

# Supporting Others

## Key information

If someone is telling you about what has happened to them, it is because they trust you. It takes a huge amount of courage to tell someone. For that reason, you are very important to them and what you say and do matters a lot.

A note on language: We know that language is important, and people feel differently about the terms used to describe people who have

experienced sexual violence. Throughout our toolkits, where space is limited, we will be using 'survivor', but we acknowledge that not everyone will identify with this term.

Supporting anyone in the aftermath of sexual violence can be difficult, it can be made even harder if the person is a loved one. Here are some supports to equip yourself with the skills to be there when someone needs it.

**Offer your support and attention** One of the most important things you can do for a survivor of sexual violence is to believe them and let them know you are there for them.

**Don't blame** A person is never responsible for being assaulted. Sexual violence is 100% the fault of the perpetrator and never the survivor. Ever.

**Try to stay neutral** It's normal to be upset by hearing that something awful has happened to someone you know. It's okay to be angry and sad but try to stay calm. Showing big emotions could make the survivor feel ashamed or at fault for making you feel that way. Whatever you are feeling is valid but try not to show those feelings to the survivor.

**Be understanding & non-judgmental** Be patient and supportive both in the moment and during the time that follows. There is no "right" way to respond to sexual violence.

**Understand sexual violence can take many forms** In all its forms, sexual violence is harmful and wrong and can be traumatising. Any sexual contact without consent is sexual violence and should be taken seriously.

**Let them make their own choices** Sexual violence was not the survivor's choice so it is important that you do not take away their decision-making powers or pressure them into any actions or choices such as reporting what has happened to the Gardai. Don't

interrogate them or push them on their actions – it is up to them to say what they need to do. You can find out what options are open to them, but let them decide what they want to do. Maintain confidentiality.

**Let them know what their options are** [Here is a guide to the practical steps to take in the aftermath of sexual violence.](#) Remember that what happens next is completely up to the survivor, be patient and allow them to make their own decisions.

**Helping them mind themselves** Consider if they have anyone in their lives who could support them. There are loads of resources for minding yourself in the aftermath of assault [here](#), looking after yourself can look different for everyone. Maybe it's staying in bed for a few days and resting or maybe it's finding a therapist.

**Seek support for yourself** Finding out someone you care about has experienced sexual violence can be very upsetting. It is normal to be affected by a disclosure from someone you know and to find it hard to know what to do. Make sure to seek support for yourself too. Family, friends or other concerned persons are welcome to get support from the experienced telephone counsellors on the **National 24 Hour Freephone Helpline on 1800 778888.**

**Educate yourself** You can find resources about supporting loved ones through a disclosure of sexual violence [here](#).

## Key takeaways

It takes courage for a person to speak about and share an experience of sexual violence. Be kind. Don't ask critical or blaming questions. Listen and be present. Believe them.

Sexual violence can be traumatising and trauma can make people behave differently, be patient & allow them to make their own decisions.

Sexual violence takes many forms, no matter what happened, it is never the survivor's fault.

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**Call the National 24 Hour  
Freephone Helpline at**

**1800 778888**

**for support and information on options.**



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