

Tips for Helping a Partner Heal Sexually

© 2008 Pandora's Aquarium

By: Ash

Sexual healing needs to be done on the survivor's terms. It is imperative that you do not push her or force her to do things before either of you is ready. There is no timeline for healing, so it is important that you remain patient and support each other through the healing process.

Some tips:

Be aware – Survivors may not always be able to vocalize how they are feeling. Pay attention to how she is acting. If she looks uncomfortable, stop. Ask her how she is doing.

Stop when asked – This is very important to survivors of sexual violence. They have been violated and need to regain their trust in others. Survivors may experience flashbacks or be triggered by certain acts. Ignoring those things will only serve to set you both back in the healing process. It is imperative that you stop if she asks you to, no questions asked.

Talk to each other – Communication is incredibly important when trying to work on sexual healing. Talk about your likes and dislikes, and ask her for tangible things you can do to help her. If she is unsure, offer her some suggestions of things you think may help. This can include making her dinner, holding her hand, listening to her, etc. You are not expected to fix things, but you can support each other as you figure out the healing process.

Remember that you are partners – Although this may have been her experience, you have both been affected. Try to avoid thinking of it as something that she needs to fix on her own, or that you need to save her from. Unfortunately, it is not possible to save someone from healing, but it is possible to support them. You both have a role to play in the healing process, so lean on each other and help each other sort it out.

Don't neglect your own feelings – Helping a partner heal from rape or abuse can be a

very difficult thing to do, and it is important that you take care of yourself in the process as well. You may find it helpful to read up on sexual healing. Wendy Maltz's books *The Sexual Healing Journey* or *Partners in Healing* may be helpful. you might also consider attending either individual or couples therapy.

Be patient – Healing from sexual violence can be a long and difficult process. There is no set timeline or schedule, so each person will heal at their own pace. It may be tempting to push ahead out of frustration, but it is important to remember that pushing and pressuring a survivor will likely lead to further setbacks. The time and work that you invest now will help build on trust, and will pay off in the end.

Avoid making her feel guilty – It can be difficult to adjust to abstaining from sex or certain acts, especially if you were sexually active with this partner before the assault. Avoid making your partner feel bad about not being able or wanting to take a break from sex. She has experienced something incredibly traumatic, and this kind of pain cannot be healed overnight. Most survivors do not intentionally hold back on sex; it is a coping mechanism to allow them to address other feelings. Your support and understanding can make all the difference in the world.

Note: although the female pronoun was used in this article, the tips apply to both female and male survivors.

This article is copyrighted and unauthorized reproduction is prohibited. If you wish to use this article online or in print, please contact admin@pandys.org to request permission. Visit www.PandorasProject.org for more information and articles.

