

DoD Safe Helpline Info-Paper

How to Support a Survivor Self-Paced Educational Program

What is How to Support a Survivor?

How to Support a Survivor provides concrete tools that can help friends, family members, and colleagues of survivors of sexual assault support a survivor's recovery.

This program identifies both helping behaviors that support survivors of sexual assault and harmful behaviors that should be avoided. The program also includes concrete steps to help you become a stronger supporter for the people in your life affected by sexual violence.

Background:

Roughly one in four of the visitors to Safe Helpline who discuss an incident of sexual assault are friends, family members, colleagues, commanders or other concerned parties looking for information on how best to support a survivor of sexual assault. Following a sexual assault, the type of support a survivor receives directly affects the trajectory of their recovery.

How to Support a Survivor was created to give supporters tangible ways to help a survivor in their life. Many survivors don't choose to access help until months or years later. It is important, as a supporter, to be prepared for the challenges that helping a survivor entails.

What can I expect from this program?

Most supporters want to help even if they are not sure how to respond. This program consists of six training modules that include information about the effects of sexual assault, how to help empower a survivor, how to talk with a survivor, options for long-term support, bystander intervention, and how to take care of yourself.

Throughout the training, we've included specific examples and situations to help you see how the information can be used every day. It would be impossible to describe all the ways that people connect and support each other, so think of this as an overview rather than the detailed instruction guide. Remember, every survivor is different, and if you ever need additional support, Safe Helpline staff are here to support you 24/7.

Module 1: Effects of Sexual Assault

In the first section, we will discuss the effects of sexual assault to give you an overview of why a survivor may feel or act certain ways and why your support is important to their healing process.

Module Topics Include:

- Introduction to Effects of Sexual Assault
- Effects of Sexual Assault Breakdown
- How Trauma Can Effect the Brain
- Coping Strategies
- Healthy Coping Strategies
- Unhealthy Coping Strategies

Module 2: Empowering a Survivor

Next, we'll move into ways that you can help empower a survivor after an assault, and why that is important for their healing process.

Module Topics Include:

- Introduction to Empowerment
- Ways to Help a Survivor Feel Supported
- Empowering a Survivor through an Initial Crisis
- Helpful and Unhelpful Ways to Empower a Survivor

Module 3: How to Talk with a Survivor

Sometimes, survivors may be hesitant to share their experiences because of the fear of reactions from others. It's not always easy to know what to say when someone tells you they've been sexually assaulted; however, in Module 3, we'll show you how encouraging words and phrases can avoid judgment and show support for the survivor.

Module Topics Include:

- What to Say to a Survivor
- How to be there for a Survivor
- What Not to Say to a Survivor
- Ways a Partner can Support a Survivor

Module 4: Long-Term Support

Much of the guidance we've provided about supporting survivors of sexual assault has related to how to support them immediately after a crisis or after their initial disclosure. However, recovering from sexual assault or abuse is a process, and that process looks different for everyone—there's no timetable for healing. Module 4 includes information about how to continue supporting a survivor weeks, months, and even years after the assault and how important that continued support is.

Module Topics Include:

- Ways You Can Show Long-Term Support
- Support Network
- Safe HelpRoom

Module 5: Bystander Intervention

In Module 5, we provide information on ways that you can help prevent sexual assault from occurring in the future. One way that you can do this is called bystander intervention.

Module Topics Include:

- Bystander Intervention Introduction
- How to Intervene
- C.A.R.E.

Module 6: Taking Care of Yourself

Survivors aren't the only ones who experience a wide variety of emotions. It's normal to feel disbelief or guilt when learning that someone you love or care for has been assaulted. In Module 6, we will discuss how to manage these feelings and help you feel less overwhelmed. You can't support other people effectively unless you take care of yourself.

Module Topics Include:

- Boundaries
- Resources

To access *How to Support a Survivor* anonymously please click [here](#).

For SARCs and SAPR VAs looking to receive one hour of D-SAACP credit for completing *How to Support a Survivor*, click [here](#).