

Responding to Sexual Violence

How to listen and respond to individuals who have been assaulted--

LISTEN - BELIEVE - REFER - RESPECT

1) Listen - Although no patterns of behavior and need are universal among those who have been sexually assaulted, victims frequently need to talk; this is typically part of the process of making sense of a traumatic experience. Exploring what the assault meant to them, how they feel, how they cope, how they will heal, how they might be changed—all are clarified by talking with another person.

As listeners, our role is to make ourselves available, to let the person know it is safe to talk with us. Don't prod, push, or judge; just **listen** and **affirm** the expressed feelings.

Be aware of your own feelings, and take care of yourself as well. Frequently, family, friends, and helpers experience very powerful feelings of their own, including guilt, rage, and frustration. You must find a way to express and deal with your feelings other than sharing them with the victim. *Not everyone is able to serve in this listener role; that's OK.* If you cannot, find someone who can.

Don't impose your wishes and beliefs on the victim. Regaining control is critically important for those who have been sexually assaulted. Even if we do know a course of action would be beneficial, **it is not our role to compel a particular course of action**—reporting to the police, for example—but to connect the victim with resources on the campus and in the community and support their choice.

HELPERS ATTEND TO:

Safety—Respect—Referral [medical, mental, police, legal, academic, unique individual concerns].

2) Believe - The single greatest impediment to sexual assault victims coming forward is the fear that they will not be believed. **It is not our job to investigate or discover the truth;** accepting that boundary frees a helper to listen and believe more effectively and empathetically. [Statistically, false rape reports are quite rare (2% of REPORTED rapes).]

3) Refer - There is abundant clinical evidence that timely, specialized care has a great impact on the recovery process. **The K-State Women's Center** (206 Holton Hall, 532-6444) works on behalf of individual students dealing with sexual assault, explaining available options, connecting students with other services—medical and mental health care, for example—and **advocating** for students on and off campus. Information remains completely confidential.

4) Respect - Sometimes students experience sexual assault even though the incident does not involve a clear violation of criminal law or the K-State Policy Prohibiting Sexual Violence (<http://www.ksu.edu/studentlife/SexPolicy.html>). As helpers, our understanding of the power of the experience in a student's life can be a real gift. In more than 30 years working as victim advocates, we have rarely worked with a sexual assault victim who did not blame herself for the actions of another. It is important to remind her, **"It is not your fault. Whatever the circumstances, you were not the actor. Drinking alcohol is not sexual consent. Kissing is not sexual consent. Submission does not equal consent."**

Putting this Violent Crime in Perspective:

*People of both sexes and all ages, races, abilities, positions, sexual orientation and economic status are victims of rape.

*At least 75% of rapes are committed by acquaintances of the victim, often in the victims' own home.

*About 90% of all rapes are planned; it is a myth that rape is an uncontrollable, impulsive act of sexual gratification.

*The *National Victim Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center* estimate that there are 1.3 rapes in the U.S. every **minute**.

*Between 1 out of 3 and 1 out of 5 women will be raped in her lifetime.

*FBI statistics indicate that rape is one of the fastest-growing and most underreported crimes in the nation.

*Studies suggest that rapists will attack an average of 10 times before being caught.