

Things to consider saying to a friend or loved one

"It's not your fault."

"Thank you for telling me."

"I am available if and when you are ready to talk."

Helping a Friend or Loved One

Sexual violence is any act that breaks a person's trust and/or safety and is sexual in nature. Victims/survivors of sexual assaults are forced, coerced, and/or manipulated to participate in sexual activity. Victims/survivors do not cause their assaults and are not to blame. Perpetrators are responsible for the assaults.

It can be difficult to know what to say or do when a friend or loved one has been sexually assaulted. One of the most critical things that one can do is to believe the victim/survivor. Non-judgmental support from friends or loved ones is a significant factor in a survivor's recovery (MCASA, 2012).

Ways friends or loved ones can support a survivor:

- Listen to what they have to say and ask what you can do to help —don't assume you know what is best for them
- Learn about available resources like local sexual assault service providers and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs and ask the survivor if you can share the information with them
- Remind them it was not their fault
- Consider accompanying them to various appointments if they request it
- Respect their confidentiality—don't tell others about their assault without their consent
- Take care of yourself too—seek support if you are feeling overwhelmed, while continuing to maintain the survivor's confidentiality

WCASA, 2012 & Peace Over Violence, 2014

Sources:

Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault. (2012). Friends & Family's of Survivors.

Peace Over Violence. (2014). If Someone You Know Has Been Sexually Assaulted.

WCASA is a membership agency comprised of organizations and individuals working to end sexual violence in Wisconsin. Among these are the 56 sexual assault service provider (SASP) agencies throughout the state that offer support, advocacy and information to victims of sexual assault and their families. For information sheets on other topics and for more information about sexual assault, please visit our website. This sheet may be reproduced in its original format only.

This information does not constitute legal advice.