

# Berkeley

## PATH to Care Center

PREVENTION | ADVOCACY | TRAINING | HEALING

### How to Give Support: Sexual Assault

*If someone close to you has been impacted by sexual assault...*

*You don't have to be a professional to support a member of your community who has been impacted by interpersonal violence. We know that a survivor's community is an important part of healing from a traumatic event. Below, you'll find some tools to help support someone who has experienced sexual assault.*

#### **What to Expect**

*When someone experiences sexual violence, the brain responds in ways that can be confusing to both the survivor and their support system. Our bodies are hardwired to protect us against physical and emotional threats and it does this by initiating our survival responses and flooding our brains with hormones which can make trauma responses appear unpredictable and inconsistent. As a support person, it can be helpful to understand the symptoms that someone might experience who has been impacted by sexual violence.*

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Self-blame, guilt, and shame</li><li>● Extreme mood fluctuation</li><li>● Easily becoming triggered or upset</li><li>● Avoidant - never wanting to talk about their experience</li><li>● Consumed - only wanting to talk about it</li><li>● Anger, blaming others, frustration with support system</li><li>● Hypervigilance - feelings of fear and paranoia</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Hyperarousal - extreme anxiety</li><li>● Hypoarousal - disassociated, emotionally numb</li><li>● Forgetful, inconsistent with details</li><li>● Depression - unable to get out of bed, complete routine tasks, etc.</li><li>● Over-exertion - never slowing down, not taking time for one's self, restlessness</li></ul> |
|---|--|

#### **How to Support**

*The symptoms following a sexual assault can be very uncomfortable for the person experiencing them. We can help by avoiding certain behaviors that may be interpreted as unsupportive, judgmental, or overwhelming. Interpersonal violence can be disempowering, so it's important to let the survivor know that they control what happens next. Part of this practice involves maintaining good boundaries and practicing your own self-care while operating in a supportive role. Always reach out to the PATH to Care advocate team to access your own support as needed, and remember you don't have to be a superhero to support someone, being there for them is enough! If you know a person who is being impacted by sexual assault, you can consider the following suggestions:*

#### **Sexual Assault**

# Berkeley

## PATH to Care Center

PREVENTION | ADVOCACY | TRAINING | HEALING

| DOS  | DON'TS   |
|--|--|
| Validate and affirm all feelings. Demonstrate that you believe them.   | Victim blame, ask probing questions or show doubt.   |
| Support the survivor in seeking out and exploring options.   | Insist on one course of action or pressure the survivor into making decisions before they're ready |
| Ask what kind of support would be helpful. Offer choices such as offering to accompany the survivor to medical/advocacy/legal appointments, etc. | Become offended or angry if the survivor doesn't want support                                      |
| Show empathy and understanding for the survivor's experience   | Compare or measure against your own experiences  |
| Familiarize yourself with confidential resources on and off campus   | Neglect your own self-care or take on more than you can handle while acting as a support person    |

### **Resources**

*Seeking Safety* coping skills sheet

<http://www.napsa-now.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Safe-Coping-Skills.pdf>

RAINN.org <https://www.rainn.org/articles/tips-talking-survivors-sexual-assault>