



MY SISTER, MY RESPONSIBILITY:

Sisterhood, Safety and Support

This brief resource is a guide for members and volunteers dealing with incidents of sexual assault and relational violence and for those supporting sisters or friends who are survivors.

WHAT IF THIS HAPPENED TO ME?

Your Health & Safety Come First

1. Get to a safe place.
2. Reach out for help; you do not have to go through it alone.
 - a. If possible, call a friend you trust and ask her if she can be with you.
 - b. Call a hotline for referrals in your area; operators will be able to advise you on the best place to seek medical care.
3. Get medical care.
 - a. Your emotional and physical health are very important. If you have just experienced a sexual assault, you may have internal or external injuries that require medical attention.
 - b. Preventing pregnancy or the transmission of an STD is a major concern for many victims.
 - c. Preserving evidence is critical following an assault. Even if you decide not to report until later, this evidence can be very helpful.
 - i. Obtain a forensic exam at your local hospital. You can complete this immediately and it does not mean you have to file a police report. Evidence will be preserved in case you wish to report later. Evidence collected following a sexual assault will be preserved for 90 days.
4. Report it.
 - a. Ultimately, this is your choice, but we strongly recommend you file a police report or work with the appropriate campus office.

BECOMING A SUPPORTIVE SISTERHOOD & ESSENTIALS OF SUPPORTING A SISTER OR FRIEND

First Steps

- BELIEVE HER!
- Listen: Be there as a friend just as you would if a friend was telling you about anything else that is serious.
- Try to avoid asking questions. Questions about how it occurred or about why she did or did not do something differently can easily sound like skepticism, which can be very hurtful.
- Help her understand what her options are. Look up options online for her if you need to, such as where she could go locally for help or support, or to report it if she chooses to. Offer to go with her to any and all resources.
- Encourage her to talk with a professional and with caring people who can support her, and offer to go with her.

Supportive Things You Can Say:

- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- It wasn't your fault.
- It took courage and trust for you to share this experience with me.
- Thank you for telling me.
- You survived; obviously you did the right things.
- I'm always here if you want to talk.
- Can I do anything for you?
- I can only imagine how you are feeling.

Do not:

- Ask questions about her behavior. That can easily sound like blaming her for the other person's violating actions.
- Pressure her about what she should or should not do in terms of reporting.

Next steps

- Follow up with her on a regular basis.
- Consider talking with a professional yourself so you can have guidance working through your own emotions and know how to be a more supportive friend and sister.

How to be equipped to support a survivor

- Support does not mean labeling another person's experience for them. Refrain from telling a friend, "That was rape," or "That was sexual assault." It also, of course, is not your role to tell them it wasn't. Your role is to be supportive and help others find professional resources.
- Remember it takes tremendous courage for them to tell you this.
- Understand the way it happened might be different than what you would imagine.
- Keep in mind people respond in various ways to being assaulted or abused.
- Be patient. A survivor might feel and behave in very different ways at different times.
- It is not your role to judge how she "should" be acting or feeling.

RISING ABOVE VICTIM BLAMING

Victim-blaming is when people blame the person who was harmed rather than the person who did the harming.

- This can be **hurtful** because it creates an environment where people are afraid to report an assault.
- It can add to the trauma of a person already seriously harmed—those whose support she needs most seem to be siding against her.
- **Misplacing blame = Misplacing responsibility.** Each person is responsible for their actions toward others. *The person who harms is responsible for the harm.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Campus Women's Center or Title IX Compliance Office**
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center (<http://www.nsvrc.org/>)**
 - The NSVRC provides leadership sexual violence response and prevention through collaboration, developing and sharing resources, and furthering research.
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline**
 - 800-656-4673
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
 - 800-799-7233