



EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Guiding principles

- Remain non-intrusive and totally accepting
- Believe the victim
- Be non-judgemental
- Be aware of body language (avoid things like raised eyebrows or backing away)
- Be aware of your own feelings (particularly if you yourself or someone you know has been sexually assaulted)
- Be especially vigilant about confidentiality
 - Do not discuss anything at all with family members without the explicit consent of the victim, or without the victim present
 - Ensure that all comments and discussions occur in private settings, even if you must temporarily go outside of the building to do so

Emotional support

- Listen and be very patient
- Keep your distance (recognize that personal space may be a heightened need of the victim)
- Normalize feelings (let the victim know that whatever reactions she is having are experienced by other victims)
- Emphasize that she is safe now
- Contact friends or relatives who can be supportive (with the victim's consent)
- Give basic information on medical and police procedure (if the victim asks)
- Try to diminish the victim's self-blaming (place the responsibility for the attack on the offender and reassure the victim that she did not provoke the attack)

Physical support

- Ask the victim how she is feeling (victim may be experiencing internal pain, bleeding, headache, nausea, tension, and anxiety)
- Make the victim more physically comfortable (provide a warm drink, a blanket, and encourage her to keep her feet elevated)
- Do not dispense medication
- Ask the victim if they are on any medication or if they have ingested any alcohol or other substance
- Provide information about medical or forensic procedures, and be



Practical support

sure to tell the victim that she can retain control of these procedures by stopping them if they become too difficult

- Check to see if a trusted friend/family member may be called to stay
- If she is undergoing forensic examination:
 - Suggest she bring a change of clothing and toiletries to the hospital, explaining that her clothing will be kept as evidence
 - Interact discreetly with hospital staff to ensure a maximum of privacy for the victim
- If the sexual assault occurred during a break-in:
 - Provide information regarding arrangements for lock changes or other security features
 - Help with arrangements for the victim to stay at a location she feels is “safe” until such changes can be made
- Ask for the victim’s permission to leave with them printed information on sexual assault services, counsellors, and support groups
- Offer a follow-up call to the victim

Male victims

Approximately one in six men will experience sexual abuse in their lifetime. For men, telling someone that they have been abused or assaulted is often more difficult than it is for women.

As a crisis intervention volunteer, you will offer the same support to male victims as you will to female victims of sexual assault:

- Help him find a place where he feels safe
- Listen to him and believe him
- Reassure him that the assault was not his fault
- Respect his decisions
- Encourage him to seek out help from a professional
- Let him know that he is not alone
- Be aware of your own feelings about male victims of sexual assault

Note: Organizations such as the Men's Project in Ontario may be helpful resources for male victims of sexual assault.



LGBTQ victims

Sexual assault can happen to anyone, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgender (LGBTQ) persons.

LGBTQ victims of sexual assault confront the same issues as any survivor, but must also deal with unique issues and special needs.

LGBTQ victims may not report the sexual assault due to:

- A tendency to blame their victimization on their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Concerns about being “outed”
- Perceptions of police and caregivers as homophobic
- Fear of being seen as a “traitor” to the gay community
- Lack of “queer-friendly” services

As a crisis intervention volunteer, keep in mind that LGBTQ victims experience the same emotional reactions, and are in need of the same support and intervention services as anyone.

Court support

Many victims fear going to court and feel that they may be re-victimized by the experience. Another way to offer practical support to victims is to provide referrals and other suggestions regarding the judicial system.

For example, you may refer victims to the Victim Witness Assistance Program if this is available in your area. VWAP provides victims of serious crime with information and assistance throughout the court process. This referral would be very helpful in ensuring that the victim you supported during the crisis phase also receives help during the judicial phase.

If this resource is not available in your area, it is sometimes helpful to suggest that the victim and a supportive friend visit the courthouse and “sit-in” on some unrelated proceedings in order to become a little more familiar with the justice system’s approach to sexual offences. Encouraging the victim to visit a courtroom prior to having to deal with the sexual assault trial itself is a way of supporting them in their preparation for the trial.