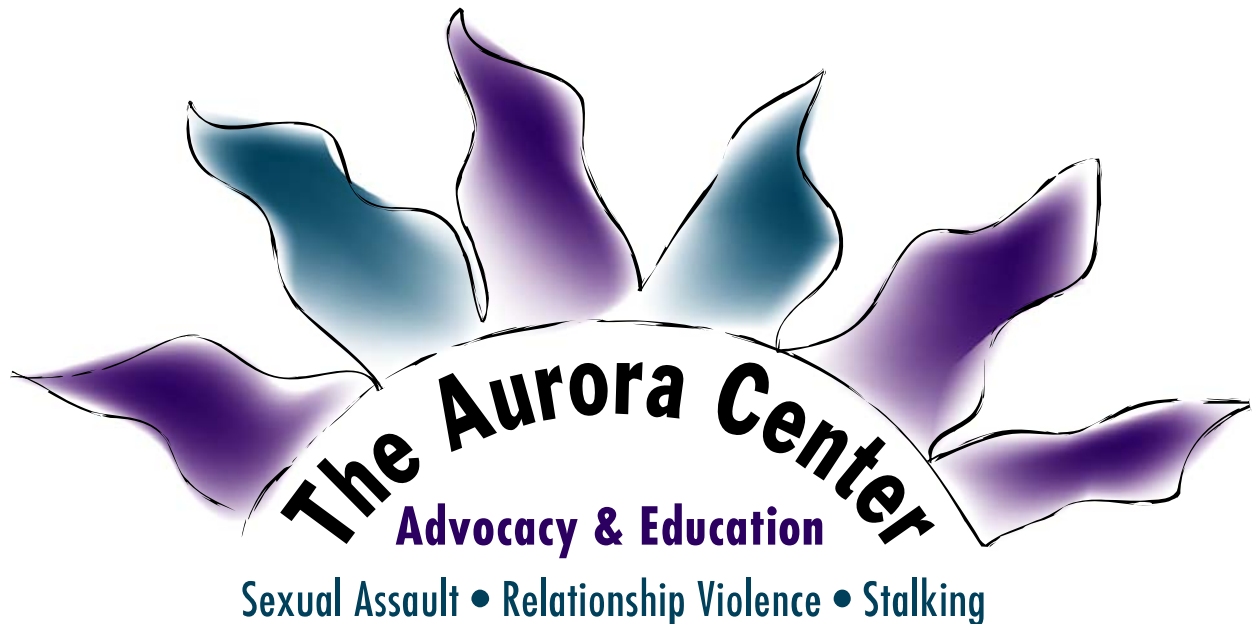


**Concerned Persons/Secondary
Survivors**

Sexual Assault

Info Packet



The Aurora Center for Advocacy & Education
407 Boynton*410 Church St SE*Minneapolis, MN 55455
Business Line: (612) 626-2929*TTY Line: (612) 626-4279
Email: aurora.center@umn.edu*Website: www.umn.edu/aurora

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Office for Student Affairs

24hr Crisis Line: (612) 626-9111

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

Dear Reader,

This information packet was created for several reasons: First, we hope and believe that information and education will help survivors to reach a healthy recovery. Second, we hope that people concerned about a survivor can learn to be an excellent support person by understanding more about the issue affecting their loved one. And finally, we believe the information can be helpful to those reading it for educational purposes because it deals with an issue that is important to them.

If you are a survivor of violence, you may find some comfort in the following pages. You may also read some things that are upsetting. Please remember that The Aurora Center crisis line is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year: 612-626-9111.

All of the statistics and facts in this packet are followed by their source. The information in this packet is updated on an annual basis, but please confirm any information contained herein if you are concerned about its source or its accuracy. This packet was created for informational purposes only and should not be taken as legal advice.

Readers will notice that the female pronoun "she" is used to refer to the survivor of violence in the following pages. This usage is reflective of statistics and our practice which have shown that on a college campus, the survivors of sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking are overwhelmingly female. We have therefore chosen to avoid the cumbersome use of he/she, him/her, and his/hers. This does not mean that males are not victimized by these crimes, they are, but not in nearly the numbers that females are. Please note that we have devoted some sections of various information packets entirely to male survivors and we welcome male survivors to access our services.

Readers will also notice that we limit our use of the word "victim" when talking about a survivor. It is important for survivors to feel empowered and in control of their lives; labeling a survivor as a victim may cause a survivor to feel disempowered, and helpless. The term survivor implies that a person has lived through something traumatic by their own inner strength and endurance.

We hope that all readers of this information packet find it helpful and we welcome comments on its content sent to: aurora.center@umn.edu.

Sincerely,
The Aurora Center



CONCERNED FRIENDS WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

What can I do as a friend?

