

Support yourself to support them

It can be a tremendous shock to discover that someone you care about has been abused. When acting as a support person, it's important to recognise that you may need some support for yourself. Neither you nor the survivor need to be alone in dealing with what has happened.

Counselling - Many survivors of sexual abuse or rape find it helpful to talk to a counsellor. Likewise, people who are supporting survivors can benefit from the advice and guidance of a trained professional. You may find you want to seek face-to-face counselling for yourself; alternatively, you may find the telephone support offered by agencies like Rape Prevention Education meets your needs. Either way, you do not have to support your friend or relative by yourself.

Support groups - There are several groups throughout the Auckland region that provide an opportunity for people who are supporting a survivor to meet and talk about what they are going through. The majority of these groups are run by people trained in the area of sexual abuse (e.g. counsellors). Many people find that joining a group provides invaluable assistance and information to enable them to better help the survivor.

How can I find out more?

Rape Prevention Education provides free information, resources and support. We operate a referral service which is culturally appropriate, safe and supportive. You can call us on 360-4001 during office hours, email info@rapecrisis.org.nz, or check out www.rapecrisis.org.nz for more information about your options.

Supporting a Survivor: Information for those supporting a survivor of sexual assault

Rape Prevention Education
Rape Crisis Auckland Inc.
Ph. (09) 360 4001
Fax. (09) 360 4015
Email: info@rapecrisis.org.nz

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR

Information for those supporting a survivor of sexual assault



Rape Prevention Education

RAPE CRISIS AUCKLAND INCORPORATED
WHAKATU MAURI

*Supporting survivors of sexual violence & their whanau.
Working to eliminate rape and sexual abuse through education and community work.*

CONTACT DETAILS

Crisis phone 360 4004
Office phone 360 4001
Fax 360 4015
TTY 360 4004

PO Box 78 307, Grey Lynn, Auckland
E-mail info@rapecrisis.org.nz
Website www.rapecrisis.org.nz

Supporting a survivor

It can often be hard to know how to support someone who has had an experience of rape or sexual abuse. Although there is no set 'way to do it', you may find the following information helpful if a friend or relative chooses to disclose their abuse to you.

- Encourage them to talk. Listen. Asking open ended questions can encourage them to tell you how they feel. (e.g. "How are you finding things now? How have you been coping so far?")
- Believe them. Many survivors of sexual violence fear that they will not be believed if they tell about the abuse. Showing them that you believe them and that you are listening to them is one form of support.
- Reassure them that it's good that they told someone. Let them know you'll be there for them.
- If they blame themselves for the abuse, reassure them that whatever happened wasn't their fault.
- Don't feel pressured to give advice. You've been approached for support rather than for you to tell them what to do. Don't pressure them into any decisions. Let them take the lead.

**For more information,
check out the Rape Prevention
Education website
www.rapecrisis.org.nz**

DO'S AND DON'T'S FOR SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR

- √ **Do** help the survivor find out what their options are (e.g. legal, medical, support)
- X **Don't** push for the survivor to do anything they don't want to do
- √ **Do** support the survivor to make their own decisions (ones that feel right for them)
- X **Don't** make decisions for them
- √ **Do** be honest about how you are feeling (without 'dumping' your emotions on the survivor)
- X **Don't** blame them for what happened. Remember, the survivor did the right thing at the right time to stay alive. The responsibility for abuse always lies with the abuser.
- √ **Do** get support for yourself. Feelings of shock, anger and revenge are natural, but should be dealt with so that you can offer the best support you can to the survivor
- X **Don't** expect either the survivor or yourself to be 'over it' in a certain amount of time

What do I do if they didn't tell me personally?

You may have heard about the sexual violation from someone other than the survivor. Perhaps s/he doesn't want you to know, or s/he hasn't been able to tell you yet. But what can you do now you know?

If the abuse is general information and everyone is talking about it, remember that it is best to talk with the survivor than about them. S/he can probably use the support. Let her/him know that you care and are available to talk:

"I heard you were raped/sexually abused. I feel really bad that that happened and was wondering how you're doing now?"

If the person who told you about the survivor's abuse has asked you not to tell anyone, you may still want to check out if the survivor is currently in a safe situation. If they are, you can wait until they choose to come to you before offering support.

If, however, they are still at risk of abuse and are under 17 years, you could let both the person who told you and the survivor know that you have to report the abuse (people you can report the abuse to include Child, Youth and Family Services and the Police). Although this can be hard option to take, it is important to make sure that the survivor is safe. Rape Prevention Education can help you work out if reporting is the best option.

What can I do to help now?

As a support person you could offer to gather resources and information about the options available to survivors of rape and sexual abuse. Rape Prevention Education has a wide range of pamphlets that are free to the public, and that can provide valuable information to both you and the person you are supporting.