

Help Yourself

It is important following a disclosure of sexual violence that you take care of yourself. If you are also a survivor of sexual violence it may be difficult to put aside your own experiences. Your feelings are important, and working through them should be as much of a priority as supporting your teen. Getting support can help you make sense of the situation. It can also be useful to make sure you access accurate information on moving forward. Everyone has different reactions to trauma and will need different kinds of support to heal.

Useful strategies

- Spending time with calm people who you trust and are supportive
- Expressing feelings in a journal, artwork, or through exercise
- Scheduling time to process what is happening
- Healthy eating
- Getting a good nights sleep and resting when you can
- Seeking info/support/counselling for yourself and other family members
- While many parents want to focus only on the young person, it is important to also remember your own needs. Taking care of yourself will assist your teen to heal
- A good recovery is often aided by the support, understanding, and help from family

Your teen may test you;
a calm and consistent presence
will help them feel safe.



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Parents Guide



Responding to a young person who
has experienced sexual violence



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Understanding Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is any sexual behaviour that a person does not consent to and makes them feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened. It is a crime that can happen to anyone and includes acts such as rape, attempted rape, unwanted touching or kissing, unwanted sexual texts, emails or other online contact, sexual harassment, and unwanted filming or photographing.

There are no excuses for sexual violence.

Statistics show that most victims/survivors of sexual violence are female, most offenders are male and most people experience sexual violence from someone they know. The group most likely to experience sexual violence is females aged between 15- 19 years, closely followed by females aged between 10- 14 years.

Impacts of Disclosure

A young person can disclose in many ways and you may not be the first person to find out. Whatever way you hear about it, your reactions matter.

A disclosure can be overwhelming, and you may experience a range of emotions. It is common for parents to blame themselves for not being able to protect the young person, especially if you know the perpetrator. It is not your fault. You could not have known what was going to happen otherwise you would have tried to prevent it.

The only person to blame is the perpetrator.

How to Help

As a parent you can play a significant role in helping the young person heal from the impacts of sexual violence. The most useful thing you can do is start by believing. Do not betray their trust by telling anyone else without permission.

SUPPORT

You need to ensure that the young person is not in any current or ongoing danger. If the sexual violence has occurred recently, consider a medical examination to check that everything is OK. Regardless of the circumstances of the assault, what happened was not the young person's fault. They had no control over the situation and were powerless to stop it. Try and make the young person feel safe and secure and remind them that you still love them. Knowing what services and reporting options are available can help, however it must be their decision to pursue any options.

LISTEN

Remain open to communicating with the young person about what has happened and how they are feeling, even though this may be upsetting for you. Try to avoid assumptions or judgments and ask them what would be most helpful. Avoid lots of questions, respect their need for space, and let them share at their own pace. It is important not to process your own emotions through conversations with the young person otherwise they could become overwhelmed and emotionally shut down.

NO MORE VIOLENCE

It is normal to feel anger toward the perpetrator and you may even dream of seeking revenge. However, it is important to think through the consequences of such

actions. Further violence could result in legal action against you and it will not make up for your young person's experience or take their pain away. More violence could make your teen feel unsafe or scared.

BE CONSISTENT

The healing process is unpredictable and has ups and downs. Consistent support is important. Remember, sometimes things appear to get worse before they get better as everyone starts to express and process their feelings. The time frame and healing process for every person is unique. Consistent support and providing a stable environment, routine and parenting will all have a positive impact.

Setting Boundaries after trauma

- Behaviour management may require adjustments to focus more on helping your teen heal. Avoid touch as a punishment
- Model good emotional management. It's easy to respond to anger with anger however they will not be able to calm down if you can't
- Don't discourage the expression of negative emotions. Instead support your teen to identify how they feel and express it in healthy ways
- Avoid power struggles. The young person may be desperate to feel some sense of power during feelings of powerlessness. Try giving them responsibilities and choices while reassuring them they don't need to fight