

What to say and do?

Some helpful things to say when trying to show you care may be:

- What do you need from me?
- What do you want to do?
- What do you know about yourself that will help right now?
- I'm glad you told me.

Helpful things to do:

- Be available to listen without judgment or interruption—let your friend know you're there for them.
- Make plans. Call them up for dinner, go exercising or for a walk with them, make a movie date.
- Offer to go to court/police/hospital with your friend if he/she chooses to take those steps.
- Talk to them like you normally would. Let them know you'll listen to them if they want to talk about the assault, but don't push. You can convey your concern but respect that your friend may not be prepared to talk at this time.

Take Care of Yourself

Supporting a friend can bring up a lot of feelings and emotions. You may feel powerless to help them, irrational guilt for not being able to prevent the assault, confusion about what to do next, sad for your friend, or anger towards the system. If you find yourself struggling, make sure you take care of yourself. You may choose to consult with a counsellor to help you manage your own emotions about the situation or to debrief what has happened. It also may be helpful to take care of yourself by:

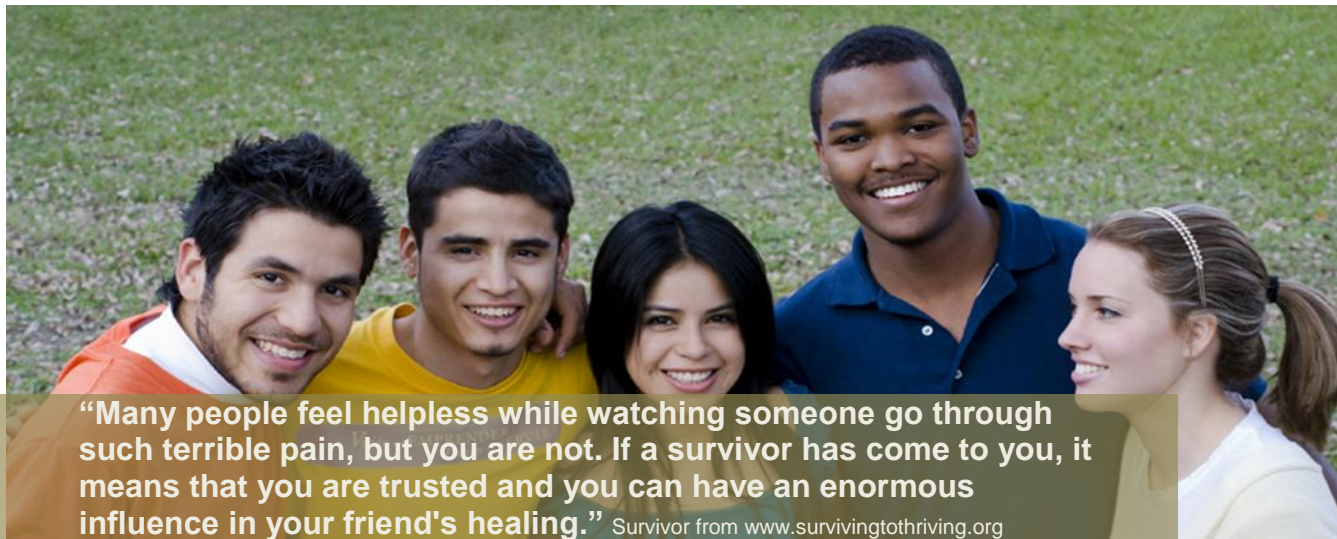
- Going for a walk/run
- Talking to someone
- Engage in writing or creating art
- Setting healthy boundaries with others

If you need more support you can contact Counselling Services at TH 218, (403) 317 2845, www.uleth.ca/counselling

Sexual Violence on Campus

How to Support a Friend

A collaboration between:
Counselling Services (403) 317 2845
Health Services (403) 329 2484
Security Services (403) 329 2603



“Many people feel helpless while watching someone go through such terrible pain, but you are not. If a survivor has come to you, it means that you are trusted and you can have an enormous influence in your friend's healing.” Survivor from www.survivingtothrive.org

Believe

This sounds simple enough, but sometimes when we hear our friend has experienced an assault our biases can emerge. What if the perpetrator is also your friend? The best way to support a friend is to believe them regardless of the situation and the individuals involved. They've shown great courage by telling you and believing them is a way to honour that.

Listen

Be willing to listen non-judgmentally. By truly listening, you will have a better understanding of what your friend needs from you. Never question the details of the friend's story, his or her feelings or the details of the assault. If you are having a difficult time understanding, reflect back the feelings you hear.

A challenging part of listening might be to keep your own emotions in check. As much as you may want to hurt the person who hurt your friend, many people who experience violence report they end up managing their friend's emotions rather than their own. You absolutely can state your anger but remember it won't help your friend if you choose to get into a fight.

Support

Your friend is not made of glass and although the assault will likely have a big impact on them, they are still, fundamentally, the person they've always been. Some people who've experienced sexual assault may want extra caring from you but others report they don't tell because they don't want to be pitied or judged. It's important to ask your friend what they need from you. You can recognize their vulnerability, but also can support and encourage his/her strength.

It's also very important to let them make their own decisions and cope in their own way. You may not understand why they don't want to press charges, or why they aren't crying every day, but each individual copes in their own way and it's important to respect that. It's also very important to respect your friend's right to privacy.

Encourage

Even if you may not understand your friend's decisions it's very important to let them know you are there for them. You can show encouragement in a lot of ways such as simply telling them you support them. Just letting them know you respect their decisions and that they aren't alone can make a huge difference.

Questions and Answers

Q My friend says she is fine and doesn't want to talk about it. Doesn't she need to tell people her story?

A Although it might be hard to accept, your friend might need some time to deny and avoid talking about what happened. Pushing a friend to talk before they are ready may actually make things a lot harder. What you can say is something like “I'm here to listen if/when you're ready” and then letting it go. If your friend has other resources and places to talk about the assault, they might just need you to be “normal” for them.

Q Are there things I shouldn't do?

A Often, people's good intentions can make the situation worse for someone who's experienced sexual violence. Some things to watch out for are:

- Blaming statements (i.e. “why'd you do that?” or **any** comments regarding flirtatious behavior, dress etc.)
- Evaluations and interpretations, (i.e. “You shouldn't...”, “You should...”, “You're doing that because...”, “If you don't...You'll regret it”, “Surely he didn't mean it...”)
- Being too positive. (i.e. “You'll be fine.”, “This will make you stronger.”)

Q Where do I go to get my friend help?

If the assault has just happened, call 911, Security (403) 329-2345 or your RA.

A You can also contact:

- Counselling Services (403) 317 2845
- Health Centre (403) 329 2484
- Sexual Health Centre (403) 320 0110
- Lethbridge Family Services (403) 327 5724
- YWCA Harbour House (403) 320 1881
- Lethbridge Regional Hospital
- Lethbridge City Police (403) 328 4444
- Distress Line (403) 327 7905

If your friend doesn't want to speak with someone directly, you can direct them to:

- www.svaclethbridge.org
- www.ywcalethbridge.org