



## Responding with compassion when someone says “I have been sexually assaulted”

When someone says they have been sexually assaulted, the first response is critical to their recovery and decisions about what to do next.

A response which is supportive, non-blaming and compassionate will help the person feel they have chosen the right person to speak with.

A response which is non-believing, seeks to give excuses to the perpetrator, or in some way indicates that the person who experienced the violence is in some way to blame, will often result in the person not speaking of the violence again or for a very long time. This can lead to the trauma severely impacting that person's life.

To be the person someone chooses to tell the most awful story of their life to is a very honourable place to be. It is also a place of great responsibility. Below, and overleaf, are some examples of important things to do and say to someone who tells you they have been sexually assaulted.

### Three key things to say

#### Say...

I am sorry for what has happened.  
What happened is a crime.  
I will do what I can to help.

#### This is heard as...

I believe you.  
This is not your fault.  
You are not alone.

#### 24/7 Counselling

NSW Rape Crisis  
1800 424 017  
1800RESPECT  
1800 737 732  
1800respect.org.au

#### Administration

**P** 02 8585 0333  
**F** 02 9555 5911  
rape-dvservices.org.au  
info@rape-dvservices.org.au



## Initial Response

### Do:

- Listen to the story.
- Let them express how they feel.
- Let them cry.
- Encourage them.
- Not worry if parts of the story don't add up.
- Tell them you are sorry for what happened.
- Explain what you can do.

### Do Not:

- Tell them what to do or try to take over.
- Ask them the 'why' questions, why they were there, went there, why they trusted him.  
*Why questions are blame questions*
- Get angry on their behalf.  
*They have enough to deal with without worrying about you*
- Assume you know how they feel.  
*Everyone experiences sexual assault differently*

## If the sexual assault was recent

- Consider options for preserving forensic evidence.
- Help the person to access counselling and medical services.
- Assist them to consider reporting to Police.

### Remember

*The decision about what to do is always with the person who has been sexually assaulted.*

## Look after yourself

Assisting someone who has been sexually assaulted is difficult. Their level of pain and distress will impact on you. This is called vicarious trauma.

After you have assisted someone who has experienced sexual assault use your workplace support services to manage impacts. You can ring Rape & Domestic Violence Service Australia 24/7 to

debrief. Have your own strategies to make sure you are OK - keep contact with family and friends, laugh and have fun.

Notice changes and take action. You are too important to be lost to this work because it becomes too much.

## How Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia can help

You can refer any person who has been impacted by sexual violence to us.

If you are a counsellor and are working with someone who has been sexually assaulted you can consult with us on therapeutic interventions. You can also arrange for us to provide out of hours and annual leave support for your client.

If you have assisted a person who has been sexually assaulted you can contact us to debrief.

Factsheets on sexual assault, law and criminal justice processes, prevention, and the service can be downloaded from the website.

## Contact Us

24/7 Counselling is available via:

Phone: 1800 424 017 (NSW)

Online: [www.rape-dvservices.org.au](http://www.rape-dvservices.org.au)

Those living outside NSW can contact 1800RESPECT:

Phone: 1800 737 732

Online: [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

If you have questions regarding the material included in this factsheet, please contact administration:

Phone: 02 8585 0333

Email: [info@rape-dvservices.org.au](mailto:info@rape-dvservices.org.au)