

If Someone You Care For Is Raped

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"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Maya Angelou

Sometimes life put us in the position of being there for someone we love in times of crisis. If you are close to a person who has suffered from sexual abuse and you feel like you don't know what to do to help her/him, you are not alone. You may be dealing with the emotions that this abuse originated in you. Being a counselor has made me search for ways to best help survivors, explore what are the best things to do and say. Yet with time, I have realized that one of the most important things to do is to **be there**.

Being there without trying to "fix" the problem, by just offering respectful, non-judgmental, and compassionate support, is so vital. Supporting a person who has been sexually assaulted can be difficult, you may find that they are feeling a series of emotions that might be unusual for that person. Although everybody can react differently after a sexual assault, some of the most common reactions are anger, depression, guilt, shame, confusion, anxiety, and loss of control.

When someone has been raped, their sense of safety and control is taken away. Therefore one of the most powerful ways to offer support to a survivor is by helping her/him regain a sense of power and self-sufficiency. Make an effort to not try and make any decisions for the victim. The survivor should be in charge of her or his healing process and your support could assist the victim in this process by not judging the person and by helping him/her understand reactions as way of coping with the situation. It is important to realize that some of the reactions after an assault have to do with the need to recuperate a sense of safety and control.

In the book *The Courage to Heal*, by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, some of the suggestions to support a survivor in the healing process have to do with acknowledging the strength and courage that it took to survive the assault. This could help the survivor to see herself/himself as survivors and not a victim. Always try to convey that the assault was not his or her fault, no matter what.

Try to seek out information about sexual assault and the recovery process. Local rape crisis centers can be a wealth of information – from hotline staff to others involved with in those respective agencies.

Here at The Rape Crisis Center in San Antonio, we consider it as important to educate the support system of the survivors, as it is to offer services to direct victims of sexual abuse. This can also encourage the survivor to get more help in our center. All staff and volunteers are here to help you and your loved one build a bridge to help, hope and healing.