

Supporting someone after sexual assault

It takes courage for someone to share the story of a sexual assault. How you respond and offer your support to a friend or family member can make a big difference.

Listen

Sometimes you don't need a lot of words to be a comfort to someone. Having someone listen lessens the weight of isolation, secrecy and self-blame. Listening is an act of compassion.

Validate

It's important to show that you believe them and are committed to supporting them. Here are some helpful phrases you can use to show you care. *"I believe you." "I'm so sorry this happened to you." "This is not your fault." "You're not alone. I'm here for you and I'm glad you told me."*

They may also feel that it was their fault. It can be helpful to communicate gently and repeatedly that the responsibility lies with the offender. For example, *"Nothing you did or could've done differently makes this your fault." "No one ever has the right to hurt you." "What they did was illegal."*

Make yourself available

The healing and recovery journey can be a long one. There may be many challenging — but sometimes joyful and liberating — conversations. It can make a big difference just knowing you're there to support them along the way.

Look after yourself

Someone's story of sexual assault will impact you too. You may find yourself too tired to listen with care and compassion, or be overfilled with emotions. This is a human response to hearing about trauma and these feelings are valid.

It's important to care for yourself so you can provide strong support. Take some time out after a conversation to re-centre yourself.

Ask what more you can do to help

Some people may feel disconnected and numb and not know how to ask for help or what to ask for. Anticipate what they might need and (if appropriate) rally others to provide an active support network.

Know where to point someone for more help

You don't have to have all the answers. There are many services that can offer professional support. Offer options and leave space for them to decide what they want to do.

Here are some services that can be helpful:

- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (Victoria): 1800 806 292
- Specialist sexual assault services in Victoria: sasvic.org.au/our-members
- 1800 RESPECT (National Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Counselling): 1800 737 732
- Victoria Police Sexual Offences Child Investigation Team: <https://www.police.vic.gov.au/sexual-offences-and-child-abuse-investigation-teams>