

Self-Care for Friends and Family Members

When someone that you care about tells you that they have been a victim of sexual assault or sexual abuse, it can be difficult. You may have a range of reactions that could include...

Shock

You may be very surprised to hear what has happened.

You might have difficulty figuring out how to respond.

Anger

You might feel angry at the perpetrator for hurting your loved one.

You might also feel angry at your loved one for not telling you sooner or for telling you something that is hard for you to hear.

This can be especially true if the assault was committed by someone that you know. An example of this would be sexual assault that is committed by a family member (incest).

Sadness

You might feel sad for your loved one, for his or her family, or for what this assault may change about both of your lives.

Anxiety

You might feel anxiety about responding the "right" way to your loved one.

You might feel anxiety about how this will impact your relationship.

Fear

Depending on the circumstances of your loved one's assault, you might be concerned that something similar could happen to you.

... almost anything is normal.

Everyone has a different reaction when they find out that someone they care for has been sexually assaulted. There is no “wrong” way to feel. What *is* important is that you show the victim that you care and that you can help support them.

It’s also very important for you to take care of yourself! Helping someone who has experienced a sexual assault can change the way that you see the world. Even though you were not the victim of the assault, hearing your loved one’s story and helping to support them can impact you as well.

- ❖ Your belief in your personal safety might be shaken, especially if your loved one was assaulted somewhere that you have to visit.
- ❖ Some family and friends of survivors may experience more conflict in their relationships, whether those are intimate partner relationships, friendships or family relationships. **This can be especially true if the person who committed the assault is a mutual acquaintance or a relative.**
- ❖ You might find that you’re more easily irritated or have difficulty tolerating frustration.
- ❖ You could even experience nightmares about their experience.
- ❖ You might begin to feel distant and begin avoiding people and activities that you usually find pleasurable, especially if your loved one was assaulted in one of these places.

Here are some ways to cope with these feelings.

- ❖ Make sure that you are involved in activities that don’t revolve around your loved one’s experience. It can be easy to get caught up in what is happening to them.
- ❖ Get involved in a sport or hobby that you love!! Find other people who are doing the same thing!
- ❖ Knowing that people are counting on you to show up can help motivate you.
- ❖ If you have a spouse or partner, make a date night and stick with it.
- ❖ Turn off your cell phones (within reason. If the babysitter needs to be able to find you, consider leaving him/her the number of the restaurant so that you can turn off your ringer!)
- ❖ Treat leisure appointments as seriously as business appointments. If you have plans to do something for fun, mark it on your calendar!
- ❖ If you find that you are getting too involved with what is happening to your loved one, set limits!
- ❖ Set aside time to do what they need you to do and when that time is up, move on to other activities

It’s very important for you to maintain your emotional health! **You cannot help your loved one if you are in crisis yourself.**

Work to manage your feelings:

Keep a journal. It may be helpful to write down some of the feelings that you are experiencing.

Practice meditation or relaxation exercises. This may help maintain your emotional balance.

You might also consider talking to a counselor. This could mean seeing a psychologist, a clinical social worker, or therapist.