- Listen!
- Believe your friend.
- Don't make decisions for your friend. Her sense of control was taken away as a result of the sexual assault. You can express concern for decisions you disagree with, but be sure to support her decision in the end.
- Strongly recommend that s/he should seek medical attention to ensure her physical health.
- Always try to remember that your friend is telling you out of trust and care for you. She is not telling you to hurt you.
- Always remember that memories of traumatic events or relationships in one's life will always be remembered, but the No. 1 measure in helping someone's healing process is supportive friends and significant others. When anniversaries are approaching or when something in a present relationship reminds your friend of the past, listen and ask what you can do to provide support or help your friend through these difficult memories.
- People can heal from traumatic events, but the process takes a different amount of time for each person individually. Please continue to be supportive and try not to give up!
- Concerned people sometimes also need support for what she are hearing and learning. You can seek help from The Aurora Center if you have questions or concerns about the situation you are in!
- Start conversations, not interrogations. Open doors for communication with comments like "You look upset." You might not get a response right away, but keep asking. Your persistence will let your friend know that you notice and care about what happens to her.

What can I do as a citizen?

- Talk about sexual assault and challenge myths with parents and teens.
- Talk to teachers in high schools about teaching teens self-esteem, respect, and other health promoting programs, and provide them with related materials.
- Talk with communities of faith about the importance of parenting education in risk reduction and prevention of sexual assault.

This information is available in alternative formats by calling The Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education at (612) 626-2929.

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SIGNIFICANT OTHER / SECONDARY Survivor SUPPORT

The family members and significant others of the survivor of sexual assault or abuse are also, in many ways, survivors of the assault and may experience feelings similar to that of the primary survivor. He not only wants to give support and help the survivor deal with her feelings, but he also need to deal with his own feelings regarding the assault and the impact on the survivor and their relationship with the significant other/family.

Significant others may feel responsible for taking care of the survivor or helping the survivor make decisions. He may want to give the survivor support but doesn't know how or what to say or do.

FEELINGS OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

- Concern for the survivor.
- Confusion about how to deal with the trauma.
- Difficulty understanding why the assault or abuse happened.
- Helplessness – wishing he could have protected the survivor or prevented the assault, and wanting to “fix” the situation so that life can “get back to normal.”
- Guilt over “buying into” some of the myths surrounding sexual assault, such as a survivor provoking or asking for the assault or looking at sexual assault as sex instead of violence/abuse and viewing the survivor as a willing sexual partner.
- Shame regarding the reaction of family members, acquaintances, and the community, should the sexual assault become common knowledge. This shame could lead the significant other to feelings of wanting to distance themselves from the survivor, leaving the survivor feeling isolated, rejected, or blamed for the assault.
- Temporary loss of intimacy with the survivor. It may be difficult for the significant other to not take this loss personally. A survivor has been forced to recognize her own vulnerability, and as a result may find it difficult to trust enough to be sexual, even when the relationship is strong and nurturing. Being sexual, even in a healthy relationship, brings back memories of the assault. Intimacy will return with the help of a nurturing, patient partner.
- Feeling out of control. Someone has intruded on your partner's life, and nothing feels the same. Feeling out of control is a natural response to sexual assault; a sense of control will return with time and healing.
- Wanting to harm the perpetrator. Although it is a natural reaction, striking out at the assailant may create further crisis and force the survivor to protect the significant other, rather than focusing on her or his own healing.

Continued...

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- Frustration with the legal and law enforcement systems.
- Anger. Anger is a healthy response to sexual assault and can be aimed at the assailant or the systems that don't work. Although anger is expected and justified, acting out violently will not solve anything. Significant others need to understand that venting anger on the survivor will further her feelings of guilt and self-blame. Sexual assault is never the survivor's fault.
- Difficulty expressing feelings, difficulty asking for help. Significant others feel that because they aren't the primary survivor, they shouldn't be in survivor support systems or that they should be able to handle it. It's also true that he may find a lack of support systems for secondary survivors (significant others/family).

Remember

- Giving support means listening, asking how you can help, encouraging survivors to ask for what she need, being sensitive and patient, not trying to "fix" the survivor or the situation, supporting survivor in order to allow them to regain control over their life, not into the myths surrounding sexual assault.
- No one deserves to be sexually assaulted! Sexual assault is never the fault of a survivor. It does not matter if you know the assailant or even whether you've chosen to have sex with assailant in the past. Survivors cannot "ask" to be sexually assaulted by what she wear, what she say, or by "leading someone on." Drinking or hitchhiking might make you more vulnerable, but she do not mean you deserve to be sexually assaulted, nor do she cause a sexual assault to occur.
- Always try to remember that your partner is telling you out of trust and care for you. She is not telling you to hurt you.
- Significant others are responsible for dealing with and finding support for their feelings regarding the sexual assault. The primary survivor can be concerned with her own healing.
- Pushing the survivor to be intimate or sexual too soon will only slow down the healing process and can be damaging to the relationship. Healing from sexual assault takes time, and it's a normal reaction to want to "get it over with." "Hurry up and Get Well" messages will only force the survivor to stuff feelings, internalize her anger and pain, cause her to distance themselves from those she cares about, which leads to further feelings of isolation.
- A disruption of routine, even without crisis, produces anxiety. Recognize that you and the survivor may both be in crisis. Prioritize issues that need immediate attention and let go of decisions that can wait.
- Be sensitive in the way you ask questions regarding the assault. "What were you wearing?" may suggest to the survivor that she might be to blame for the assault.
- Many survivors blame themselves for the assault or for being unable to prevent the assault. Reassure the survivor many times that it is not her fault – that s/he did the best she could given the situation, and that she survived the attack.
- Your own feelings, personality, or your role with the survivor may make it difficult to ask for help. It is extremely important for you to talk about the assault and its effect on you with a supportive person who understands the issues surrounding sexual assault – a friend, family member, a counselor, or an advocate from a rape crisis/sexual assault center can help.

