

HOW TO HELP

When a survivor tells you they were sexually assaulted, they are entrusting you with part of their life that is painful, frightening, and vulnerable. These guidelines can help you honor that trust and help their healing:

- ❖ **Believe the survivor.** Even if their memories are unclear or too terrible to believe, believe them.
- ❖ **Join with the survivor in validating the damage.** All abuse is harmful. Even if it's not violent, physical, or repeated. All abuse has serious consequences.
- ❖ **Educate yourself about sexual assault and the healing process.**
- ❖ **Validate the survivor's feelings of anger, pain, and fear.** These are natural, healthy responses to abuse. They need to feel them, express them, and be heard.
- ❖ **Express your feelings.** If you have feelings of outrage, sympathy, or pain, share them. Just make sure they do not overshadow the survivor's feelings.
- ❖ **Respect the time and space it takes to heal.** Healing is a slow process with lots of ups and downs. It can't be hurried.
- ❖ **Encourage the survivor to get help.** You can't be their only supporter.
- ❖ **Get help if the survivor is suicidal.** Do not hesitate or try to deal with it alone. Get professional help. If you don't know who else to call, ask the operator for the number for suicide prevention.
- ❖ **Accept that there will probably be changes in your relationship as the survivor heals.**
- ❖ **Resist seeing the survivor as a victim.** Continue to see them as strong, courageous individuals struggling to resolve a major trauma.

--Obtained from Beginning to Heal,
by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis