



Supporting a Survivor: Conversation Starter

APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

Zeta Tau Alpha has created an e-poster campaign focusing on supporting survivors of sexual assault. Use this conversation starter to continue dialogue within the chapter on steps to take, what to say, and how to be supportive when speaking to a survivor of sexual assault.

What should I know in order to support a survivor?

- Remember it takes tremendous courage for share their experience.
- 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 they “should” act or feel.

How can I provide support?

- Support looks different to each person, but it could include:
 - Sitting with them as they tell their story
 - Going with them to an appointment with a medical or mental health professional
 - Reassuring them that they are not to blame for this experience or following up with them in the weeks and months after they share their experience with you
 - Letting them know they have a support system who loves and believes them is key.

Supportive things you can say:

A big step in becoming a supportive friend is learning what to say when speaking with a survivor of sexual assault. Being supportive can make people anxious because they're afraid they will say the wrong thing. Here are some supportive statements:

- I believe you.
- 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.
- I'm always here if you want to talk.
- Can I do anything for you?
- I can only imagine how you are feeling.

What not to do:

- Do not pressure them about what they should or should not do in terms of reporting.
- Try to avoid asking questions, especially about the survivor's behavior. Questions about how it occurred or about why they did or did not do something differently can easily sound like skepticism or blaming them for the other person's violating actions.

What are the next steps as I continue to be a supportive member?

- Check in with the survivor on a regular basis.
- Consider talking with a professional yourself for guidance on working through your own emotions and to learn more about how to be a supportive friend and member.
- Download the Sisterhood, Safety and Support e-book.

ZTA's Sisterhood, Safety and Support e-book

Knowledge is power. [This downloadable resource](#) is designed to equip you with knowledge that can help optimize personal relationships in college and beyond.

Other resources

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE

1-800-656-HOPE | www.rainn.org

HELPLINE

www.stopitnow.org/help-inquiry | 1-888-PREVENT

LOVE IS RESPECT

www.loveisrespect.org | 1-866-331-9474 or 1-866-331-8453 | text “loveis” to 22522