

## Rape/Sexual Assault: When It Happens To Someone You Know

As a family member or friend of a sexual assault survivor, you may be feeling confused by some of the reactions s/he exhibits. It can help to know the facts about sexual assault, what reactions to expect from a survivor and yourself, and most of all, how you can help.

Anyone can be a victim of this violent crime: male or female, young or old, from all ethnic and economic backgrounds. A survivor may be someone you know or love. When someone you know or love becomes a victim of sexual assault, you are also victimized as well and may be feeling a variety of emotions.

- Sexual assault happens when someone is forced *or* coerced into sexual contact. This includes when someone is unable to consent to sexual contact because they are asleep, unconscious, or under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
- Sexual assault is a crime of power and control. It is NOT about sex.
- Sexual assault is NEVER the victim's fault.
- The chances of being a victim of sexual assault in your lifetime are:
  - 1 in 4 for females (rates are consistent throughout lifetime)
  - 1 in 7 for males (rates decline as males age)
- Over 66% of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows, such as a friend, relative, or acquaintance.
- Over 60% of assaults occur in or near the home of the victim.
- Only 28% (or less) of sexual assault incidents are reported due to the personal nature of these crimes, and fears about public criminal justice process, family/friend/community response.

Every survivor has a unique reaction to his/her assault, and as a support person, you cannot completely understand what they are going through (even if you have yourself experienced an assault); however, by providing support at this difficult time, you can make a difference in their healing. A survivor needs empathy, understanding, and *if s/he chooses to talk*, someone who listens actively and non-judgmentally. You may be wondering "What can I do?" or "How can I fix this?". You cannot make the assault go away, but by listening to what the survivor needs right now, you can help him/her reclaim some power over his/her healing.

Here are some ways you can help a survivor of sexual assault...

## How You Can Help

**Remain Calm:** It is common to feel shock and rage, but it is not appropriate to express these emotions to the survivor at this time. Share these feelings with someone else, whom you trust, and preferably someone who does not have a relationship with the survivor (this is because the story of the assault is the survivor's story to share). Counseling is available for you as a support person at Turning Point, (586)463-4430.

**Focus on the Survivor's Needs:** Ask what you can do to help.

**Encourage Medical Attention:** Seeking medical attention is important for many reasons, such as: treatment of injuries, prevention and treatment of STD's, and testing and prevention of pregnancy, as well as evidence collection (within 4 days of assault).

**Give the Survivor Control:** Allow the survivor to make decisions, such as who to tell and what steps to take next. You can help by discussing what the options are, but do not try to make decisions for the survivor.

**Let the survivor express feelings:** Allow the survivor to share what s/he is feeling IF he/she wants to talk about it. They may be experiencing a wide range of emotions, and all feelings are valid!

**Convey unconditional acceptance:** Make it clear to the survivor that you believe him/her and that the responsibility for the assault lies with the person who assaulted him/her.

**Encourage counseling:** Give the survivor Turning Point's 24-hour crisis line (586)463.6990, and business line (586) 463.4430 (for counseling). Let the decision for counseling be made by the survivor.

**Ask before touching:** You may want to hold or comfort the survivor, but the survivor may not want to be touched. Ask before you touch and abide by the wishes of the survivor.

To learn more, or to speak with an advocate or counselor, please call Turning Point.



24-hour Crisis Line: (586) 463.6990

Business Line: (586) 463.4430