

## **How to Support a Survivor**

- Let her/him make decisions. It is natural to want to try and fix the problem but know that healing from this event will take a great deal of time and your friend must maintain the ability to choose how they wish to go about that healing process.
- You may provide advice, guidance, and information about options for additional support, but allow your friend to decide if, when and how they will pursue these resources. If your friend is hesitant to get help from any outside sources, even those that you know are supportive and helpful, offer to go with her/him. Sometimes that's all it takes to help a friend begin to take action.
- Remember it is often very difficult for a survivor to come forward and share their story and your reaction may have an impact on whether or not they choose to continue to share with others and seek further support. Tell your friend that you believe them and you want to support them in any way that you can. Even if you do not agree with their decision you should support their decision.
- Do not touch the survivor without first asking permission. Physical contact may or may not be appropriate. Ask, "Would you like a hug?" Do not assume that physical contact will be comforting or welcome. Try to ensure that everything you do is comforting.
- Listen and validate everything that your friend is telling you. Do not pass judgment on what you are hearing.
- Don't blame the survivor for anything. Avoid asking things like, "Were you drinking?" or "Why did you go home with that person?" Focus instead on making the person feel safe and loved. Assure your friend that it is not his or her fault.
- It is natural when listening to a story to want to ask questions and get details about what transpired. In this situation, however, it is best to allow the survivor to control what and how much they would like to tell you about the incident.

- Try to deal with your own reactions and emotions later. It is natural for you to feel angry, helpless, confused, or hurt. Try instead to focus on attending to your friend's feelings. Once the survivor's immediate needs are met and s/he is safe, you should consider seeking help from a counselor to talk about the incident and your own self-care.
- Do not try to minimize what has happened. While it may be true that "things will be okay" eventually, your friend has experienced a traumatic event and needs support, patience, and validation. Healing takes time.
- Encourage the survivor to seek help as soon as possible. Use this website to help understand what resources are available. Help them access that support. Ask your friend what s/he needs from you in terms of help and companionship.