Adapted from information from the Sexual Violence Center of Hennepin County



HELPFUL HINTS FOR PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF MALES WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

A sexual assault can be very disruptive to a man's sense of safety, well being, and confidence in himself. A male survivor will heal from this event to the extent that he receives support and understanding. You can help him in the following ways:

- Connect with a counselor who specializes in recovery from sexual assault. Your local rape crisis center can help you with this. Your whole family will benefit from this support. You can also get books like Recovering from Rape by Dr. Linda Ledray to guide in your recovery.
- Take care of yourself. Survivors are often very aware of the pain of their parents and friends. If you are falling apart, he will have to be strong and delay his healing. Get support for yourself. He will learn a lot about coping and self care by watching you over the next few weeks. Choose healthy coping strategies like planning fun events, eating well, exercising, watching funny movies, being out in nature, listening to relaxing music, talking to good friends, etc.
- Help him realize that men do get raped – there is nothing about him that brought this on. Scientific studies show that men are just as likely as women not to fight back when faced with a sexual assault. There was nothing your son/friend could have done to prevent this. Most men who rape men and boys are heterosexual. This act was not about sexual preference; it was about power, domination, and violence.
- It is rare for a survivor of sexual assault not to be overwhelmed by self-blame and shame. He will need you to reassure him over and over that no matter what he was doing, he didn't deserve to be raped. It was not his fault. Remember, the shame and blame for the assault belongs to his assailant.
- He will probably experience mood swings over the next few weeks. He may lose his appetite or have trouble sleeping. He will also be very sensitive. A sexual assault creates a circus mirror image that blows up negatives and makes positives seem very small. Your negative messages will sound very loud to him and your positive messages will be faint. Exaggerate your expressions of love and support.
- You will have a natural desire to protect your son/friend/significant other at every moment. Try to avoid being overly protective – this will only reinforce his fears of the world as an unsafe place and will cause him to doubt his ability to make good decisions for himself.

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- Often survivors will cover up part of the assault because she or their friends were doing something or going somewhere she were not supposed to. This is very common. Allow him a way out. Let him know you still love and support him and you're just glad he's safe. Discussions about making good decisions and trust can take place later. Chances are very good that he has learned his lesson and doesn't need to be reminded – quite on the contrary, he needs to regain his confidence.
- Resist your strong urges to become involved in the work of the police. You are his parent/friend/significant other, let the police do the police work. He needs you to be there to love and support him. Your involvement in the legal outcome may cause undue anxiety for him.
- Sexual assault is an out of control experience; you can help him regain his sense of control by giving him the power to make important and not so important choices for himself (from what to have for dinner to whether he contacts the police). He should be in control of who is going to be told about what happened and how to tell them.
- Depression in adolescents and young adults looks different from depression in adults – it often involves substance abuse, high-risk behaviors, acting out, stealing, etc. If he exhibits these characteristics, seek professional help. Remember, when kids feel ugly, they act ugly.
- Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) commonly experienced after an assault include general numbness, being very anxious, and being consumed with what happened. These symptoms go away with time, but can feel pretty overwhelming and crazy when present. He may need some special accommodations over the next few weeks at school. Subjects like foreign language and math that involved a lot of memorization will be most difficult. A counselor can help work with teachers. Don't let teachers say he is just being lazy. Coping with a sexual assault takes a lot of energy; it's exhausting.
- He may need a few days away from school and/or work to regain his physical and emotional strength. If other people at the school/dorm/workplace know what happened or the assailant was someone in that environment, meet with a counselor/manager/principal to develop a plan of support. He should have a designated support person to go to if he needs to leave his school or work environment.

A sexual assault, while a horrible, violent experience, does not have to have only a negative impact. This can be a time for a survivor to discover their strengths and learn how to cope with adversity. Many people have made positive changes in their lives after experiencing a sexual assault. You don't have control over the fact that this happened to you, but you do have control over your healing.

Adapted from:
Maggie Dexheimer Pharris, Ph.D., MPH, RN
Nurse Counselor and Assistant Director
Sexual Assault Resource Service
525 Portland Ave
Minneapolis, MN 55415
(612) 347-2434
maggie.pharris@co.hennepin.mn.us