



24 Hour Crisis/Information & Referral Line (253) 474-7273 or 1-800-756-7273

Questions Asked by Family or Friends (Secondary Victims)

How can I be supportive and understanding of my friend/family member if I am having difficulties with my own emotions about sexual abuse/assault?

...You are also impacted by the sexual assault of your family member/friend. Understand that it is normal to experience some impatience, guilt and fear during this difficult time. Talking with professionals in this area may offer an opportunity for you to express your thoughts and emotions regarding this incident in a safe and confidential setting while also providing non-judgmental support and healthy coping strategies.

What can I do to support my loved one who is a victim of sexual assault/abuse?

...Whether you are a parent, a spouse, a partner or a friend it is important to remember that you too have been hurt by your loved one's assault/abuse even though you are not the person to have suffered the actual assault. Therefore, your focus should be on assisting and supporting your loved one but also on taking care of yourself. Many of us take comfort in believing that we will never be assaulted if we do the "right" thing; or that if we are assaulted, we will respond heroically and put the pain behind us quickly and with ease. Research into trauma reveals that this is simply not the case.

It is important to remember that individuals cannot predict if they will be assaulted, how they will respond during an assault/abuse or in the days, months or years that follow it. It is common after an assault to want to look to see how the victim could have prevented it. Hindsight is always 20/20. It is important to remember that no matter what the circumstances of the assault there was no way your loved one could have known that she or he would be assaulted.

Your loved one is also likely doing the best that they can to cope with the situation currently. They likely wish, as you may, that they could "put the assault behind them and move on". Or you may feel that your loved one is not addressing the issues related to the assault/abuse as much as they should. For many survivors of sexual assault/abuse there are competing needs: to address the sexual assault/abuse while also fearing that they will be overwhelmed by it. Studies have shown that an individual's reaction to trauma is largely not a matter of choice but a complicated interaction of history and body chemistry. It is important to allow your loved one as much control and choice as possible over how, when, at what pace and with whom they address the sexual assault/abuse. ***(Please see Links to Resources for more information on responses to trauma and ways to be supportive.)***

How do I support my friend/family member after a recent sexual assault or disclosure of childhood sexual abuse or past sexual assault?

...Listen, do not judge them; believe, do not ask judgmental, blaming questions; be supportive, be there for them; be understanding, tell them the assault was not their fault

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and that it doesn't change how you feel about them; be there for them, comfort them; offer a safe place to go; be patient; encourage them to seek the appropriate professional assistance such as medical, law enforcement or the Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County; empower them to make their own decisions and choices regarding next steps, even if it is different from yours.

Where can I find out more?

...For more information you may contact us by calling the 24-Hour Crisis, Information & Referral Line at (253) 474-7273 or 1-800-756-7273 or you can email

jennifer@sexualassaultcenter.com. (As safety permits, please include a phone # where we might reach you if email response presents a problem.)

On the *Links to Resources* page we have listed links to other sites you might find helpful and informative. In addition we have listed books that survivors have found particularly useful.