

## 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
- Helplessness

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 informed decisions on a course of action.

**For More Information call  
HelpLine at 211, or toll free at  
1.800.684.2324 or text  
helpline to 898211**

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

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

If the Survivor seems "spacy", 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 Assistance's "Coping with Trauma")*

**[www.helplinedelmor.org](http://www.helplinedelmor.org)**

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

Crawford/Wyandot Office:  
97 Hought Drive, Suite W  
Upper Sandusky, Ohio 43351  
Hotline: 419.947.2520

HelpLine is a provider agency of the Delaware-Morrow Mental Health & Recovery Services Board, a member of United Ways of Delaware, Morrow & Union Counties, partially funded by SourcePoint, the Ohio AG Crime Victims Services Office, Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, Ohio Department of Health and private donations. HelpLine is certified by the Ohio Dept of Mental Health & Addiction Services, the American Association of Suicidology & accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems. HelpLine is an Equal Opportunity Employer/Provider.

This project supported by Grant Numbers 2017 VOCA 43558951 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, through the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Federal crime victims will be served.

Rev 2/17



**HelpLine**

# SARN

**Sexual Assault Response Network**

*Serving Delaware, Morrow, Crawford & Wyandot Counties*



## 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. Survivors may be unable to consent for any reason. Some examples of this can be when the Survivor is:**

- Tricked
- Too young
- Coerced
- Threatened or forced
- Unconscious
- Intoxicated
- Pressured to consent in any circumstance

**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, bathing, 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 were 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 else.

### **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, peaceful reactions 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 to the Survivor's healing that they 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.

**A Co-Survivor is anyone close to the person who has experienced sexual assault. 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 24/7 hotline, seeking other support & sharing what you are doing.**

## A Few Common Beliefs

### **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.
- Delayed reporting is common.

## SARN Can Help!

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

Even if the assault happened years ago, we can still help. 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, LGBTQI, 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 or text our free, confidential hotline.  
Text 'helpline' to 898211. Call 211 or 1.800.684.2324.**