

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

HELPFUL AND HARMFUL REACTIONS



1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime - there is a good chance that someone close to you is a survivor. Survivors are often blamed for their own sexual assault, discouraged from speaking out, and are often faced with disbelief or are not taken seriously when they do disclose. These are a few of the reasons why it can be very frightening for survivors to talk about what they have experienced, and makes getting help more difficult.

Your support and understanding has an important place in the process of healing for a survivor of sexual assault. The following examples of helpful and harmful reactions can help you to be a supportive friend, family member, partner or ally when someone confides in you that they have been sexually assaulted.

HELPFUL REACTIONS

Listening: Listening non-judgementally to what the survivor has to say. Letting the survivor express themselves in their own words, at their own pace and in their own way.

Believing: Believing what the survivor says. The survivor is the one who has been through it. For now you should focus on what the survivor is saying and going through.

Accepting: Simply accept what the survivor says without either minimizing or magnifying the facts, emotions or consequences.

Encouraging Strength: Helping the survivor to feel good about expressing their feelings, pointing out the survivor's courage and strength.

Supporting: Being available to talk or to accompany the survivor. If you feel unable to help, it is important to tell the survivor and help them find someone else who is able to assist them.

Reducing Guilt: Helping the survivor understand that it is not their fault for being sexually assaulted. The perpetrator is completely responsible for the sexual assault.

Encouraging Autonomy: Being there for the survivor and helping them re-establish power in their own life. Giving the survivor room to breathe, to get back to their previous level of functioning.

Recognizing Emotions: Help the survivor to express what they feel by recognizing that their reactions, emotions and feelings (for example: anger, shame, guilt, fear, low self-esteem) are normal.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

ON CAMPUS

Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)
SGW H 645, 514-848-2424 ext. 3353

Counselling & Psychological Services
SGW H-440, 514-848-2424 ext. 3545
LOY AD-103, 514-848-2424 ext. 3555

Health Services
SGW GM-200, 514-848-2424 ext. 3565
LOY AD 131, 514-848-2424 ext. 3575

Office of Rights and Responsibilities
SGW GM-1120, 514- 848-2424 ext. 8659

Centre for Gender Advocacy
2110 Mackay St., 514-848-2424 ext. 7431

OFF CAMPUS

Montreal Sexual Assault Centre (designated centre)
(8 a.m. - 5 p.m.) 514-934-0354

Montreal General Hospital (designated centre)
(5 p.m. onwards) 514-934-8090

Sexual Assault Centres
(CALACS) 514-529-5252

Crime victim's assistance centres
(CAVAC) 514-277-9860

**Help and information centre on sexual harassment
in the workplace** (GAIHST) 514-526-0789

Sexual Assault Provincial Helpline (24/7)
1-888-933-9007 or 514-933-9007 in Montreal

HARMFUL REACTIONS

Judging: Asking tactless questions and for unnecessary details.

Doubting: Questioning the survivor's story, showing skepticism.

Trivializing, Minimizing or Dramatizing:
Communicating to the survivor that their experience is not a big deal, or that it could have been worse. Alternatively-overreacting to the survivor's disclosure by expressing strong emotions of anger, sadness, fear, panic etc. or verbalizing violent intentions towards the perpetrator.

Finding Fault: Pointing out what the survivor could, or should, have done differently.

Ignoring: Doing nothing about the survivors request for help.

Blaming: Communicating that the survivor was somehow responsible, or provoked, the sexual assault.

Over protecting: Keeping the survivor from seeing friends, going out to certain places, or going out at certain times.

Silencing: Telling the survivor to move on, or to not dwell on the sexual assault. Silencing the survivor when they need to let out emotions about their experience.

¹Ministère de la Sécurité publique, Statistiques 2008 sur les agressions sexuelles au Québec (2008 statistics on sexual assault in Québec), Québec, MSP, 2010. Government of Quebec.

Orientations gouvernementales en matière d'agression sexuelle (Action plan for the setting up of governmental guidelines in matters of sexual aggression), Québec, 2001.

LEARN MORE AT: concordia.ca/sarc

SGW CAMPUS: 1455 De Maisonneuve W., H 645 • 514-848-2424 ext. 3353 • sarc@concordia.ca