

FACT SHEET — *This fact sheet is for parents, friends and family of someone who has been sexually assaulted.*

Six ways to support a person who has been sexually assaulted

It takes courage to share the story of a sexual assault. Never underestimate your role or your power to affect the course of someone's journey to healing. If someone has chosen to share their experience with you, you're probably a person they look to for support, compassion and guidance. You don't have to be an expert — you just have to be yourself and listen with care and empathy.

1. Listen

Sometimes you don't need a lot of words to be a comfort to someone. Having someone listen lessens the weight of isolation, secrecy and self-blame. Listening is an act of compassion.

2. Validate

Think about a time when you felt vulnerable or faced a crisis and think of what helped you the most. Chances are it wasn't a specific conversation but the knowledge that the person or people you told were there for you, believed you, were on your side, and were committed to supporting you. Here are some helpful phrases you can use to show you care.

"I believe you."

"I'm so sorry this happened to you." "This is not your fault."

"You're not alone. I'm here for you and I'm glad you told me."

A person who has experienced sexual assault may feel that it was their fault. Victim-blaming is prevalent in our society. Violence and sexual assault are a crime. Responsibility lies with the offender and it can be helpful to communicate that gently and repeatedly.

"Nothing you did or could've done differently makes this your fault." "No one ever has the right to hurt you."

"The responsibility is on the person who hurt you."

"I know that it can feel like you did something wrong, but you didn't." "What they did was illegal."

3. Keep an open heart

Make yourself available. The healing journey can be a long one, full of challenging — but sometimes joyful and liberating — conversations. It can make a big difference just knowing you're there to support them along the way.

4. Keep yourself strong

There is a limit to what we're able to hear and process. The stories of someone else's hardships related to a sexual assault will impact and become a part of us. This second-hand or vicarious trauma is a human response to coming face-to-face with the reality and difficulties of the human experience. It's important to care for yourself so you can provide strong support. You cannot be your best self if you find yourself too tired to listen with care and compassion, or you're overfilled with emotions in response. Though all these feelings are valid. Take some time after a conversation as a way of re-centering yourself.

5. Ask what more you can do to help

Some people may feel disconnected and numb and not know how to ask for help or what to ask for. Anticipate what they might need and (if appropriate) rally your collective friends around to provide an active support network to help your friend. Violence and sexual assault are about power and control. It's vital for people to regain their sense of personal power.

6. Know where to point someone to for more help

Offer options and leave space for them to decide what they want to do. Here are some services that can be helpful:

- Call 000 if you're worried about safety, the safety of children or anyone else.
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (www.sacl.com.au) — 1800 806 292
- Loddon Campaspe Centre Against Sexual Assault (lccasa.org.au) — 5441 0430
- Victoria Police Sexual Offences Child Investigation Team — 5444 6752
- 1800Respect (National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line) (www.1800respect.org.au) — 1800 737 732