

Sexual Assault

A GUIDE FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS



When someone you care about has been sexually assaulted it can be difficult to know what to do or say. You may have feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and disbelief.

The most important thing that you can do from the beginning is to believe them. One of the most significant factors in a survivor's recovery is how those around them respond to their disclosure.

Remember, nothing a person does or the decisions they make causes them to be sexually assaulted. Your loved one needs your love and support no matter the circumstances of the assault.

Sexual assault can affect a survivor's life in the following ways:

- Physical & mental health
- Body image
- Self-esteem
- Sexuality & relationships
- Eating & sleeping habits
- How they function in social situations

How friends and family can help a survivor:

- Listen to what they have to say about what happened, but in their own time.
- Be supportive – ask what you can do to help. Do not assume you know what is best.
- Remind them it was not their fault.
- Know where to find information on your local Rape Crisis & Recovery Center. Visit **mcasa.org** to locate one near you.
- If they are interested in information on a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE), you can help them find a local SAFE program at **mcasa.org**. During a SAFE, a specialized nurse can treat injuries, collect evidence, and address concerns about pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV. In Maryland, SAFEs can be conducted up to 15 days after the assault, however, it is best to seek these services as soon as possible. Survivors can contact their local SAFE program with any questions about the exam process and evidence collection services.
- Allow them to decide the level of your involvement.
- Offer them a safe place to stay, or stay with them in their home.
- Recognize and process your own anger. It is not the survivor's responsibility to address your anger.
- Be patient – and remind them to be patient with themselves.
- Offer to accompany them to various appointments (doctors, police, lawyers, courts).
- Encourage them to engage in self-care activities as a way to cope.
- Remind them that the assault is something that happened to them; it doesn't define them as a person.
- Avoid giving advice or taking control of the situation – allow your loved one to have control over their own decisions.

MCASA

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