

## **How to support a Survivor of Sexual Assault**

### **Believe your friend**

Remember that it's often very difficult for a survivor to come forward and share their story and your reaction may have an impact on whether or not they choose to continue to share this information with others and seek further support. Tell your friend that you believe them and you want to support them in any way that you can.

### **Respect privacy and confidentiality**

Don't share your friend's story with others unless you have that person's permission to do so.

### **Listen**

It is natural when listening to a story to want to ask questions and get details about what transpired. In this situation however, it is best to allow the survivor to control what and how much they would like to tell you about the incident. You should listen actively and non-judgmentally. Reiterate that you are there to listen and support and allow the survivor to dictate when and how much they wish to say.

### **Assure your friend that it is not his or her fault**

Self-blame is common among victims of sexual violence. It is important that, as their friend, you help the survivor understand that no matter what happened—it was not their fault.

### **Allow your friend to control next steps**

It is natural to want to try to fix the problem but know that healing from this event will take a great deal of time and your friend must maintain the ability to choose how they wish to go about that healing process. You may provide advice, guidance and information about their options for additional support, but allow your friend to decide if, when and how they will pursue these resources. If your friend is hesitant to get help from any outside sources, even those that you know are supportive and helpful, offer to go with her/him. Sometimes that's all it takes to help a friend begin to take action.

### **Don't forget to support yourself**

Supporting a friend through a trauma can be a difficult and emotionally draining experience for those in the support role as well. Recognize this and don't hesitate to seek help and support for yourself when you

need it. You cannot effectively support your friend without being mindful of your own health and well-being.