

CAPE

CENTER FOR ADVOCACY, PREVENTION, & EMPOWERMENT

CAPE supports survivor healing by providing advocacy and support to survivors of sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.



For Friends and Loved Ones

If someone you know has experienced sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking it can be difficult to process your own reactions/emotions while also knowing what to do, or how to respond.

When supporting a survivor, it is important to note that there is no right or wrong way to cope with the immediate aftermath of trauma. It is important to validate, believe, listen, provide choice, respect their personal space, and protect their privacy. The following are tips on what you can do and what not to do when providing support.

Validate & Believe

- Start by believing and validating their feelings as normal.
- "I am sorry this happened to you and I am glad you felt comfortable coming to be. I believe you and I am here to support you however you would like me to."
- "The way you're feeling is totally understandable/makes complete sense"

Listen

- One of the greatest gifts you can give is your ability to listen. Some may want to talk more than others; let the person know that you are here for them if/when they are ready to talk. Provide space for them to choose what they share about their experience. Don't pressure for details.
- "I am here to listen whenever you are ready"
- "Do you want me to offer feedback or just listen?"

Allow Them to Make Their Own Choices

- Sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking are about power and control. Even the smallest choices a survivor makes can begin to restore their sense of power.
- "You can choose if and when we talk. It is up to you. I am just here to listen."
- "I don't know what is best for you, but can I share some resources that may be helpful?"
- "I am here to support you in whatever you choose is best for you."

Respect Their Personal Space

- While hugging someone we care about, or holding their hand may be a natural inclination, it is important to ask if that would comfort them or if they want that. Physical intimacy that may have been fine before the trauma may not be fine for a while after. The right for the survivor to choose the type and timing of physical intimacy is integral to their feeling of safety.
- "Would you like a hug?"

Don't Confront the Alleged Offender

- While it is normal to be angry at the person accused of hurting the person you care about and love, confronting the person could result in the offender escalating behavior. It may also make the survivor feel uncomfortable, or like their power and control is continuing to be taken away from them.

Protect Their Privacy

- DU is a small campus, and when someone has been assaulted, they may feel like everyone knows what happened.
- It's important that you get permission before talking to anyone about what they have shared with you.
- They have confided in you because they trust you. What happened to them, is not your story to share.

What Not to Say or Do

- Avoid implying blame. What happened is never the fault of the victim/survivor.
- Don't ask/say things like: "Why did you get that drunk?"; "Why didn't you fight back or run?"; "Are you sure you weren't leading them on?"; "I told you not to hang out with them."
- Don't pressure for details. You can be supportive without knowing every detail of the incident. Allow them to share only what they are comfortable sharing.
- Refrain from focusing on potential social impact. The most important thing to consider is what is best for them, not how others might react.
- Don't criticize their actions during or following the assault. Assure them that they did what they needed to do to get through the experience.
- Don't question the validity of their experience, or minimize what happened. Don't ask/say things like: "Maybe you misunderstood what was happening?"; "Are you sure it was rape?"

Take Care of Yourself and Seek Your Own Support

- When someone you care about is hurt, it is normal to feel angry, sad and powerless. As a friend or loved one, it is also common to experience many of the same reactions a survivor does.
- To be a support for someone else, it is also important that you take care of yourself. CAPE and the Health and Counseling Center at DU are resources to get more information about sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking and to process your own thoughts/feelings/reactions to what happened.

Resources

CAPE
cape@du.edu
303-871-3853

Counselor on Call
24/7 mental health & Gender
Violence Support
303-871-2205

Health and Counseling Center
hccinfo@du.edu
303-871-2205