

How to talk to a Survivor

Encouraging words and resources for survivors of sexual assault in the military

It can be difficult for survivors of sexual assault to tell their loved ones about what happened. If someone trusts you enough to tell you that they've been sexually assaulted, you can have a profoundly positive impact just with the words that you use.

It's not always easy to know what to say when a family member, friend, or loved one tells you they've been sexually assaulted, but a supportive reaction can make all the difference. Instead of focusing on the circumstances of what happened, use the opportunity to turn your attention to your loved one and what they need. Consider these phrases to show your support:

- **“I’m sorry this happened.”** Acknowledge that the experience has affected their life. Phrases like “This must be really tough for you,” and “I’m so glad you are sharing this with me,” help to communicate empathy.
- **“You are not alone.”** Remind your loved one that you are there for them and willing to listen to their story. Remind them there are other people in their life who care and that there are [service providers](#) who will be able to support them as they recover from the experience.
- **“Are you open to seeking medical attention?”** The survivor might need medical attention, even if the event happened a while ago. It's ok to ask directly, “Are you open to seeking medical care?”
- **“This doesn’t change how I think of you.”** Some survivors are concerned that sharing what happened will change the way other people see them, especially a partner. Reassure the survivor that surviving sexual violence doesn't change the way you think or feel about them.

Most importantly, know your resources. You're a strong supporter, but that doesn't mean you need to manage this situation on your own. Become familiar with resources you can recommend to a survivor within the military, like [DoD Safe Helpline](#).

Safe Helpline provides a clear channel for sexual assault survivors in the DoD community to receive the care and resources they need in an anonymous, confidential support platform. The [six Safe Helpline services](#) (Telephone Helpline, Online Helpline, Self-Care Mobile App, a secure peer-to-peer chat room, Info-by-text, and Safe Helpline online responder database) work to meet a survivor where they are in that moment, and get them resources that work for them.

Department of Defense (DoD) Safe Helpline provides confidential crisis support and information for members of the DoD community affected by sexual assault. You can get the help you need — while remaining anonymous. Safe Helpline services are provided by the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) and are operated through a contract by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) - the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization.