

Helping a friend

who was sexually assaulted



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If you know and care about someone who was sexually assaulted, this pamphlet is for you. It was adapted from the booklet “Coping with Sexual Assault: A Guide to Healing.” It provides some guidance on some of the ways you can support your friend or loved one through this difficult time. Keep in mind, everyone is different. Trust what you know to be true about your relationship with your friend or loved one. Then be there in the ways that they need you—even if it is not what you want or think should happen.

Important notes: *This resource uses gender neutral language to be inclusive of all survivors and in recognition that anyone can be a victim of sexual assault. Information provided in this pamphlet is not intended to be a substitute for medical, psychological, or legal advice. Professional consult should be sought for medical, psychological or legal concerns. Information may vary depending on state laws which are also subject to change.*

Some important things to remember

No one expects to be helping a friend cope with a sexual assault. It is a topic that some people feel uncomfortable talking about especially if it has happened to them or to someone they love. This pamphlet was written with that in mind—to offer some information and guidance as you face this unexpected event and as you support your friend in their healing. To begin, here are a few important facts that may be helpful to know.

■ **Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault.** Survivors include persons from all genders and gender identities, ages, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, social classes, ranks (in military), abilities and all backgrounds. *Sexual assault can happen to anyone, no matter who they are or their situation.*

It is important that your friend has accurate information to make the best decisions for their healing and their future.

■ **Sexual assaults occur in many different situations.**

No matter what—it is never the victim's fault that the assault happened—never. Your friend may have decided to leave a window open on a summer night, go for a walk alone, get drunk at a party, or say “no” to a date about sex. None of these actions or decisions gives anyone the right to take advantage of someone else. Many sexual assault victims do blame themselves for what happened. It is important to remember that just like any other crime, the offender is responsible AND to blame. *Your friend did not cause this to happen by anything they did or said.*

■ **If an adult has any type of sexual contact with a minor who is not of legal age to consent, it is considered child abuse.**

Any sexual contact between an adult and a minor (under the age of legal consent) is sexual abuse and should be reported to children's protective services. If your friend is a minor and was abused by an adult, it is important to know that a report to children's services does not mean your friend is in trouble. Children's services are there to help teenagers, children and their families get through this difficult time and to ensure their safety.

■ **Everyone deserves to have support after a sexual assault.**

Your friend does not have to deal with this alone. There are many resources and people available to help. This pamphlet gives you a general overview about coping after a sexual assault. It is likely your friend may need more information, especially if the criminal justice system is involved. You may want to suggest your friend call the local Rape Crisis or Victim-Witness Program for more information. Keep in mind, how a person identifies themselves (e.g., LGBTQ+) and their relationship to the offender may impact their needs or responses. *Confidential and anonymous crisis counseling is available for victims, friends, and family.*

■ **All survivors of sexual assault should be treated with respect when trying to get help.**

Sexual assault victims have the right to be informed about all of the choices in their medical care, the criminal justice system, their legal rights, and counseling options. *With this information your friend will be able to make the decisions that are best for them.*