

***Are you a parent, partner  
or friend of someone who  
has been sexually  
assaulted?***

Sexual violence can affect the people in the survivor's life in many ways. You have every right to feel angry, sad and upset and there are resources for you to help you deal with those emotions.

Many people feel helpless while watching someone go through such terrible pain, but you are not helpless. If a survivor has come to you, it means that you are trusted and you can have an enormous influence in your loved one's healing.

Although you may not always know what to say or how to help, a supportive presence is healing.

## Further Resources

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As a secondary survivor, your life has been affected as well. Many resources are out there for you if you need support. If someone you love has been abused or assaulted, it is natural to feel many emotions and it may help to find someone to talk to.

Crisis centers often provide counseling or support groups for people dealing with the rape or sexual abuse of loved ones. Call your local center if you think this would be of benefit to you. RAINN is a resource for secondary survivors as well. Call 1-800-656-HOPE if you need someone to talk to or would like suggestions to further help your loved one cope.

Finally, online support can be found for secondary survivors at [www.pandys.org](http://www.pandys.org).



**The mission of Pandora's Project is to provide information, facilitate peer support and offer assistance to male and female survivors of sexual violence, as well as their friends and family.**

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### Pandora's Project

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## How can I help? Tips for Secondary Survivors

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*A handout for  
supporters*

*Developed by  
Pandora's Project*

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[www.PandorasProject.org](http://www.PandorasProject.org)  
[www.pandys.org](http://www.pandys.org)



## Ways to Help

Your loved one may need your help right now, but be unable to ask for it. I hope you'll consider offering it. You can help her heal more than you know.

- Believe him or her.
- Educate yourself about the emotional response your friend may be experiencing.
- Validate the emotions your loved one expresses to you. They are a normal reaction to an abnormal event.
- Express the strong emotions you probably feel about your friend's rape in a controlled manner.
- Avoid relying on your friend to help you process what you feel as a result of her sexual assault.
- Offer practical support, like helping your friend with tasks that are overwhelming to her.
- Encourage her to seek medical attention and offer to go with her.
- Call her and make plans with her.
- Let him know you are thinking of him.
- Take time for yourself.
- Let him know that you are always available to talk, but that he doesn't have to if he isn't ready.

## Things to Say

Many people do not know what to say when a friend is talking about sexual assault. Most of the time, your supportive listening ear is all that is needed. Please bear in mind that your friend has had total control taken from her and is probably struggling to reclaim it. Offering ideas and suggestions is a better idea than giving direct advice. It is not always necessary to come up with the perfect words, but here are a few ideas.

- You are on my mind. How are you?
  - How can I help you?
  - Can I do anything to make things better for you right now?
  - I'm glad you told me.
  - It just happened to you. You didn't cause it and you didn't deserve it.
  - I'll support you no matter what you decide to do.
  - What would you like to do next?
  - It is okay if you are at a loss for words.
  - There's no right or wrong way to do this.
- You are doing the very best you can.

## What Not to Say

Talking about sexual assault is very difficult for a survivor. If she is telling you about what happened, she is probably revealing a very intimate part of herself to you and you can help her by believing her and respecting her story and her healing process.

- Don't use platitudes, like Time heals all wounds, or Life will go on.
- Avoid minimizing his experience by telling him that it wasn't that bad, or at least he wasn't physically hurt.
- Don't ask her when she will get over it.
- Try not to express your desire to hurt the rapist – even if you feel it!
- Don't ask why he didn't report it or try to force him to report it if he is overwhelmed by the idea.
- Avoid asking her why she didn't scream or fight.