

Wayne County Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner's Program

WC SAFE

Advocacy Program

## **Helping a Survivor of Sexual Assault**

If you know someone who has been sexually assaulted...

**Believe them!** They are depending on you.

**Listen to them.** Let the person know you're available if they need you. However, resist the urge to ask details about what happened. The rape survivor will tell you what they want you to know when they're ready to talk about it.

**Provide comfort and support** in a way that is best suited for the survivor. Ask them if there is anything that you can do or get for them.

**Let them know it wasn't their fault.** Many rape victims feel guilty or blame themselves. Reinforce that they did not deserve what happened to them. The perpetrator is the one to blame.

**Offer protection or a safe place to stay.** You can also offer to stay at their home if that would be better for them. Remember, the choice is up to them.

**Suggest calling a Rape Crisis Center.** A rape crisis counselor can discuss the victim's options and needs. Most larger communities have a 24-hour Rape Crisis Center. Call the one nearest to your community.

**Discuss with the rape victim the importance of a medical exam** to treat medical needs and to address questions about sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy. Many hospitals offer the morning-after pill for rape victims up to 72 hours after the rape.

**Empower the rape victim to gain back control over their life.** Allow them to make the decisions about what's best for them. Separate your feelings and needs from the rape victim's feelings and needs. It's important that you don't try to take control of the situation. Allow your friend to have control over their life right now.

**Recognize that they may need some personal space and time** before they resume sexual relations. Each survivor responds differently to the crisis. Some may not want to be touched or held for

Adapted from A Handbook for Friends & Family of Sexual Assault Survivors, Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, *Revised December, 2009.*

a while, yet others may want that closeness. It's ok for the rape survivor to cope with the trauma in whatever way is best for them.

**Discuss their options** - making a police report, getting counseling, having a medical exam. Offer your support-whatever their decision.

**Be there for them in whatever way they need you** - for a ride to the hospital, to spend the night, for a 2 a.m. phone call. Recovery from rape takes time-longer for some than others. Understand that they may not want to talk about it today, but they might need you several months from now.

**Learn about rape trauma.** Local Rape Crisis Centers have information available about rape and support services.

**Recognize your own limits.** Rape affects family and friends as well. It's okay to call the rape crisis center for your own needs. Rape is one of the most traumatic events anyone can endure. Family and friends aren't invulnerable to the pain of rape.

**If someone you care about tells you they've been raped (whether it happened recently or several years ago) it's important to tell the survivor, "I'm sorry this happened to you. I'm here if you need me – anytime."**