

How to support someone after sexual assault or family violence

Someone you care about may tell you they have experienced sexual assault or family violence – your response matters

How to respond when someone tells you about their experience

1. Listen and believe them
2. Stay calm and be present
3. Let them share at their own pace
4. Acknowledge that it might have difficult for them to tell you

What to say

- I'm glad you told me
- I believe you
- You're not alone
- It's not your fault
- How can I support you?
- I'm here for you

What to avoid

- Avoid asking detailed questions
- Avoid asking 'why' or blaming them
- Avoid comparing their experience
- Avoid pressuring them to report or take action

Supporting someone over time

Be patient with them, recovery can take time and is not a linear process. You can check in regularly and keep communication lines open, without asking for details. Respect their choices about what they want to do.

How to help someone who is distressed

Someone who has had an experience of sexual trauma or family violence may have a range of reactions and responses. SECASA has other resources which describe common reactions to trauma and what recovery can look like.

There are some helpful tools you can have handy for when you are supporting someone who becomes distressed:

- Use a calm voice
- Stay with them – if they can tolerate physical touch, sometimes holding or squeezing hands can help
- Reassure them that they are safe with you
- Encourage grounding such as asking what they can see in the room or what they can smell
- Follow their lead

Supporting someone experiencing family violence

The person you are supporting may still be in contact with, or in a relationship with, the person who has harmed them.

You may be aware of ongoing safety concerns for your friend or family member.

Decisions about staying or leaving a violent relationship are very complex and often based on safety. Avoid pressuring them to leave because this can increase their risk.

Try to avoid placing pressure on the person or blaming them for their experiences of violence.

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Important Things to know about supporting someone:

- You cannot 'fix' what has happened to them
- Your role is to support them, not to have the answers or take control
- People respond to trauma in a range of different ways
- It is important to **look after yourself** – supporting someone can be difficult and take an emotional toll
- It is okay to set boundaries for yourself to keep yourself safe and prioritise your wellbeing

When should I involve someone else?

If you have reason to believe that there is a risk to children, and their parent or carer cannot keep them safe, you should call Child Protection South Division on 1300 555 526.

If they are in immediate danger, you should call 000.

You can encourage them seek professional support such as counselling where appropriate. You can also seek counselling for yourself if you are being impacted by your support role.

Help is available:

- If you or someone you know are in immediate danger – **call 000**
- During business hours, contact your local Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)
 - Find your nearest service at: <https://peak.sasvic.org.au/servicemap> and enter your postcode or suburb
- On after hours, weekends and public holidays, call the Sexual Assault Crisis Line (SACL) on 1800 577 011
- For 24/7 family violence counselling support, call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)
- For family violence support including safety planning and support to exit a relationship, call The Orange Door – visit <https://www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au/support-near-you> and enter your postcode
- You can call **8769 2200 – opt 1** to speak to a SECASA intake counsellor advocate during business hours

All services listed here are free, confidential and voluntary.