

Sexual Assault is a crime of power and control.

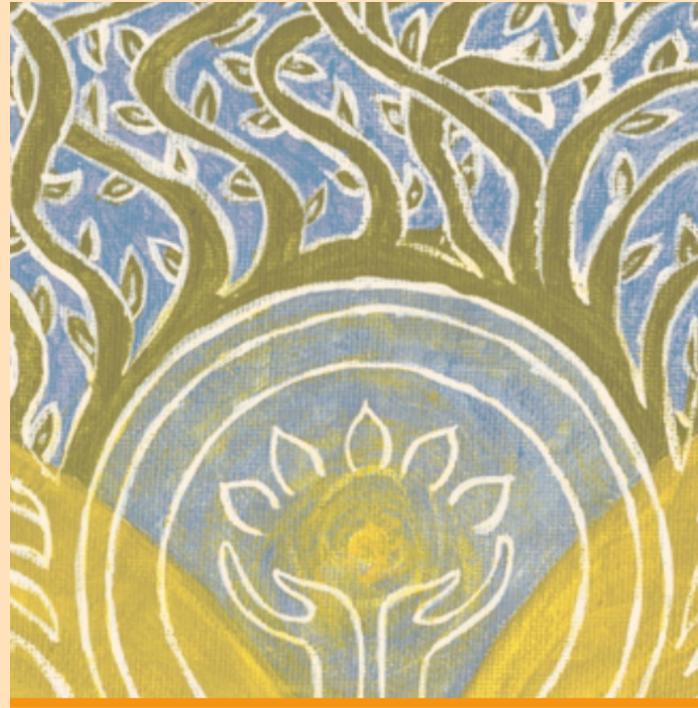
Acts of sexual violence are means of dominating and controlling the survivor, not attempts to achieve sexual fulfillment. Many sexual assaults involve threats of harm, intimidation and humiliation. Survivors suffer severe psychological injury and often physical injury as well.

A survivor is never responsible for the assault.

People mistakenly assume that the survivor could have prevented the assault by doing something differently. Some people also believe that if the survivor did not actively resist the attack, they must have given consent, which unfairly suggests that they are responsible for the assault.

The truth is that no one knows how they will respond.

Reactions during a sexual assault are often not conscious or voluntary but rather automatic and based on the brain's defense circuitry. Survivors may fight back, but it is also common for survival instincts to cause survivors to freeze or have many other reactions. Implying that the survivor bears some responsibility will only build emotional distance between you. What they need most is unconditional support.



Contact Us

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Utah's 24-Hour Sexual Violence
Help-Line: (801) 736-4356
Línea de Apoyo de Violencia
Sexual las 24 Horas de Utah:
(801) 924-0860



raperecoverycenter.org

A Guide for Family & Friends

There are some things that you can do to be helpful. By acting with thoughtful understanding and support, you can help to minimize the trauma of a sexual assault survivor.

Disclosing a Sexual Assault

Friends and family often wonder why a survivor waited to tell them about the assault. Because the emotional attachment isn't present, it may even have been easier for them to tell a stranger before disclosing the assault to their loved ones.

Know that the survivor is trusting you with whatever they are comfortable disclosing. Any indication, verbal or non-verbal, that what they say is not accepted or believed will significantly diminish their ability to continue.

Respect their boundaries. Do not press for details of the assault.

Some reasons for not disclosing:

- * Fear
- * Blame/Judgment
- * Embarrassment/Humiliation
- * Family already in crisis
- * Not wishing to cause worry

How can you help?

- Let the survivor know that you love them and support them.
- Do not blame the survivor, regardless of the circumstances.
- Do not press for details of the assault.
- Understand that there are a variety of ways survivors may react. These do not always reflect the amount of trauma they have experienced. Allow them their feelings, whatever they may be.
- Your urge to act may be significant. Be careful not to force your friend or family member to take action they're not ready to take (i.e., counseling, talking, reporting, etc.).
- Resist overprotecting.
- Understand and respect their need for privacy.
- Don't feel or act as though you have to have all the answers. That is not your role.
- Reassure the survivor that the sexual assault is not equal to promiscuity or cheating.
- Assure the survivor that you will endure this crisis with them and that your friendship and love will remain intact.

Self-care for the secondary survivor

It is normal to have difficulty processing a sexual assault by someone close to you. You may experience sadness, anger, guilt, powerlessness, anxiety, numbness, and other emotions. Know that there is no set timeline for recovery; it is a unique process that cannot be predetermined.

Find the help you need to take care of yourself and support your loved one from the Rape Recovery Center or other resources.

What to say when you don't know what to say

"I don't want to force you to talk about this when you don't want to. I just want you to know that I'm here to listen if you decide that you do."

"I want you to know that I don't know what to say, but I care about you, I believe you, and I will support whatever decisions you make."

"How can I help you?"