

Supporting a Sexual Assault Survivor

How to be an Empathetic Listener

- Listen, don't lecture
- Be non-judgmental
- Be aware of the social stigmas that female vs. male survivors face
- Be friendly, concerned, and supportive
- Avoid Saying...
 - "I understand."
 - "I know how you feel."
- Instead, reflect back their emotions...
 - "It sounds like..."
 - "What I'm hearing you say..."
 - "It seems as if you feel..."

How to Help

- Every survivor reacts differently following a sexual assault
- Some might express intense emotions and behaviors, including: crying, shaking, etc.
- However, others appear to have little to no emotion
- Remember: Everyone has different ways to cope with traumatic events
- Just because he/she is not visibly upset, it does not mean they are not hurting



What to Say:

- "I believe you."
 - Many victims do not confide in others because of fear that others will not believe them
 - Be supportive and do not question their story
 - "It's not your fault."
 - Most victims blame themselves
 - They need to be reassured that it was not their fault
- Research shows that the first response that a survivor receives when they disclose will affect the way they seek support and the way in which healing occurs.
- Encourage victim to receive medical care and complete a rape kit after the sexual assault. He or she may need treatment for STDs or pregnancy testing after the assault. Remind them that collecting evidence does not mean they must press charges against the perpetrator.
- Encourage - but do not pressure - victim to report the attack to police. If the victim does not want to report the rape, respect that decision as his or hers to make.

Rape Trauma Syndrome

1) The Acute Phase

- Feelings of shock, disbelief, and helplessness
- Concern about pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or injury
- Inability to concentrate

2) The Repression Phase

- Avoids thinking & talking about assault
- Experiences anger
- Tells others he/she is 'over it'
- Minimizes the assault, "It wasn't so bad"

3) The Reorganization Phase

- Hypervigilance
- Depression
- Flashbacks & nightmares
- Lack of trust
- Fear & avoidance of people & places that remind him/her of the assault

4) The Integration Phase

- Regains feelings of control & safety
- Shifts blame from self to perpetrator
- Regains trust in others

Victims of sexual assault can benefit greatly by working with a trained counselor to cope with trauma.

Resources

- PAVE National (www.pavingtheway.net)
- Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR) (www.woar.org / 215.985.3333)
- The National Sexual Assault Hotline (online.rainn.org / 1.800.656.HOPE)
- Philadelphia Police Department, Special Victims Unit (215.685.3251)

References:

Promoting Awareness Victim Empowerment (www.pavingtheway.net)

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)

Council on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence (www.safefromabuse.com)

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, Inc. (BARCC) (<http://www.surviverape.org/>)

Mission Statement: Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment (PAVE) is a multi-chapter national 501c3 non-profit organization that uses education and action to shatter the silence of sexual violence through targeted social, educational and legislative tactics.