



Support Ideas for Loved Ones of Male Sexual Assault and Rape Survivors

Sexual assault and rape are disruptive to anyone's sense of safety. Male survivors often feel much more stigmatized because of their gender. Male survivors often have lost their sense of safety, well-being, and self-confidence. Listed below are some suggestions about how to support male survivors.

- Believe his story and listen to him when he needs you to.
- Help him realize that men do get sexually assaulted and raped. Tell him that he is not alone. Approximately 1 in 14 men is a rape survivor.
- Reinforce that this was NOT his fault in any way. Remember that sexual assault and rape are not about sex or sexual preference; it is about power, dominance, and control.
- Encourage him to seek out a professional counselor who can help him work through some of his feelings about the assault or rape. He may feel uncomfortable talking to loved ones about something so intimate.
- Be patient. Mood swings and over-exaggerated or under-exaggerated reactions to everything will be likely to occur. He will also most likely be showing signs of rape trauma syndrome or posttraumatic stress disorder. The STAR Central Office has more information on these trauma-related reactions.
- Try to avoid being overly-protective. This reinforces his fears of the world being an unsafe place and may cause him to doubt himself. Remember, most males don't have the experience of being taught from an early age that sexual assault or rape is possible as most females do.
- Allow him to make decisions for himself. This bolsters his sense of control.
- Keep the assault/rape confidential. If he decides to tell others, let him be the one to do so.
- Let him talk to you about issues regarding sexuality if he needs to. Many males become homophobic or confused about sexuality. Often, males will have erections during the assault. This is a biological reaction and nothing more. It does not mean that he wanted the assault to occur. Also, remind him that males who rape other males self-identify as heterosexual. Rape is meant to degrade, humiliate, and control; it has nothing to do with sexual gratification.

Information adapted from The Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education of the University of Minnesota, Homesafe Rape Crisis Center, Ohio State University Rape Education and Prevention Program's *When Men are Raped* (1997), and Maggie Dexheimer Pharris, PhD, MPH, RN