

supporting a survivor of **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**



When someone shares their story with you...

BELIEVE THEM.

It is not your role to question whether sexual violence occurred. The fact is, false rape reports are no more nor less common than false reports for other crimes.

GIVE THEM OPTIONS.

Don't take charge of the situation and pressure the survivor to do what you think they should. That's what the perpetrator did. Give them the freedom to choose a path of recovery that is most comfortable, even if you would do it differently. Remember, there is no right way for a survivor to respond after being violated.

LISTEN TO THEM.

It is crucial to let a survivor know that they can talk to you about their experience whenever they are ready. Some may not wish to speak with you immediately, but at some point during the healing process, it is likely that the survivor will come to a loved one for support. When that happens, don't interrupt, or yell, or inject your feelings. Just open your ears to their pain, and actively listen. Your caring (but silent) attention will be invaluable.

NEVER BLAME.

No one ever deserves to be harassed, assaulted, or raped - no matter what they were wearing, how many times they've had sex before, whether they were walking alone at night, whether they were drinking at the time, if they were in a relationship, or if they went up to the perpetrator's room. Even if the survivor feels responsible, say clearly and caringly, "It wasn't your fault."

ASK BEFORE TOUCHING.

Don't assume that physical contact, even in the form of a gentle touch or hug, will be comforting to the survivor. Many survivors, especially within the first weeks after an assault, prefer to avoid touching, even with those they love and trust. Be patient. Give them the space they need, and try your best not to take it personally.

OWN YOUR FEELINGS.

We can't help but be hurt when someone we love is made to suffer. Sadness, confusion, anger, helplessness, fear, guilt, disappointment, shock, anxiety, desperation, and compassion are all common reactions for survivors and their loved ones. Being aware of these emotions will ultimately help you better understand the survivor's experience and be more supportive.

HELP YOURSELF.

Whether you reach out to a friend, family member, counselor, or religious professional, make sure you don't go through this experience alone. Suppressing your feelings will only make you less available to support the survivor. Remember, asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you don't know where to turn, feel free to call our 24hr Sexual Assault hotline at (714) 957-2737.