survive, because they think they "should" have been able to escape, or because they believe the many myths that wrongly blame victims for sexual assaults. As a result, survivors may feel bad about themselves, wash more often, avoid closeness, or try to "punish" themselves in some way.

Some survivors want to talk about the assault soon afterwards. Others may wait until much later or may never feel comfortable talking about it. Some survivors do not want to be touched after an assault, and others want increased physical affection and reassurance.

Although all sexual assault survivors pass through the four stages listed above, the passage is not always smooth or straightforward. A survivor may be in two stages at the same time, may return to a previous stage for a time, or get stuck in one stage. The Sexual Assault Crisis Center can help with information, counseling and support during any stage of healing.

DENIAL STAGE

During this stage, survivors try to deny any negative effects or changes as a result of the assault and may assure you that things are "fine." This may be because they think everyone is tired of hearing about the assault or because they are trying to shut out the pain of remembering in order to get back to "normal." In an effort to put the assault behind them, survivors may change things about themselves, including their appearance, lifestyle, job or residence. They may also avoid people, places and activities that could remind them of the assault. They may become withdrawn and detached. This stage can be brief or can last a long time. Sometimes while in the denial stage, survivors may turn to things that eventually become harmful (such as alcohol, drugs, sex, overeating or overworking) in order to numb their feelings and go on.

SUFFERING STAGE

This stage is when the reality of the assault sinks in. It is characterized by depression and feelings of loss. Survivors may struggle with an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The survivor's sense of security and control over her/his life has been devastated, and s/he feels betrayed by her/his own vulnerability. Commonly held beliefs have been challenged; it may be extremely difficult now to believe that life is predictable, the world is safe and people are trustworthy. Many survivors seek counseling during this time.

RESOLUTION STAGE

This stage begins when survivors start the long-term process of resolving their feelings about the sexual assault and themselves, and recognizing the full responsibility of the perpetrator. The goals of this stage are to move from *victim* to *survivor* and to integrate the sexual assault as a traumatic event that happened in one's life but no longer controls one's life. If resolution is not achieved, survivors may continue to have problems.

reaction of LOVED ONES

DISBELIEF

Family and friends may react to the sexual assault of a loved one with many of the same emotional and physical reactions that the survivor experiences. At first you may respond with shock and disbelief, especially if the survivor still looks the same or there are no visible signs of the assault. You may doubt the assault really happened. This is *denial*, and it happens to loved ones as well as survivors after a traumatic experience.

FEAR

You may feel intense fear for your own or the survivor's safety. You may try to protect her/him from future assault by being extremely cautious or over-protective. It may be hard to let the survivor out of your sight or to let her/him return to everyday activities. All this concern may be reassuring soon after the assault, but too much caution on your part can make it difficult for the survivor to feel capable and in control again.

ANGER

Often loved ones experience anger, and even rage, after a sexual assault. Your first reaction may be to seek revenge — to find and kill the perpetrator. This is a normal feeling. However, acting out of revenge will not help you or the survivor if you end up hurt or in jail and the survivor has to worry about *you*. Sometimes you may feel anger towards the survivor, especially if s/he did something you warned against (like drinking or going to a party) that ended in sexual assault. If you find yourself blaming the survivor for the assault, make sure you have someone other than the survivor who can listen to your angry feelings. Remember, even if the survivor used poor judgement, *it is the perpetrator who committed the crime and the perpetrator who is totally responsible for it*.

DEPRESSION

It is common to feel hopeless and depressed. A sexual assault brings up feelings of powerlessness in survivors and in those who love them, and you may feel that your life is out of control now. Your security and trust have been drastically violated. If depression lasts for more than a few weeks or becomes serious, get support for yourself.

GUILT

Guilt is a common reaction when a loved one has been sexually assaulted. Those closest to the survivor may blame themselves, believing that if they had done (or not done) something, the assault could have been prevented. But whatever you did or did not do, *you* are not to blame if someone you love has been sexually assaulted. *It is solely the fault of the perpetrator*. Instead of blaming yourself for something beyond your control, concentrate on the positive things you can do now.