

# HOW TO SUPPORT A FRIEND THROUGH SEXUAL ASSAULT

## What is sexual assault?

- The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:
  - Attempted rape
  - Fondling or unwanted sexual touching
  - Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body
  - Penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape

## How can you help?

- **Do**
  - **Believe your friend.** It is important to examine your own attitudes about rape and sexual assault before you can provide effective support to someone who has been sexually assaulted. A sexual assault survivor will be very sensitive to your moods, opinions, and attitudes.
  - **Be understanding.** No one EVER deserves to be raped and/or sexually assault, regardless of where they were, who they were with, or what they were doing. Allow your friend to regain control by making their own decisions. Offer to help them with decision making, but do not make decisions for them. If your friend is a survivor of attempted rape and/or sexual assault, know that their experience was traumatic/painful and their emotional responses can be similar to those of a rape survivor



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- **Be a good listener.** Let your friend know you want to listen. Survivors want you to hear them, but they do not expect you to solve the situation. Let the person tell you at their own pace what happened.
  - Offer to set aside time to talk together
  - Let your friend talk, do not interrupt
  - Show interest in what they say by facing them and making eye contact
  - If they need encouragement to continue talking, try repeating back to them what they have said
- **Be supportive.** This may be the first time your friend has told anyone about the rape and/or sexual assault. Offer whatever expression of sympathy that feels comfortable ("It must have been really scary for you"). Ask about their feelings, more than just the facts ("You say you feel guilty. How so?"). Most survivors blame themselves for the assault and it will take time to work through those emotions. Instead of saying, "It's not your fault," you can say something like "I do not think it is your fault." Respond to any emotions your friend expresses, such as fear, anger, or guilt. Each of these are part of the rape trauma syndrome. Discuss different options with them, such as contacting a victim advocate, reporting to police, and/or going to the hospital (only if they want to). Do not be critical or judgmental (do not ask "Did you not fight back?" or "Why did you go out with him?"). Instead, acknowledge that what happened was awful, frightening, and undeserved ("I can see this is hard for you to talk about. I am glad you decided to talk with me.")
- **Offer assistance.** Help them examine legal and medical options.



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- **Don't**

- Assume they can "just put it behind them" or think of it as "just a bad experience."
- Expect your friend to be "done with it" in a few weeks or even months.
- Ask "why" questions as they can sound blaming.
- Embrace them without asking first.
- Get angry or talk about "getting the perpetrator. It will not help your friend cope, but will instead keep attention on your friend.

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## **RAINN Sexual Assault Hotline**

- RAINN is an anti-sexual violence organization with a free, confidential, 24/7 national sexual assault hotline.
- **Website:** <https://www.rainn.org/>
- **Hotline:** 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- **Live Chat:** <https://hotline.rainn.org/online>

## **National Sexual Violence Resource Center**

- National Sexual Violence Resource Center provides leadership in preventing and responding sexual violence through collaborating, sharing and creating resources, and promoting research.
- **Website:** <https://www.nsvrc.org/>

## **National Organization for Victim Assistance**

- National Organization for Victim Assistance is a leader in victim advocacy, education, and credentialing.
- **Website:** <https://www.trynova.org/>
- **Victim Assistance Helpline:** 800-879-6682 (TRY-NOVA)

## **Victim Connect Resource Center**

- Victim Connect Resource Center is a referral hotline where crime victims can learn about their rights and options confidentially and compassionately.
- **Website:** <https://victimconnect.org>
- **Traditional-based helpline:** 855-4-VICTIM (84-2846)
- **Online Chat:** <http://Chat.VictimConnect.org>

## **Crisis Text Line**

- Crisis Text Line serves anyone, in any type of crisis, providing access to free, 24/7 support via a medium people already use and trust: text.
- **Website:** <https://www.crisistextline.org>
- Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor



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## The Women's Center Rape Crisis and Victim Services

- The Women's Center Rape Crisis and Victim Services program is one of the most comprehensive and distinguished rape crisis centers in the Southwest. No matter the age or gender, victims of stranger and non-stranger sexual abuse and sexual assault find both hope and help here.
- **Website:** <https://www.womenscentertc.org>
- **24-hour crisis hotline:** 817-927-2737

## Anti-Violence Project

- Anti-Violence Project empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities and allies to end all forms of violence through organizing and education, and supports survivors through counseling and advocacy.
- **Website:** <https://avp.org/#>
- **Hotline:** 212-714-1141

## National Domestic Violence Hotline

- At the National Domestic Violence Hotline, our highly trained expert advocates are available 24/7 to talk confidentially with anyone in the United States who is experiencing domestic violence, seeking resources or information, or questioning unhealthy aspects of their relationship.
- **Website:** <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- **Hotline:** 800-787-3224

## Additional Resources

- Find a sex educator, counselor or therapist in your area  
[aasect.org/refferal-directory](http://aasect.org/refferal-directory)

