



Welcome to Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition

committed to the prevention and elimination of domestic and sexual violence

How to Help: What to do if someone discloses sexual assault to you

Believe Them

Even if their story is difficult to hear and if you know the other person(s) involved, believe what you hear. Most people who come forward are telling the truth. You may be the first person they tell their experience to.

Let them know you are there

Don't feel like you have to say just the right thing—just being there can help. Let them talk to a rate that's comfortable for them—wanting to know details is natural, but hold back from interrupting or asking a lot of questions. Show interest by nodding your head and keeping eye contact. Don't feel nervous about gaps in conversation, they are okay—let them happen. Ask if they want to get medical attention—no matter how long ago the assault occurred. Offer to go with them if they want you to. Give them the phone number of the local sexual assault program or the national crisis line number.

Let them know you care

Some things you can say:

- I'm sorry this happened to you.
- What happened wasn't your fault.
- That must have been tough/frightening/scary for you.

Reinforce that they are not to blame

Let your friend know that they did not choose or cause the rape to happen. Help them re-frame blaming statements. If they say they should have fought back, say, "It's difficult to scream or fight back when you are scared." If they feel like the rape is their fault because they were alone with the rapist say, "You trusted that person. They violated that trust. You didn't ask to be raped."

Let them be in control of who knows about the sexual assault

Your friend confided in you for a reason—probably because they trusted you not to tell anyone else. If you are worried they are not getting the support and help they need, ask them if you can confide in an adult together. If you think your friend may attempt to hurt themselves, talk to an adult immediately.

Take care of yourself

You are not superhuman. Hearing about any sexual assault can be difficult and upsetting. It can also be confusing if you know both people. It's normal to feel angry or want to "fix it", but confronting the other person is not going to make the situation better. Find someone to talk to about your feelings, like a crisis line or counselor.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/sexualviolence/index.html> or the Rape, Incest, and Abuse National Network at www.rainn.org