

Supporting an Adult Survivor of Sexual Assault

- **Believe, listen and validate.** Always assure the survivor that you believe her/him; others may not. Allow the survivor to have all of their feelings, but make it clear that s/he is not responsible for the assault. Do not force the survivor to talk about the assault, but let the survivor know that you are available.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** Do not discuss the assault with anyone that the survivor has already not told. However, if the survivor is a child, you have a responsibility to make a police report. If the survivor is an adolescent, there are several issues to consider. Call LACASA for further information and support.
- **Do not take over.** Following a sexual assault, a survivor may feel like s/he has no control. It is important to help the survivor identify what s/he needs and discuss options. Give her/him LACASA's phone number and let her/him know that free and confidential services are available. Ask the survivor what you could do to provide support. Offer to accompany the survivor to the police station or emergency room, but do not force the survivor to take a specific course of action, unless you feel that medical care is crucial, or the survivor is a child. Report child sexual abuse to the police, Child Protective Services, or both.
- **Don't assume that s/he will want to be hugged or touched.** Always ask the survivor what is most comfortable. Some survivors will not want any physical contact, while others may feel comforted by being hugged or held.
- **Every survivor's healing process is unique.** Although survivors are trying to return their lives to "normal," there is no timetable for their healing process. The healing process includes several phases, which may be repeated. Memories and flashbacks of the assault may be triggered at any time. Triggers may include a scent or touch, a visual image, the onset of a new relationship, etc.
- **Recognize your impact on the survivor.** While sharing your feelings and concerns could be supportive, it could also be overwhelming. Survivors may take responsibility for your reactions, such as rage toward the perpetrator. Find ways to take care of your own feelings about the assault. LACASA offers a free support group for friends and family members of sexual assault survivors. Call for further information.
- **Take a break!** Do not over focus your time and energy on the assault. Make time to talk with the survivor about other things. Plan activities unrelated to the assault. Also, be sensitive to a survivor's possible fears and concerns s/he may have about safety. Make sure that you keep in touch with your own feelings and needs.



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Abuse impacts on humanity and on society; therefore, LACASA is committed to diversity and to serving all individuals.

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