What To Do if Someone I Know Is Sexually Assaulted

If someone you know is victimized, his or her reactions can vary. He or she might be angry, sad, or afraid. He or she might respond in ways that seem unusual to you – for example, your friend might laugh at seemingly inappropriate times or appear to have no reaction at all. In most cases of campus sexual assault, the victim is hurt by someone he or she knows or trusts and processing complicated emotions following an assault and deciding what he or she wants to do moving forward can take time. Here are some things you can do if someone discloses an assault to you:

- **Listen.** If someone discloses an assault to you, it means he/she trusts you enough to share this incredibly difficult story. Just listening with compassion can be incredibly helpful.
- **Believe.** Rather than asking a lot of questions, just let your friend know that you believe him/her and will support him/her as best as you can.
- **Give options.** Sexual assault is a crime of power and control. In order to give a sense of control back to your friend, allow him/her to carefully choose what option is best. He/she may not make the same decision you might make; however, only the victim can decide what is a healthy process for him/her. You can help them explore their options by suggesting available resources – medical, legal, on-campus, off-campus, friends, family, counselors, or any other support you can think of. (You can also use the resources page on this website to find out available options.)
- **Take care of yourself.** Hearing about an assault can be difficult, particularly when the victimization occurred to someone you care about. It is important that while you are supporting a friend, you are also taking care of your own physical and mental health.

**What If My Friend Doesn’t Want to Report?**

It is possible you could have a friend disclose to you that a sexual assault has occurred but then tell you that he/she does not want to report the assault. Your friend may ask you to keep the conversation private. There are a lot of reasons why someone may choose not to report sexual violence.

- In most cases of campus sexual assault, the offender is known to the victim, which means it is likely someone she (or he) trusted, like a boyfriend, friend, or classmate.
- Your friend could be concerned that people won’t believe him/her or may not identify what occurred as a sexual assault.
- A victim may have fear of or confusion about the criminal justice system or campus judicial processes.
- If drugs or alcohol were involved, victims may choose not to report because they are worried they will get in trouble, as well.

As mentioned before, only the victim can decide what is best for him or her. However, your support can help address some of the fears that might impact his/her decision as to whether or not he/she is comfortable reporting.

- Let your friend know that you will believe him/her and support his/her decisions.
- Remind him/her that no one, regardless of relationship or status within the campus community, has the right to hurt him/her and that no matter what, it is not his/her fault that this occurred.
- Connect him/her with resources that can help set expectations and provide an understanding of the criminal justice or campus judicial process.
- Tell your friend you will go with him/her to make the report, if he/she decides to do so.

If there is a situation where you fear for a friend’s safety, you may choose to discuss what is happening with a trusted adult on campus even though your friend requested privacy. However, if your friend is safe, help him/her by providing all possible options and allowing him/her to decide what to do moving forward.

**Your Response Matters**

Don’t worry about being perfect, but do recognize the importance of your role. Again, if someone discloses to you, it means they trust you enough to share this information with you. Be present – listen to what is being said and consider what you can do to support your friend. Sometimes your friend might not want to talk; sitting in silence can be just as powerful. Avoid asking questions like “Why did you go with him?” or “Did you fight back?” Questioning your friend’s behaviors could make him or her feel as though the victimization was his or her fault, even though it wasn’t and even if that’s not your intent. Focus on offering your friend support and providing options so he or she can decide what is best.


Please contact **NU Wellness Center** for help
425-889-5282
[http://eagle.northwestu.edu/departments/wellness-center/](http://eagle.northwestu.edu/departments/wellness-center/)