Helping a Friend Who Has Been Raped or Sexually Assaulted

Acquaintance rape and sexual assault occur on college campuses across the nation. As a student, you may find yourself in a situation in which someone you know is raped or sexually assaulted. Would you know what to do?

**Helping to take the first steps**

Immediately after an assault, help your friend to:

1. **Get medical attention.** Your friend will benefit from being examined for physical injury and infection and/or discussing options for pregnancy prevention. Post-assault medical services are available at Gannett and at Cayuga Medical Center. Your friend may choose to have physical and medical evidence of the assault recorded for legal purposes. Specially trained nurses at Cayuga Medical Center can collect the evidence necessary (274-4411). Should your friend decide later to press charges, such evidence will significantly increase the possibility of successful prosecution.

2. **Feel supported.** Feelings of trust and security may be diminished, so offer to stay with your friend, or ask her/him if they feel safe.

3. **Enlist the help of an advocate.** The Advocacy Center’s rape hotline (277-5000), is available 24-hours a day. They can provide an advocate who is knowledgeable about the needs of rape victims. Alternatively, **during regular business hours,** call Cornell’s Victim Advocacy Office (255-1212). A campus advocate can offer personal support, information, and help your friend decide what they need.

4. **Consider notifying the police.** An informational report does not obligate your friend to press charges, but could be helpful if there is future legal action.

**Supportive “do’s” and “don’ts”**

**DO:**

- Believe your friend. People rarely lie about rape or assault.
- Listen to your friend and concentrate on understanding her or his feelings.
- Allow your friend to be silent; you don’t have to talk every time he or she stops talking.
- Let your friend know that you understand her or his feelings. For example, you might say, “You must have been very frightened.”
- Ask how you can help.
- Offer to accompany your friend in seeking medical attention or counseling or in going to police.
- Help your friend regain a sense of control. Support the decisions he or she makes about whom to tell and how to proceed.
- Remind your friend that rape is the rapist’s fault, not theirs.
- Offer shelter or companionship so that your friend doesn’t have to be alone.
- Help your friend learn about, recognize, and seek treatment for signs of rape trauma syndrome (see next section).

**DON’T:**

- Ask questions that imply that the rape was your friend’s fault, such as “Why did you go to his room?” “Why didn’t you scream?” “Why didn’t you run away?”
- Touch or hug your friend unless you’re sure your friend is comfortable with physical contact.
- Act in ways that are upsetting to your friend. Be wary of phrases like “If I could find the creep, I’d kill him.” Although you may be trying to be supportive, that type of comment might upset your friend even more.
- Tell your friend what to do; rather, help her or him explore the options. Among the complex decisions your friend will have to make are who to tell about what happened, and whether to report the assault to the campus Judicial Administrator or police. The campus Victim Advocate can be helpful in discussing such options.

**How your friend may feel**

Even when the actual assault is over, your friend may suffer from a variety of difficulties commonly experienced after a sexual assault. People respond to sexual assault in many different ways, ranging from extreme calm to extreme agitation. Your friend might experience any or all of the following reactions: emotional shock, denial, nightmares, sleeplessness, intrusive memories or thoughts about the assault, inability to work or make decisions, impaired relationships, and feelings of guilt, despair, depression, fear, anxiety, self-blame, and anger. Many victims appear to themselves and to others to have their feelings in control, only to become extremely upset again within a short time. Some of these reactions may be short-lived; others can be troubling for months or years. In any case, it is important to know that information and help are available. Contact Gannett Counseling and Psychological Services (255-5208) or The Advocacy Center (277-5000).

**Acknowledge your limits**

Despite your best intentions, you need to realize there are limits to what a friend can do to help. At times your friend may not want to deal with the assault and, as a result, may even avoid you. If you need to express feelings your friend doesn’t want or need to hear, find a trustworthy confidant or counselor. There will also be times when you need time off from help.
What’s the truth about rape?

Believing myths won’t help the victim or you. Perhaps you have heard some of these?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Fact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victims are to blame in some way for the assault.</td>
<td>The rapist is always responsible for having committed rape. Regardless of the victim's appearance, behavior, judgment, or previous actions, the victim is not responsible for the rape. Rapists are responsible for rape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rape is an expression of sexual desire.</td>
<td>Rape is an expression of hostility and aggression with sex as the vehicle. Rape is a violent abuse of power in which one person acts without regard for the pain and trauma inflicted on another.</td>
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<td>It won’t happen to me.</td>
<td>One study found that one in four college women have been victims of rape or sexual assault. About 10 percent of sexual assault victims are men.</td>
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<td>Men can’t stop themselves when they are sexually aroused.</td>
<td>Men are capable of, and responsible for, controlling both their minds and their bodies, just as women are.</td>
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<td>Rape is usually committed by strangers.</td>
<td>College students are in far greater danger of being raped by a friend or a fellow student than by a stranger. Almost 90 percent of college women who were raped knew their assailants.</td>
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<td>If a person is forced to have sex with someone she or he knows (e.g., a friend, date, boyfriend, or spouse), it isn’t really rape.</td>
<td>Sexual intercourse forced by an acquaintance is rape. As in “stranger rape,” trauma may be exacerbated by damage done to the victim’s trust in others and in her own judgment.</td>
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<td>Men are never victims of sexual assault.</td>
<td>Both men and women may be victims of sexual assault. Unfortunately male victims rarely seek help, or even confide in their friends, due to embarrassment and the fear that they will not be taken seriously.</td>
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<td>Sexual violence does not occur between lesbians or gay men.</td>
<td>Sexual violence does occur in same-sex relationships. Fear of homophobic responses may prevent victims from seeking help.</td>
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Resources for change

In addition to supporting your friend, learn more about the issues, take action, and work to prevent sexual assault and rape in the future.

- Learn the facts by reading books on the subject.
- Share what you learn with friends (of all genders).
- Attend campus and community rape-awareness events.
- Think about and learn to recognize the connections between sexual assault and other manifestations of inequality such as sexual harassment, racism, and violence against gays and lesbians.
- Work with others in the community who share your concerns regarding rape and sexual assault, such as the Women’s Resource Center (255-0015), and the Advocacy Center (277-3203).
- Respect yourself and develop relationships based on mutual respect.

Fall and Spring Semester Hours:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday–Friday</td>
<td>8:30 am–5:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9:30 am–5:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10:00 am–4:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>building closed</td>
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Check the web for hours during breaks, winter and summer sessions: www.gannett.cornell.edu
e-mail: gannett@cornell.edu
fax: 607-255-0269
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