

How to be a Supportive Listener for a Friend, Lover, or Relative who is a Survivor of Sexual Violence.

Most survivors, female or male, never tell anyone. If someone tells you about his or her abuse - consider it an honor. You may not feel lucky, but you are. Welcome to a very confusing, murky world. Get ready to feel many feelings.

BELIEVE THEM - THEY ARE TELLING YOU THE TRUTH.

- Tell them this wasn't their fault.
- Really listen; don't jump to solutions..."What you should do now is..."
- Don't distract yourself with heroic fantasies to beat-up the perpetrator.
- Ask what kind of help they would like.
- Be aware of school/local support resources and share those.
- Offer to make appointments with them and accompany them to counselor, clergy, police, etc.
- Don't give advice, even if asked for it. Making decisions for them is not helpful. It over-protects them and may send a message that you think they're incompetent. Help them problem-solve by offering all the possible options. Offer to support whatever decision they make, and then do it.
- Suggest counseling in addition to talking with you. You are not a professional, and your knowledge and experience is limited.
- There is no limit to how long the healing process takes. All people are different. All survivors are different. It is very individual. Saying things like, "You've got to forget about this." Or "When are you going to pull yourself together?" won't help and may harm recovery. In fact, she/he may stop confiding in you, and pretend that everything is okay.
- Get support for yourself too - the more you care, the more you are affected too. Look inward now, pay attention to your own feelings, your needs are valid too, and take care of yourself.
- What did it feel like when a good friend took the time to really listen to you?

