HELPING A FRIEND

The support and understanding of friends can be very helpful to a sexual assault victim. Many victims worry about how their family and/or friends will react. It is important to let your friend know right away that you care and want to help. There are also many specific things you can do:

Believe your friend.

It takes a great deal of courage to talk about sexual assault. Many victims remain silent because they feel ashamed and/or they fear that they will not be believed if they tell people about what happened to them.

Listen to your friend:

Listen, but don’t press for details. Let your friend decide how much she/he feels comfortable telling you about the assault and its impact.

Encourage your friend to make her/his own decisions and choices.

Let your friend decide if she/he wants to notify the police or campus officials, contact a rape treatment or crisis center, and/or seek medical attention. But do what you can to assist your friend in getting help. For example, you can encourage your friend to get information about these options by calling a rape crisis center and talking with a counselor.

Provide support.

Support your friend’s decisions about whom to tell and how to proceed. For example you can offer to accompany your friend if she/he decides to seek medical care or go to the police.

Make it clear that you know your friend was not responsible in any way for the sexual assault, no matter what the circumstances.

For example, if your friend was intoxicated, she/he is not to blame. The responsibility for a rape or a sexual assault belongs completely to the assailant.

Be prepared to listen for as long as your friend needs your support.

Understand that the trauma caused by rape does not go away after a short period of time. Victims often have the need to talk about what happened and its impact for a long time after the assault.
Encourage your friend to talk to a trained counselor at a rape treatment or crisis center.

If your friend does not want to talk with a counselor, you may want to contact a crisis center yourself. A crisis counselor can give you advice about how you can help your friend.

Encourage your friend to seek medical care.

Even if your friend does not have any apparent physical injuries, and even if the assault happened a while ago, encourage her/him to get a medical examination. A health care provider can help your friend deal with the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, as well as provide an evidentiary examination.

Protect your friend’s privacy.

Don’t reveal what the victim has told you to other people. Let your friend decide whom she/he wishes to confide in.