

Tab 3 How to support a survivor

Many people do not know what to say or do when a loved one is sexually assaulted. Most of the time your supportive listening ear is all that is needed. Remind him/her the assault is NOT their fault. There is no such thing as a atypical. Sexual assault or sexual assault victim so there is no right way to feel, act or heal after an assault. Each survivor will deal with their experiences and emotions differently.

No one should try to cope alone. There are many ways that you can help a friend or family member who has been sexually assaulted:

1. Believe him/her, this is the most important thing you can do
2. Don't blame or judge — it is NEVER the fault of the victim
3. Be patient and understanding — healing takes time
4. Let the survivor talk, but don't force a discussion
5. Educate yourself — knowing how she and others may respond to the assault will make you better prepared to assist
6. Respect his or her choices, even if they are not the ones you would make
7. Demonstrate compassion, acceptance and support
8. Help empower them, encourage her/him to make decisions which help to regain control and power over their life
9. Validate their emotions as an understandable response to the assault
10. Reassure the survivor that he/she did their best to survivor and what was necessary to prevent further harm
11. Recognize their strength to survive and heal
12. Help her/him to prepare for what lies ahead
13. Share your feelings with him/her so that he/she knows they are not alone and have your unconditional love and support
14. Ask before touching, some people can't stand a hug, others can't make it without one

It is important to note that sexual assault is an act of violence that affects not only the victim, but also anyone close to them. For this reason it is important that you make your self-care a priority.