

INFORMATION FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

It is important for a survivor of rape or sexual abuse to be listened to, and believed, whether they have just been attacked, or are talking about events that happened some time ago, for example in their childhood.

This section aims to give some helpful information on how to respond if you are in the situation where a family member, partner or friend has just started speaking out about their own experience of rape or child sexual abuse.

How can I help?

Listen - To what she has to say and let her take her time. It might not be easy for her to start talking about an event that she has kept silent about for a long time. It may be difficult because she may have been told not to tell by the abuser at the time.

Believe - People rarely lie about rape or sexual abuse. Why would they? It is important to believe what they are saying.

Respect - Both her feelings and decisions. If she feels like crying, let her, it can be part of her healing process.

Remember - It is not her fault. No-one asks to be abused or deserves it, and she cannot be blamed for not preventing the abuse. The blame lies with abuser.

Recognise - The courage it takes for a survivor to speak must be recognised and praised. It takes a great deal of courage to face up to fears and also to talk about any sexual experience.

Do not...

Don't tell her to forget about it. Don't say, "It happened a long time ago, why does it suddenly bother you now?" Healing can take time and some people block, or try to forget, traumatic events. This is a way of coping with what has happened. Remembering can be triggered by events such as the

birth of a baby, a T.V. programme, marriage, changing job, starting a new relationship, etc....

Don't ask her why she didn't fight back. People can freeze when confronted with a terrifying situation.

Don't ask why she didn't say anything sooner. If it happened when she was young she may have tried to tell but been ignored or disbelieved. She may have been threatened or been too frightened to say anything. Most people do try to tell someone at some time.

Don't tell her what to do. She needs to be in control of her own decisions about matters that affect her. You can help her to explore the options that are available.

Don't pressure her into doing, or talking about, things she is not ready to face. When she is ready they will speak.

What about sexual contact?

If it is your partner that has just been attacked or has remembered some past abuse which she has blocked out, she may find sexual and intimate contact difficult. It is important to realise that it is not something to do with you - it is to do with the feelings and memories she has. Reassure her and let her take things at her own pace. With your help, patience and understanding, she can heal from the trauma.

What about my feelings?

Seeing someone you care about dealing with a traumatic experience can be distressing in itself. It is important that you get support for yourself. Without such support, it can be really hard for you to be there for her. Try asking a trusted friend or family member or contact the Centre.

HELPLINE SUPPORT

You can telephone our helpline for support or information on 01738 630965 We also have a 24 hour answering machine, so that at any other time messages can be left and will be returned discreetly, as soon as possible.

Write to: WRASAC P & K, P.O. Box 7570, Perth, PH2 1BY

Email: info@perthshirerapecrisis.org

USEFUL CONTACTS

Samaritans	(01738) 626 666
Genito-Urinary Clinic	(01738) 473 220
Police Family Protection Unit	(01738) 892 911
Perthshire Women's Aid	(01738) 639 043
Victim Support	(01738) 567 171
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board	(0141) 331 2726
Citizens Advice Bureau	(01738) 624 301
Bristol Crisis Service for Women	(0117) 925 1119
Childline	(0800 1111)