

# COMMUNICATING WITH THE VICTIM

## *What to Say to the Victim*

- ❖ Be a patient and approachable listener. This requires being sensitive to their feelings and willingness to demonstrate unconditional acceptance. By giving them the opportunity to express feelings when they are ready, you will help them work through emotional conflicts and you will gain a better understanding of their needs.
- ❖ Don't pressure or "interrogate" by insisting that they recount the details of the incident over and over again. When they are ready to discuss the rape and their feelings about it, they will do so. Forcing them to be candid intensifies their confusion and may make them resent you.
- ❖ You should never express anger toward them if they initially are reluctant to talk, or if they delay telling you for a period of time. Do not accuse them of "hiding something" because they did not tell you sooner. They may wish to protect loved ones from the pain and turmoil caused by the assault. Remaining silent should not be interpreted as a rejection of you, but as their way of sorting things out.
- ❖ Pay special attention to recurring themes in their conversations. These might be clues providing insight into issues which are especially troublesome to them. Being raped can bring out much "unfinished business" that has long troubled their relationship with you. By being alert to their conversational themes and by being open to discuss sensitive issues, you will come to better understand their emotional state and help them to resolve problems.
- ❖ Eventually, it is important for the two of you to discuss the impact of the rape on your relationship. The emotional consequences of rape are traumatic for all those involved in a personal relationship, especially you. Calmly sharing your feelings and vulnerabilities with them offers them the opportunity to nurture you, just as you have been nurturing them. Nurturing a loved one is an effective way to a speedy recovery.
- ❖ Consider relationship counseling. A competent, sensitive counselor can help remove barriers to effective communication.