

SAAVI Office

Sexual Assault and Anti Violence Information

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WHEN SOMEONE CLOSE IS RAPED

adapted from

The Ideal Reaction

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Rape Crisis Center, SLC, UT 1989

“My boyfriend has been so wonderful about it. He is one reason I got through it. His concern was for me. He was just glad to have me alive and well.”

1. Educate yourself regarding rape. This will make you a more effective helper. Contact a rape crisis center that can advise and counsel you; invite the survivor to join you in this action.
2. Place the needs of the survivor ahead of your own. Avoid distracting the survivor with your own struggles. This will allow the individual to focus full attention on her/his own feelings and recovery.
3. Never suggest that the survivor was in any way responsible for their victimization. Do all you can to convey the message that rape is *never* the fault of the survivor. Create a safe, accepting environment free from judgment or criticism.
4. Help the survivor communicate with family and others. When you are willing to serve as a buffer to others, you demonstrate your support to the survivor and to others.
5. “Be there” for the survivor. Throughout the ordeal, your presence and support are reassuring and very important to the healing work the survivor must do. Taking time to accompany her/him to trial dates, ect. shows the individual they are not alone.
6. Be sensitive to her/his need for space and privacy. Help the survivor feel comfortable spending time alone or with others. This is important to their recovery. Also, do not divulge information to others. The survivor should decide who to tell *and* when.
7. Follow the survivor’s cues; her/his cues will tell you what type of support is needed or wanted. Everyone is different; what may be helpful to one person, may not be helpful to another. By following the survivor’s lead, you will help her/him to feel more in control; you will also increase confidence in her/his ability to make decisions. Reinforcing her/his decisions and actions will help your loved one realize her/his strength and capability.

A Guide for Husbands, Fathers and Male Friends of Survivors of Rape

Common MISUNDERSTANDINGS about rape:

- Her appearance or behavior caused the assault
- Failure to resist the attack means that she gave consent
- Rape only harms virgins
- It does some women good to be raped
- The rapist is your sexual rival

TRUTH about rape:

- Rape is NOT an act of infidelity on her part
- Rape should never be equated with an act of promiscuity
- A woman is never responsible for being raped
- Rape is not the same as “making love”
- Women do not “secretly desire” to be raped
- Rape is an act of violence, not passion

Information about rape:

- Rape often destroys a woman’s sense of safety
- Rape often undermines a woman’s sense of trust
- Rape often makes it hard for her to accept nurturing or to nurture others
- Rape often robs a woman of a sense of control over her life
- Rape often diminishes her sense of self-esteem

What YOU need to communicate to her:

- Let her know that you believe her
- Let her know that you do not blame her for what happened
- Let her know that you will stand by her

Consequences of THREATENING REVENGE on the attacker:

- Forces her to worry about your safety as well as hers
- Cuts off communication because it upsets her
- Shifts the attention from her needs to your anger
- May lead her to fear you and your rage
- Increases her emotional burden

You might feel angry at her because:

- The assault has caused turmoil in your relationship
- You may feel manipulated by her
- She may not have told you in a timely fashion and you may wonder, “Is she hiding something?”
- She isn’t recovering on your terms and you may think, “Why can’t she get better?”

Note: Deal with your anger constructively. Often it is helpful to get counseling to deal with your angry feelings about the rape.

HELPING THE RAPE SURVIVOR

- ✓ Encourage open expression of what has taken place
- ✓ Believe her/him; accept what you are hearing
- ✓ Provide an accepting and safe environment where the survivor can share her/his feelings without fear of condemnation
- ✓ Comfort her/him
- ✓ Help her/him to regain the feeling of being in control
- ✓ Listen and understand what the experience of rape actually means to the victim
- ✓ Understand what the rape represents to you as the significant other. Do you believe in some of the myths?
 - “Nice women don’t get rapes”
 - “Men cannot be raped”
 - “She/he must have asked for it”
 - “She/he is now tainted”
 - “I should have been able to protect her/him”
- ✓ Reinforce that the rape was not her/his fault
- ✓ Avoid questions that seem to blame (i.e. “Why didn’t you scream/fight? “Why did you go to that party?” “Why were you wearing that outfit?”)
- ✓ Become educated about rape and the nature of crisis the survivor is experiencing. Show empathy.
- ✓ Be sensitive to manifestations of rape trauma (This could include reactions to certain touches, frightening her/him when coming up from behind, terror at sudden noises, problems with intimacy)
- ✓ A rape may trigger previously unaddressed conflicts
- ✓ Recognize that moods and reactions may change from one day to the next. Recovery will last a long time.
- ✓ Reassure her/him that she/he can turn to you whenever she/he needs your continued support
- ✓ Help the survivor to mobilize her/his own best coping abilities
- ✓ If the survivor requests it rally the support of her/his friends, clergy, co-workers, teachers, supervisors

As a friend or family member, realize that a rape experience will stress vulnerable areas in any relationship.

HOW CAN I HELP AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Rape not only impacts the victim, but also her/his friends and family members. One of the greatest hardships is not knowing how to help. This packet provides advice for those whose friend or family member has been raped. Its authors, who include both rape victims and counselors, believe it will help the victim as well as those close to her/him during this difficult time.

