

The Aftermath of Sexual Assault

Survivors of sexual assault can experience a wide variety of normal reactions to this traumatic event. It is also common that support people may experience some of the same feelings and behaviors. These reactions can include:

- Self-blame
- Sleeplessness
- Change in appetite
- Anger
- Hopelessness
- Easily startled
- Afraid
- Worthlessness
- Nightmares
- Crying

Without proper care and attention, traumatic events can lead to an increased likelihood of developing substance abuse and/or addiction; anxiety and/or depression. It is helpful for support people to encourage the Survivor to seek both medical and mental health care. If these choices are offered, the Survivor will then be able to make their own informed decision about their course of action.

**For More Information call
HelpLine at 211, or toll free at
1.800.684.2324**

Deaf and Hard of Hearing dial 711 or 1.800.750.0750
Language Services Available



Talking Tips For Co-Survivors

Helpful statements a Co-Survivor may make:

- How can I help?
- I am here to listen
- I can see this is very difficult
- It's okay to cry
- Remember to breathe
- It takes time to heal

(Above excerpted from Mt. Carmel Crime & Trauma Assistances "Coping With Trauma")

- You made the best choices you could at the time
- You are not to blame
- You don't deserve what happened to you
- The decisions you made helped you survive

Statements for Co-Survivors to avoid:

- Don't worry
- It's in the past
- Don't cry
- It's all in your head
- Just forget about it
- Why didn't you...

If the survivor seems "spacey", remind them of the current time, place and situation. Offer to participate in counseling sessions or to help locate resources.

(Excerpted from Mt. Carmel Crime & Trauma Assistances "Coping With Trauma")

We suggest avoiding questions that start with "Why___?" because they can imply blame or sound like you doubt their accounting of what happened.

Delaware County Office:
11 N. Franklin St.
Delaware, Ohio 43015
Hotline: 740.369.3316

Morrow County Office:
950 Meadow Drive, Suite B
Mt. Gilead, Ohio 43338
Hotline: 419.947.2520

www.helplinedelmor.org

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HelpLine

Of Delaware and Morrow Counties, Inc.

SARN
Sexual Assault Response Network



**A Guide for
Friends and Family
of the
Sexual Assault
Survivor**



What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual Assault is any unwanted sexual act that is not consensual. Examples of this can be when the person is:

- tricked
- too young
- coerced
- threatened or forced
- unconscious
- intoxicated
- unable to consent in any circumstance for any reason

Sexual assault is a crime of power and control. It's a violent act whether or not physical force is used.

Remember, it is never the survivor's fault.

You can provide support:

- Encourage them to take care of themselves by doing basic things (i.e. eating, sleeping, exercising).
- Every discussion doesn't have to revolve around this topic. Offer support, create an environment where they can safely talk, and then let them come to you. Try not to force a dialogue.

Some Overwhelming Feelings Co-Survivors May Experience

Guilt

When we are close to someone or in a relationship where we've helped to take care of them, we may feel guilty we are unable to keep them safe. Even if the Survivor is an adult, we may still fall into the trap of believing that we are, somehow, responsible for what happened. Remember that the only person responsible is the perpetrator who chose to hurt someone.

Revenge

It is not uncommon to feel an intense anger and desire to seek revenge against the perpetrator. This is normal and understandable, yet not the best way to respond as it only adds to the emotional burden the Survivor is carrying. At a time when the Survivor needs support and understanding, the focus becomes about your anger and not the Survivor's well-being. The result may be a cut off in communication from the Survivor because they may feel they need to protect you, or fear your response. Right now, reasonable judgment and calmness are most beneficial to the Survivor.

Wanting to Take Control

If we see a Survivor struggling with what has happened, we may want to fix the problems ourselves. We may think we can see more clearly what needs to be done and want to help the survivor by taking over these decisions. While the desire to help is a wonderful thing, it is important for the Survivor's healing to be in control of what happens next, as much as possible. Making decisions, even small decisions, even what we may consider to be possibly wrong decisions, can help bring a person out of a sense of helplessness.

As a Co-Survivor, you too have been profoundly affected by the sexual assault. You can model how to take care of yourself by calling our hotline, seeking other support & sharing this.

A Few Common Myths

Some people mistakenly believe that:

- If the Survivor didn't actively resist the attack, that means they consented.
- Survivors could have somehow prevented the assault by doing something differently.
- If someone is sexually assaulted, they tell someone right away or report it as soon as possible.

The reality of sexual assault is that:

- No one knows how they would react while it is occurring or even after it has happened.
- The Survivor is not responsible for the actions of others.

SARN Can Help!

Specially trained advocates are available to assist survivors 24/7 at the hospital and with law enforcement after an assault. Just call our hotline. Advocates can also help connect a survivor to valuable resources in our community.

Even if the assault happened years ago, the SARN program at HelpLine can still help. Unfortunately, many survivors do not think they need help until months or years after the assault.

Remember, it's never too late to get help.

Our advocates are trained and prepared to help male, female, LGBTQ, teen, adult, and/or elderly survivors of sexual assault.



"The SARN program was informative, encouraging, and empowering. They were there for me every step of the way." -Survivor

Call our free, confidential hotline at 211 or 1.800.684.2324