

Helping Survivors of Sexual Violence

You may have a friend come to you and disclose that they have been sexually assaulted. Here are some valuable tips to allow you to help your friend:

- Be aware of your own feelings about sexual abuse and violence. If you are uncomfortable talking about this issue, it is okay. Helping the survivor identify who might be able to talk with them about the issue can also be supportive.
- Try to respond calmly and openly. Hearing about sexual abuse can be difficult. It can be very helpful to a survivor if you remain calm and non-judgmental. Also, provide a safe environment for discussion.
- Refrain from negative comments about the perpetrator. Keep in mind that most often, about 85% of the time, individuals who are sexually assaulted/abused are assaulted by someone they know. As a result they may have mixed feelings about the person.
- Do not interrogate. Let the individual tell you about the abuse on his/her terms. Do not pressure the person but let him/her talk when they are comfortable.
- Let the individual know that you believe him/her. Fear of not being believed is a concern expressed by many survivors. Being believed is important for people of all ages and helps eliminate feelings of guilt or shame.
- Commend the survivor for talking and reaching out for help. Talking about the abuse is often a big step so acknowledge this.
- Assure the survivors that they are not to blame for the assault. Survivors often have deep feelings of guilt or shame about the abuse. Only sexual offenders are at fault for the abuse. No one asks to be raped or assaulted.
- Respect the privacy of the survivor. Do not share what was told in confidence. If you think another person would be better able to help, give the survivor that person's name. If the person wants a confidential resource at Meredith College, connect the survivor with the Counseling Center, the Chaplain, or the Health Center.
- Provide information about supportive services; do not force the survivor to seek out supportive services. Survivors of sexual assault need to regain a sense of control over their lives. Instead, help them locate the correct information and, if appropriate, offer to accompany them.
- Encourage the survivor to obtain a medical examination. If he or she has not done so already, encourage them get a medical examination. But in other respects, resist your natural desire to give advice. Allow the survivor to make her/his own decision about next steps.
- If a Meredith student wishes to report about an incident of sexual violence, she/he may contact the Title IX Coordinator Pam Davis at 919-760-8760 or davisbam@meredith.edu or the Dean of Students at gleasona@meredith.edu or 919-760-8521.

Source: Adapted from safercampus.org