

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A CRIME IN WHICH PERPETRATORS SEEK TO CONTROL AND DOMINATE ANOTHER PERSON

It's important to support someone to regain their own power and control over their life and experiences.

REMEMBER – SEXUAL ASSAULT IS NOT THE SURVIVORS FAULT

Much of the pain caused by sexual assault is related to guilt, shame and self-blame – it's important that you do not reinforce these feelings with your words or actions.

When supporting someone who has experienced sexual assault, let them know you do not blame them for what happened and it's NEVER their fault.

Sexual assault is always the responsibility of the perpetrator and never the responsibility of the survivor.

THE VALUE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Remember to develop a relationship with a survivor that does not reflect the unhealthy dynamics that were/are present between the perpetrator and the survivor.

This means:

- Saying “you can choose what you share and how you share”
- Affirm their feelings and remember there is no right or wrong way to feel
- Ask them “How can I help?” or “Is there anything you need from me right now?”
- Encourage them to seek the support that feels right for them
- Respect their decisions – they are the expert
- Respect their privacy and choices about what they disclose and to who
- Seek their permission before disclosing information about them to others
- Clearly discussing and supporting survivors to know their rights

DEFINING YOUR OWN FEELINGS

It is important to be mindful of your own feelings and reactions and to seek support from someone other than the person who has experienced sexual violence. It's natural that you may feel shocked, angry, sad or confused (or all of these at once!).

You may have questions about how the sexual assault happened - however, remember that support is about listening and asking if someone wants to share details. Taking it slow and checking-in is important!

You may feel a desire to confront or enact revenge on the perpetrator. You might feel a strong urge to 'do something' or have the survivor 'do something'. These are all common reactions but remember it's about listening to how the survivor wants to handle things.

Know the limits of your support.

Sometimes topics or conversations can be triggering or challenging for you. It can be useful to check in with yourself and know what you can and cannot talk about and how you can offer support.

IT MAY BE USEFUL TO REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How comfortable do I feel in responding to issues of sexual violence?
- What might get in the way of supporting a survivor?
- Do I feel I can support or is there someone else better suited?
- How will I manage my feelings when I am supporting a survivor?
- What support is available to me?
- Who else can support if I can't?
- What services are available?

REMEMBER:

- Believing a survivor is one of the most important things you can do
- People will have a variety of feelings - and that's okay
- Affirm the person's feelings - pain, fear, anger and shame are all natural responses
- Focus on the survivor and their story, not the perpetrator
- Offer different options of support
- Listen when someone says no, don't pressure them to seek support!
- Always get permission before touching someone
- Being non-judgmental about their decisions, behaviour, response or pace of healing
- Share how you can support and the ways you can't
- Do not pressure the person to disclose the abuse/assault to family, friends and/or police
- Sometimes listening or helping someone find the right support can be the most powerful thing you can do.
- Empower the person to recognise their own strength
- Let the person know that you are there for them/and acknowledge your limits
- Recognise the trauma they have been through and provide support with recovery from impacts of experience
- Respect that they may wish to focus solely on themselves and their needs for a while
- Be mindful, someone's healing may take a lot of time, space and energy, do not rush the process!

Some numbers which may be helpful in finding support for someone

Sexual assault hotline

1800 010 120 (7.30am to 11.30pm, 7 days a week)

1800Respect

1800 737 732 (24 hour line phone and web)

Victim Assist Queensland

1300 546 587 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)



CONTACT ZIG ZAG

Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre Inc.
575 Old Cleveland Rd
Camp Hill QLD 4152
Phone: (07) 3843 1823
Email: info@zigzag.org.au