

For family and friends who are supporting

This factsheet contains information that may help friends and family to support someone who has experienced rape/sexual assault. Help and understanding from family and friends is vital through the trauma of rape/sexual assault, and the legal process that may follow.

The victim/survivor:

- may depend on you for support
- may not always know how to ask for help, or recognise what they need from you
- has suffered from another person's criminal behaviour. They may be in shock and find it hard to express their feelings.

Giving support

If someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted, it is important to listen to their story and let them know that you believe them and are there for them. Let them express how they feel in their own way and at their own pace. They may need to cry, or simply sit in silence.

It is important to let them know you care. If you don't know the answer to something, it's okay to say, "I don't know, let's find the answer together".

Let them know you respect their privacy. When someone has been raped, their trust in others has been violated and things have been taken out of their control. It's important for them to have control over their story – they decide who to tell, and how much to tell. They may not wish to discuss what happened at all and they have the right not to tell. They may not want to tell other friends and family members.

Looking after yourself

It is important to recognise it is not easy to listen to someone who has had a traumatic experience. You may need to take time out to take extra care of yourself, spend time with friends and family, and find a physical or creative release.

It is normal to feel distressed and confused if a friend or family member has been sexually assaulted. Naturally, you will want to help the person you care about through this crisis – but you could also be dealing with difficult feelings of your own.

CAPS Hauraki Sexual Abuse Support Service
24/7 Sexual Abuse Support Helpline 0800 88 33 00
(From a mobile select 3 then 2. From landline select 2.)
Text (business hours) 027 732 7000
Email (business hours) helpline@capshauraki.co.nz



You can call to talk to a support worker about sexual assault, to get support for yourself, or to find out about how to support your friend or family member. CAPS' support phone line operates 24 hours a day.

Your reaction

You may have some of the following feelings and experiences.

Anger: Some people may feel angry. Anger is a natural response and may not be what the victim/survivor needs. Your feelings may be different to the victim/survivors. Express your anger in a way that will not leave the victim/survivor feeling to blame or upset. It is important you do not let your anger over-ride any decisions the victim/survivor might want to make.

Blame: People who get angry at a victim of sexual assault unfairly hold them responsible for what has happened. Society in general often blames women for rape. You may hear people express myths about rape, such as 'she must have done something to encourage him'.

Guilt: You may feel guilty about something you may or may not have done in the time leading up to the rape. However, you are not responsible for what happened. If you blame yourself a woman may feel that she's caused the guilt.

Want to make it better: Most people, once the initial shock and trauma have worn off, want their friend or relative to be 'better', and back to their 'normal' self. It is important that you do not treat the victim/survivor differently than before, if you are doing so, you need to be clear why you have changed. These changes in your behaviour need to be discussed with them and accepted by them. Rape and sexual abuse is not something a victim/survivor 'gets over'. It can take longer than you expect for things to improve; a victim/survivor will need time to figure out how to make sense of what's happened.

Someone close to you may be the person who assaulted the victim/survivor and you may find that you are more shocked about the rape than if the person who did the assault had been a stranger. You may also find it hard to believe that it has happened. In fact, most sexual assaults are committed by someone close to the victim – family, friends and acquaintances.

This handout is adapted from Wellington Help's tip sheet for supporters

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