

Steps to Support a Survivor

It takes courage for a survivor of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, harassment and/or stalking to share their story with anyone. **Never underestimate your power to affect the course of a survivor's healing journey.** Here are some tools—words, actions, and resources—that can help you support someone who shares personal experiences with you.

You don't have to be an expert—you just have to be yourself. If someone discloses their experience with you, you're probably a person they look to for help, compassion, and guidance. Although you can't take away what happened to someone, you can be a source of healthy support.

1. Listen

Try not to rush the survivor into making decisions and instead provide a non-judgmental listening ear. Sometimes you don't even need words (or at least not a lot of words), to be there for someone. Providing a safe space for someone processing what has happened or is happening can often be more valuable than other actions. Listening is in and of itself an act of care and consideration.

2. Validate

Let the survivor know you are there and support them.

Think about a time when you felt vulnerable or faced a crisis, and think of what helped you the most. Chances are it was not a specific conversation you had, but it was the knowledge and comfort that the person or people you told were there for you, believed in you, were on your side, and were committed to supporting you through a hard time. **Here are some helpful phrases you can use to show you care.**

"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."

"I believe you."

3. Choices

Violence and abuse is about power and control. It is vital for survivors to regain their sense of personal power and autonomy. Give the survivor the authority to make their own decisions and choices about what to do currently and in moving forward. Instead of pushing someone into taking actions for which they are not ready or may never want to do, ask how you can support them.

4. Reserve Judgement

This will not serve to help the survivor feel supported, believed or capable. Be mindful of the explicit and subtle ways we may question what or how someone discloses their experience of trauma. Remember that it may not flow or be shared in a way that we imagine it would and

often times seems counterintuitive to what we think. Trauma is experienced and processed in many different ways and there is no right or wrong way.

5. Resources

You can best help a survivor by offering options and leaving space for them to decide where to go from there. Safety is a key consideration when attempting to offer help and support. If the survivor you are speaking to does not feel safe or needs to explore safety options, yourself or the survivor can contact SAPA or another resource to discuss options.

If there is immediate danger, call 911.

Here are some local & national resources—services that can point someone in the right direction.

RESOURCES:

SAPA (Sexual Aggression Peer Advocates) 24/7 & Confidential Services @ CMU

1.989.774.2255 | www.sapa.cmich.edu

RISE serving Clare, Gratiot & Isabella Counties 24/7 & Confidential

1.844.349.6177 | www.riseadvocacy.org

CMU Counseling Center

1.989.774.3381 | counsel@cmich.edu | Foust Hall 102

Michigan Sexual Assault Hotline & Text Line 24/7 & Confidential

1.855.864.2374 | Text: 1.866.238.1454

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network Sexual Assault Hotline 24/7 & Confidential

1.800.656.4673 | www.rainn.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline 24/7 & Confidential

1.800.799.7233 | www.ndvh.org or www.thehotline.org | Text LOVEIS to 22522

Crisis Text Line 24/7 & Confidential Text anywhere in the USA to text with a Crisis Counselor
Text HOME to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24/7 & Confidential

1.800.273.TALK (8255) | www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

6. Understand Differences in Healing

No two people cope in exactly the same way and each survivor's healing process is unique to the individual. Express non-judgmental support and understand that the healing process is not a time-limited experience. The healing journey can be a long one. It can be full of many challenging—but sometimes joyful and liberating—conversations.

7. Care for yourself

There is a limit to what we are able to take in and process. The disclosure of someone else's experience related to trauma can impact us.

Concern for others and offering of support can be emotionally, mentally, and physically strenuous. Be kind to yourself, know your limits, and seek support for yourself as needed.

Services are available for you as well and can provide a safe space to learn about options and resources for the survivor and yourself and to discuss your experiences as a support person and the impact of everything you are experiencing. Remember, you can be your best self for someone else when you give yourself the space to honor your own needs.