

# Has Someone You Care About Been Sexually Assaulted?

## Effects of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual contact that may include kissing, touching, grabbing, and forced sexual intercourse. During a sexual assault, people experience a loss of control, feelings of powerlessness, and may fear injury or death. A survivor is also struggling with the many difficult decisions they have to make after a sexual assault. Do they want to see a doctor or go to the hospital? Who should they tell? Should they report to Police/RCMP? Could they have a sexually transmitted infection, or be pregnant from the assault? Survivors may be dealing with other feelings such as shame, self-blame, and guilt. It is important that a survivor be able to choose what to do about the sexual assault, and that the decisions they make are listened to and respected.

## How You Can Help

Sexual assault is a traumatic experience that often violates a person's sense of self, sense of safety, and the way they see the world around them. Survivors may experience any or all of these feelings: sadness, anger, humiliation, depression, anxiety, embarrassment, shame, guilt, anger, and fear. Validate whatever the survivor is feeling. All of these feelings are normal responses to the sexual assault.

Healing from a sexual assault is a different process for everyone. No one should be told to get over it.

If a survivor chooses to tell you about what happened to them, it means they trust you a great deal. What you say and do in this situation makes a big difference in how the Survivor feels and how they will choose to deal with the trauma

of being sexually assaulted. It is important to believe what they tell you and not blame them in any way for what happened to them, and the crime committed against them. Sexual assault is an act of aggression and violence meant to terrorize and humiliate the victim. Whatever they did during the assault was the best choice they could have made for themselves.

Try not to overprotect them. Remember that they need to regain control of their life. This means that they will make their own decisions and ask for help as they need it. They are the expert on what they need at any given time.

Often people may become interested in the details of the assault or in the sexual aspects of the crime. It is important to not ask the survivor probing questions about these things. Sexual assault is not about sex. It is about violence. Individuals will usually talk about what they feel comfortable to share. Let the survivor know that you care about them and that you are there for them when they need to talk. Ask them what they are most concerned about.

## Sexual Assault Affects Everyone

Since you are close to the survivor, you may also be dealing with a lot of different emotions. You may feel anger at what happened to them and to the person who did this. You may also feel disbelief, sadness, and depression. It is normal as well to be overwhelmed by the situation and feel like you have no idea what to do. Get support for yourself from someone other than the survivor. Talk to people you trust and be respectful of their confidentiality and right to privacy.

**24 Hour Crisis Line 1-888-353-2273**

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|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------|---|
| <b>Call 8-1-1</b><br>Healthlink BC<br><a href="http://www.healthlinkbc.ca">www.healthlinkbc.ca</a> | Nurse            | 24 hours a day  | Daily     | Call 8-1-1 to speak with a nurse, ask a dietitian about nutrition, or a pharmacist about your medication. |
|  | Dietitian        | 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. | Mon – Fri |   |
|  | Pharmacist       | 5 p.m. – 9 a.m. | Daily     |   |
|  | Hearing Impaired | Call 7-1-1      |           |   |