KNOW WHAT TO DO AND WHAT TO AVOID

Rape is always a crime—do not blame the victim. The rapist is the criminal. It is the rapist’s fault. Victims do not cause their attacker’s behavior.

Accept her experience the way it happened.

Don't second-guess the survivor's behavior. Avoid statements like "You should have" or "You shouldn't have" (i.e. "You should have had a lock on the windows," "You should have fought/fought harder," "If you hadn't gone over to his apartment this wouldn't have happened.") These types of statements only increase pain after the fact. Don't focus on the victim's behavior—doing so suggests that the victim was somehow responsible; it is the rapist's behavior that should be condemned. Nothing that the victim did or didn't do caused the rape. You may feel that she/he used poor judgment in a given situation; however responsibility for the rape lies with the perpetrator.

Leave comparisons alone.

It does not help to compare the victim's experience with others who have been raped. Someday she/he may want to learn more about the reactions of other rape victims, but any such discussion should be at her/his request. Do not compare what did happen with what could have happened. She/he already knows how much worse it could have been. Remember, most likely during the attack her/his overwhelming emotion was the fear of being killed. It is up to the victim to decide whether or not she/he was "lucky" to have survived and not to have been injured more seriously.

Face the issue.

Well-meaning people often tell the victim of a crisis, "Don't worry/don't cry/don't think about it." This is asking the impossible, and it is not helpful for someone who has been raped. Telling her/him to deny or downplay her/his experience may suggest how uncomfortable, rather than how concerned you are. Neither the crime nor its aftermath will go away by ignoring them.

Be ready to listen.

It is helpful to let the victim know she/he can discuss her/his experience with you if she/he wants to. Some individuals need to process their experience by repeating details or talking about feelings. Others may want to talk, but not about the details of the rape. Try to listen non-judgmentally and don't ask specific questions. Your interest in knowing details of the sexual assault should not overpower your desire to be supportive and gentle with the victim. Offer her/him the opportunity to talk, but never insist that talking will "cure" her/him. Remember, she/he was coerced during the assault; she/he won't be helped by further coercion, however well meant.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

If you want to help your friend or relative in concrete ways, be creative, but recognize your limitations. Do not offer more than you can give. Any assistance, however small it seems to you, will demonstrate your concern and care. However, do not become overprotective. The most important thing you can do for the survivor is to help her/him feel control over her/his life and decisions.

Going out.

Sometimes the daily routines of life will be threatening to an individual dealing with the aftermath of rape. Traveling home late from work or an evening class or even grocery shopping may be frightening. If your friend or relative expresses concern about her/his safety in these situations, you might offer to drive her/him home or accompany her/him on public transportation.

Domestic concerns.

For some time after the attack, routine chores and responsibilities may seem burdensome to your friend or relative. She/he may be grateful for assistance with errands, child care, laundry, etc. To the extent that you are *able*, offer to help with these tasks and be prepared to follow through.

Home security.

Regardless of where she/he was raped, the victim will probably be concerned about the safety of her/his house or apartment. If she/he would like, you can help her install locks on doors and windows, or help with other security measures she/he wants to take. (Remember, do not attempt to take control of the situation.) She/he may decide to move to a new apartment or house; you can offer to help search for new living arrangements or assist with moving chores.

Need to get away.

Depending upon the circumstances of the attack, your friend or relative may appreciate having a place to stay for a while outside her/his home. Alternatively, she/he may appreciate having a companion stay in her/his home. For individuals who have been raped, fear is often a predominate emotion for a considerable time afterwards. It can surface any time—especially when she/he is feeling vulnerable and may intensify when she/he is alone. Consider making your home available as a temporary refuge or offering to spend a few days with her/him at her/his home. If your family or other responsibilities prevent you from making this kind of commitment, you might offer to arrange a schedule of regular phone calls. NOTE: Keep in mind that sheltering the victim or offering assistance is a serious responsibility. Her/his pain will be closer to you as you take on the role of comforter. Make sure you are prepared to make a commitment of this nature before offering assistance. *Knowing and respecting your own limitations is important.*

THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER SAYING TO A SURVIVOR {EVEN IF THEY DON'T SOUND LIKE THE THINGS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SAY RIGHT NOW}

- “You’re alive—that’s all that matters. You didn’t do anything wrong. You did a lot of things RIGHT—You survived!”
- “I don’t think any less of you because of this.”
- “It was not your fault. You don’t deserve this.”
- “You don’t have to forgive or forget. You can tell anyone you want to, as often as you need to.”
- “You don’t have to share your feelings with me, but I’ll listen to them if you want me to.”
- “You don’t have to worry about me or take care of my feelings.”
- “I’ll never know how you feel, but I can see you’re hurting. I understand you may not want to be touched.”
- “I will leave when you want to be alone.”

It is true that many relationships do not survive such a crisis. You may do all the “right” things and still not have everything return to the way it was before. However, if you see that any of these statements really help the survivor feel better, try repeating them again, with sincerity.