

EMPOWERING SURVIVORS THROUGH RESOURCES

- Help a survivor find the best possible resources for emotional and practical support. **Refer them to your local sexual assault centre. Refer them to school-based supports**, such as a school counsellor or police department's school liaison.
- Receiving a disclosure of sexual assault can be a difficult experience. It may be helpful to **get support for yourself**. However, it is important that details about the survivor and the assault remain confidential.

LOCAL SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society

Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society is a non-profit organization that supports and empowers those affected by sexual abuse, sexual assault, exploitation or violence in a relationship.

Specialized Victim Assistance Program

 **(250) 763 - 4613**

 649 Leon Avenue, Kelowna, BC

 For information or to donate visit www.coefs.ca



24-HOUR SUPPORT

VictimLink BC **1.800.563.0808**

VictimLink BC is a toll-free, 24/7, confidential, multilingual (10 languages) telephone service. They provide information and referral services to all victims of crime, as well as crisis support to victims of sexual and domestic violence.

TTY: 604.875.0885

Text: 604.836.6381

Email: VictimLinkBC@bc21.ca

Suicide Prevention **1.800.SUICIDE**

TTY: 1.866.872.0113 **(1.800.784.2433)**

Online Chat: 12pm - 1am

www.youthinbc.com

Mental Health Support **310.6789**

YOUTH-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

Youth Against Violence **1.800.680.4264**

TTY: 604.875.0885

Text: 604.836.6381

Email: info@youthagainstviolenceline.com

Kids Help Phone **1.800.668.6868**

Online Chat: Wed-Sun, 3 - 11pm

www.kidshelpphone.ca



United Way
Central & South
Okanagan Similkameen

We acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia.

Brochure adapted from Ending Violence Association of BC, Responding to Sexual Assault Disclosure.

HOW TO SUPPORT A SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVOR

TIPS FOR SUPPORT



START BY BELIEVING

You are a **key person** in the survivor's experience. How you react to their disclosure can have a significant influence on how they make sense of what has happened to them, and could affect what they do or do not do next.

You can help the survivor to recognize that their reactions are **normal responses to trauma**, and their **way of coping** with what has happened to them. It is common to feel uncertain about what to say or do when receiving a sexual assault disclosure. Remember that the survivor is telling you because they see you as a safe and trustworthy person. You have an opportunity to **empower the survivor** and assist them in their path forward, such as accessing additional supports.

Some **problem areas/difficulties** when receiving a sexual assault disclosure:

- A judgmental, shocked, or over reactive initial response
- Disbelief, minimizing, or questioning the “truth” of a survivor’s story or reactions – especially if they seem very calm, or don’t want to report to police.
- Asking for unnecessary details, or focusing on the behaviour, appearance, and/or location of the survivor at the time of the assault.
- Focusing on your own emotional reaction (e.g., horror, sadness, anger, recalling a similar experience you may have had).
- Questioning why a survivor did not act in the ways society expects a sexual assault survivor to react (e.g., fighting back, reporting to police).

AN EMPOWERING RESPONSE

LISTEN

- **Find a private place to talk.** Tell them you are glad they are sharing with you.
- **Believe them.** A major fear of survivors is that they will not be believed. Setting aside your own concerns and fears, focus on being supportive.
- **Be patient.** Let them tell you as little or as much as they want at their own pace, without interrupting. Talking about how they feel can be more helpful than talking about the details of the assault. Take their lead on this.
- **Demonstrate active listening** through your body language (e.g., nodding) and words (e.g., “I hear what you’re saying”).
- **Let the survivor openly express their emotions.** Some survivors may find themselves flooded with emotions. There is no shame in expressing trauma (e.g., distress, shaking, crying). Do not minimize or suppress the survivor’s reaction, as the survivor may internalize trauma or feel ashamed. Reassure them that their reaction is completely normal. If the survivor becomes too overwhelmed, **you can help to ground them:**
 - Encourage them to take slow deep breaths while gently planting their feet into the floor and holding on to their knees.
 - Ask them to look around the room and name some ordinary objects they see. Do this until they feel calmer.
- **Respect their personal space. Do not touch them.** Even if you think they want a comforting touch, resist your urge to do so unless they have given you permission. Always follow their lead. You can offer them something to keep warm, like a blanket or your jacket (shock can involve feeling cold, shivering, and shaking).

BELIEVE

- **Validate their feelings.** Assure the survivor that these are normal reactions to a traumatic event. Avoid promising them that everything will be okay.
- **It was not their fault.** Assure them that the responsibility for sexual assault lies solely with the other person. This is true regardless of whether they were drinking, got into the person’s car, brought the person to their home, etc. It does not matter what the survivor did or did not do before, during, or after the assault – it is **never** their fault. No one deserves to be sexually assaulted.
- **Reassure the survivor that you will help them get support.** Tell them you will do whatever you can to help them get the support they need.

EMPOWER

Sexual assault can result in a profound sense of loss of power and control. You can help them

- regain control over their life. Help them connect to appropriate resources and supports.
- **Ask them if they are safe.** Assure them that they are in a safe place. You may also help them find a safe place to go.
 - **Ask them about who supports them.** Help them connect with their supports (e.g., family, friends).
 - **Provide them with information** about your local sexual assault centre or counselling programs. Support them in accessing these services.
 - **Encourage them to seek medical care.** If the assault was recent, they may be hurt. Find out if they need medical assistance.

Offer them options and resources, rather than telling them what to do or giving advice. Reassure them that, if they feel overwhelmed, they can take their time to make decisions.

Respect their decisions.