

Defining Sexual Violence and Assault

Sexual violence is sexual activity when consent is not obtained or not freely given. It is a serious public health problem in the United States. Sexual violence impacts every community and affects people of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages—anyone can experience or perpetrate sexual violence. The perpetrator of sexual violence is usually someone known to the victim, such as a friend, current or former intimate partner, coworker, neighbor, or family member.

(Source: CDC)

Remember!

Remember, nothing a person does, or the decisions they make causes them to be sexually assaulted. Your loved one needs your love and support no matter the circumstances of the assault.

The best thing to do for a survivor is to believe them.

How You Can Help a Survivor

- Listen to what they have to say about what happened, but in their own time.
- Be supportive – ask what you can do to help. Do not assume you know what is best.
- If they are interested in information on a forensic exam, encourage them to call Heartly House to get more information.
- Call our 24/7 Hotline at 301-662-8800 for information and support.
- Allow them to decide the level of your involvement.
- Offer them a safe place to stay, or stay with them in their home.
- Recognize your own anger. It is not the survivor's responsibility to address your anger.
- **Remind them it was not their fault.**
- Be patient – and remind them to be patient with themselves.
- Offer to accompany them to various appointments (doctors, police, lawyers, courts).
- Encourage them to engage in self-care activities as a way to cope.
- Remind them that the assault is something that happened to them; it doesn't define them

Things You Can Do for Continued Support

Avoid judgment. It can be difficult to watch a survivor struggle with the effects of sexual assault for an extended period of time. Avoid phrases that suggest they're taking too long to recover such as, "You've been acting like this for a while now," or "How much longer will you feel this way?"

Check in periodically. The event may have happened a long time ago, but that doesn't mean the pain is gone. Check in with the survivor to remind them you still care about their well-being and believe their story.

Know your resources. You're a strong supporter, but that doesn't mean you're equipped to manage someone else's health. Become familiar with resources you can recommend to a survivor.

How To Talk to a Survivor



"I believe you."

"It took a lot of courage to tell me about this."

"It's not your fault."

"You didn't do anything to deserve this."

"You are not alone."

"I'm sorry this happened."

"This shouldn't have happened to you."

Resources

Hotline Resources

Heartly House Inc.
24/7 Hotline: 301-662-8800
heartlyhouse.org

RAINN

24/7 Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
www.rainn.org

Online Resources

MCASA
www.mcasa.org

NSVRC
www.nsvrc.org

1in6
www.1in6.org