

# How to Help a Friend Who Has Been Assaulted

The support of friends is very helpful to a rape victim. Because many rape victims worry about the possible reactions of family and friends, it is important to let your friend know right away that you care and want to help.

When we learn that a family member or a friend has been raped, we tend to share the feelings of shock, anger, and hurt. We want to offer sympathy and support, but we do not always know what to do.

There are many ways you can help a friend recover.

Believe your friend. It takes a great deal of courage to talk about rape. Many rape victims remain silent because they fear that they will not be believed if they tell people about what happened to them.

Let your friend know you are willing to listen, But, don't press for details. Let your friend decide how much she feels comfortable talking about.

Make it clear that your friend was not guilty in any way for being assaulted. She is not to blame. The responsibility for rape rests completely with the offender

Don't make comments about what might have been done to prevent the attack. Don't tell your friend what she "should" have done. Just let your friend know that you want to help and that others will too.

Your friend may behave differently after the attack. She may be afraid to be alone. Or, she may withdraw and want to be alone. She may cry a lot. She may be irritable and have trouble concentrating. Remember that your friend has been through a very traumatic experience. Her reactions may be painful to watch, but your care and support can help her.

Be prepared to listen for as long as your friend needs your support. Sometimes, friends and family members expect rape victims to be upset for only a week or two. Understand that rape does not go away after a short period of time. Victims often have the need to talk about the assault for a long time after their attack.

Encourage your friend to talk to a trained counselor at a rape treatment or crisis center. If your friend does not want to talk to such a counselor, you may want to contact the center yourself. They can give you advice about how to help your friend.

Protect your friend's privacy. Don't reveal the story to other people. Let the victim decide which friends she wishes to confide in.

If a male friend of yours is assaulted, be just as supportive and sympathetic as you would be of a female friend. Males suffer the same severe emotional effects as females do. They may find it even harder to talk about their experience.

If you are a guy and your girlfriend's been raped, it is especially important that you not say or do anything that implies that the rape was her fault. Let her know you still care for her, and that you will stand by her. Tell her you are there for her. Holding her or giving her affectionate hugs may help to let her know you care.

