



How to help someone who has been assaulted

Sexual abuse and assault can have enormous impact on the survivor emotionally, physically and psychologically. Learning that someone you care about: child, friend or partner has been violated in this way can be overwhelming. You may feel sad, hurt, confused, guilty, angry or powerless with what you are hearing but you need to be aware that the person who has been assaulted needs your full support and understanding at this time. If you would like support to deal with the range of emotions you are feeling please contact CASA for assistance.

You may feel confused about what happened and question if it could have been prevented. It is crucial to remember that the offender is solely responsible for their actions. Do not blame or question the survivor about what they did. This can interfere with the resolution of the crisis.

It is helpful when someone discloses that they have been assaulted that you listen and let them talk without judgement. It is important that the person feels that you are hearing their story and by listening you can find out what they want and need. You may be the first person they have shared this painful experience with and it may have been kept secret for a long time. Do not pressure the person to do anything that they don't want to do even when you believe it is in their best interests. This will assist in the survivor in making their own decisions and gaining some sense of control over their life, which is essential for recovery.

Helpful responses

Believe	One of the greatest predictors of recovery is how others respond to the disclosure. Believe and acknowledge what they have told you
Affirm	It takes enormous courage to tell somebody about sexual abuse or assault. Let them know that the abuse is unacceptable. Do not minimise the abuse.
Listen & support	Allow the survivor to speak about their feelings. This will help lessen the emotional impact. They will feel supported if you let them know you are concerned, want to help and are trying to understand.
Give them time, space and patience	Don't judge or make demands. Don't take it personally if they are bad tempered or want to be alone. Their recovery will occur in its own time.
Assist with practical tasks	This will give the survivor more energy and time for the recovery process.
Safety	Ensure the person is no longer at risk. Explore ways they can be made to feel safe.



Non-judgement	Do not blame or judge the survivor that they have caused or invited the abuse. Remember the offender is solely responsible for their actions
Normalise feelings	The impact of the assault can be overwhelming and the survivor may feel they are going crazy to feel the way they do. Reassure the survivor that these feelings are a normal response to a traumatic situation.
Referral	Encourage the survivor to seek support. Centres Against Sexual Assault provides free confidential and specialist counselling and information for survivors and their non-offending family and friends. They also assist with medical, legal or other issues.