

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 when they tell people about their sexual assault.

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 the following parts of a survivor's life:

- Physical & mental health
- Body image
- Self-esteem
- Sexuality & relationships
- Eating & sleeping habits
- How they function in social situations
- Finances & personal budget
- Performance at work or grades in school

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 how they want you to be involved.
- Offer them a safe place to stay, or stay with them in their home.
- Recognize and process your own anger and feelings. It is not the survivor's responsibility to address how you feel.
- Be patient – and remind them to be patient with themselves.
- Offer to go with them to various appointments (doctors, police, lawyers, courts, etc.).
- Encourage them to take care of themselves.
- 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

mcasa.org | info@mcasa.org

301-328-7023

P.O. Box 8782, Silver Spring, MD 20907