

What Can You Say to Someone Who Has Been Sexually Assaulted?

If someone you know has been sexually assaulted, you may not know what to say to them. You may be afraid to mention the assault – and afraid not to mention it. It may help to know that there are no perfect words to say.

Here are some tips and ideas to think about as you offer your support.

How might this person feel?

Some common feelings that people have after being sexually assaulted are:

- Shame
- Guilt
- Fear
- Belief that the assault was their fault
- Feeling as if no one will believe them, and that they should have been able to prevent the assault

What does this person need from you?

The person who has been assaulted needs support and understanding. They need to know you do not blame them for the assault, and it was not their fault.

If you believe the person who was assaulted was at fault, it would be better for you not to say anything. These words can injure the person and cause further harm. The reality is there is never a reason that justifies someone sexually assaulting another person.

Some ideas to consider

- Keep it simple
- Be sensitive

- Do not be afraid the person will fall apart
- Do not be dramatic (for example: “How will you ever get over this?”)
- If you do not know what to say, ask the person if there may be something you can say or do to help
- If you can, let them know that they can talk with you about the assault if they wish. But if you are not able to listen, please tell them you cannot listen to how they have been hurt
- Also let them know they do not have to talk about the assault

Allowing the person to tell you what they need and what they do not need is one of the valuable gifts you can give them.

What to avoid

Avoid questions and statements that are judging or blaming such as:

- “What were you thinking?”
- “Why did you go there?”
- “You need to pay more attention to how you dress.”
- “Didn’t you try to fight or get away?”

If you are a friend, relative, acquaintance, or co-worker of someone who has been sexually assaulted, you need to take care of yourself, too. Sexual assault is not about one person. If you can, we would like to invite you to add your voice or support to ending sexual violence.

Sometimes if you have had a past experience with abuse or assault, feelings you have may be more intense. Please call us if you need help.

Sexual Assault Treatment Center
414-219-5555