How To Help a Friend Who has been Sexually Assaulted

Sexual assault is unwanted contact or touch of a sexual nature. Rape is forced vaginal or anal intercourse. Rape by instrumentation is vaginal or anal penetration with an object. Rape and sexual assault can be committed by anyone -- a stranger, a date, an acquaintance or even a friend. Assaults happened to both women and men.

Sexual assault and rape are violent crimes. Neither is motivated by sex or sexual desire; rather they are motivated by anger and aggression. Sexual assault is not uncontrolled passion - it is a hostile attack, an attempt to hurt, dominate and humiliate the victim.

Everyone has his or her own unique responses to being assaulted. However, it may be helpful for you to realize that it is common for survivors to feel confused, ashamed, guilty, dirty, frightened, helpless, damaged, distrustful, etc. Remember, whatever a survivor feels is understandable, given her or his experience.

If someone you know has been assaulted or raped you can help them in the following ways.

IF THE ASSAULT JUST OCCURRED

- Make sure they are safe.
- Help them get the medical attention they need.
- Offer to be with them or call someone they want to stay with them.
- Offer to call the police to report the rape. Reporting the assault does not mean you must prosecute, but it will ensure the availability of that option in the future, should the survivor so decide.

Offer to call for rape advocate services. This will allow an objective, supportive person to assist her in dealing with the immediate issues of the trauma.

AT ANY TIME - IMMEDIATELY AFTER OR MUCH LATER

- As a friend, it is important that you LISTEN to what the survivor tells you. Sometimes assault victims need to talk about the attack.
- Allow the survivor the freedom to choose when, where and how to talk about the trauma.
- Be supportive: BELIEVE the survivor. People rarely make up stories about being sexual assault survivors. Reinforce that the survivor is not to blame. Avoid using words that imply blame.
- Be sensitive: Let the person know that you do not subscribe to any of the common myths about sexual assault. Understand that the person has suffered extreme humiliation. Let them know that you do not see them as defiled or immoral.
- Be patient. Recovery from rape trauma is slow. Let the person proceed at their own pace.
• Realize that you have strong feelings about the trauma. If needed, seek counseling for yourself. Avoid communicating your biases and negative emotions to the survivor.
• Remember that whatever the rape victim did to survive the attack was exactly what he or she needed to do. The victim did not cause the attack and is not at fault.
• Be reassuring. Rape is never the victim's fault. Some things you can say to someone who has been sexually assaulted:
  "I believe you."
  "You survived; you did the best you could under the circumstances."
  "It is not your fault. Nothing you did could possibly justify what happened."
  "I'm sorry it happened to you."
  "This does not change how I feel about you."
  "What can I do to help you?"

Refer your friend for professional assistance; and get support for yourself!