

# HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

## A GUIDE FOR FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND LOVED ONES

### First—Know This

If someone shares their experience with you, it means they trust you. You don't need to have the perfect words. Your presence, compassion, and willingness to listen can make a powerful difference.

### A Simple Way to Respond: T.A.L.K.

When someone discloses, you can use this as a guide:

#### T – Thank Them

Acknowledge the courage it took to tell you.

“Thank you for trusting me with this.”  
“I'm really glad you told me.”

#### A – Ask How You Can Help

Let them lead. Don't assume what they need.

“What would be most helpful for you right now?”  
“How can I support you?”

#### L – Listen Without Judgment

Your role is to believe and support, not investigate.

“I'm so sorry this happened.”  
“I believe you.”  
“This is not your fault.”

### K – Keep Supporting

Support doesn't end after one conversation.

- Check in over time
- Be patient—healing is not linear
- Continue showing care and understanding  
*“I'm here for you whenever you need me.”*

### What to Say

These responses can help survivors feel supported:

- “I believe you.”
- “It wasn't your fault.”
- “You didn't deserve this.”
- “You're not alone.”
- “I care about you.”
- “I'm here to listen.”

### What to Avoid Saying

Even with good intentions, some responses can be harmful:

- “Are you sure that's what happened?”
- “Why didn't you tell someone sooner?”
- “Why didn't you fight back?”
- “What were you wearing?”
- “But they seemed like such a nice person.”
- “It happened a long time ago—why are you still upset?”

**These responses can feel blaming or dismissive, even if that's not your intention.**

### **Be There—Without Pressure**

You don't need to "fix" anything.

Instead:

- Offer to spend time together (walk, watch a movie, sit and talk)
- Let them decide what they want to share
- Respect their choices—even if you don't understand them

### **Respect Their Choices**

Survivors have the right to decide what happens next.

This includes:

- Whether to seek medical care
- Whether to report to law enforcement
- Whether to tell others

*"You have options, and I'll support whatever you decide."*

### **Share Resources (If They're Open to It)**

You don't have to have all the answers.

Support is available.

#### **Arise – 24/7 Confidential Hotline:**

724-652-9036

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233 or [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

- **National Human Trafficking Hotline:**

1-888-373-7888 or TTY: 711 or  
Text: 233733 (or "BeFree") or

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en>

- **Brain Injury Resource Line (BIRL):** Call 1-800-444-6443 for non-crisis guidance and support regarding brain injuries. Staffed by volunteers; calls returned within 3 business days. Recommended by PCADV.

### **Take Care of Yourself, Too**

Supporting someone can be emotional.

It's okay to:

- Talk to someone you trust
- Seek counseling
- Take time to process your feelings

Taking care of yourself helps you continue to show up for them.

#### **Key Takeaway:**

You don't need to have the perfect response.

Just:

- Listen
- Believe
- Respect their choices

That alone can make a lasting difference.