

CRISIS CARE FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

I. HELPFUL RESPONSES

Being a support person to a victim of sexual assault or incest is a very important role. With lots of warmth, empathy, caring, and concern, the victim can begin the long process of recovery and healing. Below are some things you can do to help:

- A. Be open and nonjudgmental in your attitude and approach.
- B. Accept people wherever they are at. Some victims appear very calm and factual, while others express feelings by crying or chatting nervously.
- C. Stay warm and attentive.
- D. Communicate to the victim that he or she is a survivor. Stress that the sexual assault is over and the victim is safe. The safer victims feel, the more they may be able to talk about the feelings behind nervous laughter, shaking, and teeth-chattering.
- E. Understanding can go a long way. Explaining that the victim's feelings are normal and understandable can help the victim work through feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, and helplessness.
- F. Encourage the victim to find own inner strength and to make the decisions about what needs to be done next.
- G. Help to identify alternatives and assess consequences of each possible choice.
- H. Share that you are sensitive to the issues of sexual assault. For example, you might say, "I can't possibly understand just how you feel, but I'm here because I care about you and I'm interested in knowing how you're feeling and what I can do to help."
- I. Be a good listener and show that you are okay talking about what has just happened. Use open-ended questions and statements:
 - 1. "You seem to be saying..."
 - 2. "It sounds like you feel..."
 - 3. "It may be helpful if..."
 - 4. "Would you like to talk about that?"
 - 5. "How can I help?"
- J. Know all the available resources. Be accepting and patient. Establish rapport before making a referral.

II. NOT SO HELPFUL RESPONSES

A victim is very fearful of how others will react. The victim is afraid of being blamed, rejected, and pressured. Some things that can be upsetting to the victim include:

- A. Advice-giving. Do not use statements like "you should...", "you have to...", "it's your duty to..." Advice-giving can add to the victim's feelings of helplessness and dependency. She may think you just don't understand, and if the advice turns out wrong, the person may hold you responsible.

- B. Persuading with logic and lecturing. Example: "There is no logical reason for you to be afraid of everyone everywhere you go." "Do you realize the rapist will probably attack someone else if you don't report." "Yes, but..." "It just makes good sense to..." These responses provoke defensiveness. Feelings are not always logical or rational, but they are very important.
- C. Moralizing. "It will be your fault if this guy rapes somebody else because you won't report him." "You shouldn't have gone to a bar alone." These comments do not show respect for the victim's feelings or their rights to make decisions.
- D. Sympathizing. "Oh, it's not so bad." "Don't worry." "You'll feel better." "That's too bad." "You poor thing." Sympathy can be too condescending while empathy is more appropriate and shows an ability to put oneself in another person's position.
- E. Psychoanalyzing. "Your real problem is..." "You just have to get some counseling." "Oh, you don't feel that way." "You were setting yourself up to be raped."
- F. Trying/interrogating. "Why did you do that?" "How come you went out with him then?" "How often do you hitchhike alone?" "Why didn't you use the escort service?" "What were you wearing when it happened?"
- G. Sensitivity. "You shouldn't feel that way." "You should have been more careful." "Didn't you know it's dangerous to walk alone at night?"
- H. Teasing and joking. "Well, it's better to get raped than to get pregnant." "men are no good. They should all be sent to the moon."
- I. Blaming. This is not the time to lecture victims about their choice of friends, clothes, or lifestyle. Nothing that the victim said or did excuses the rape. Even if the victim disappointed you by breaking a family rule, try to focus on the victim's emotional needs and direct your anger at the perpetrator whose actions were inexcusable and criminal.