

DO help them to regain a sense of safety and control over their life by allowing them to make their own decisions.

DO offer options, make suggestions, help them to weigh up the pros and cons, but let the decision be theirs.

DO ask them what they need from you.

DO help in practical ways.

DO encourage them to get support.

DO seek support for yourself – with their permission.

DO seek help if they are suicidal.

DO educate yourself about sexual assault and the issues surrounding it.

DO contact SASS (see contact information on back page)

**Remember, survivors of assault deserve support in their efforts to resolve the effects of this abuse in their life.**

DON'T blame them for the abuse.

DON'T sympathise with the abuser.

DON'T take charge.

DON'T ignore what has happened to them by telling them to 'forget about it'.

The Sexual Assault Support Service provides three main services to our community.

These are:

**The Crisis Sexual Assault Service** provides crisis counselling, support with police statements, and coordinates medical and/or forensic examinations if required by victims of recent sexual assault.

24 hours 7 days a week (03) 6231 1817

**The Adult Counselling and Support Service** provides individual counselling and group programs for female and male survivors of sexual assault 18 years and older, also family members and support people.

The service is located at 95–97 Campbell St and is open Monday to Friday 9 am to 5 pm. Please phone (03) 6231 1811 to make an appointment.

**The Child/Adolescent Sexual Assault Support Service** provides counselling and support for survivors of sexual assault from 0 to 18 years, also family members and support people.

This service is located at 73 Federal St, North Hobart and is open Monday to Friday 9 to 5 pm. Please phone (03) 6231 0044 to make an appointment.

Email: [admin@sass.org.au](mailto:admin@sass.org.au)

Website: [www.sass.org.au](http://www.sass.org.au)

SASS is a free service funded through the Department of Health and Human Services Tasmania.



**If someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted**

**Information for people supporting survivors of sexual assault**

## If someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted

If a person is forced or coerced into having sexual contact that they don't want, they have been sexually assaulted.

If a person is threatened with sexual contact that they don't want, they have been sexually assaulted.

Such threatened or actual contact can take many forms, from unwanted touching to intercourse.

Sexual assault is a crime – it violates a person's being; it is an attack against their body, emotions and sense of self.

If someone close to you has been sexually assaulted, you may feel:

- helpless
- sad
- angry or shocked
- confused about the 'right thing' for you to do

While there is no 'right thing' to do, how you react is important and may influence the feelings or choices of the person who has been assaulted.



## What support can I give?

You can support someone who has been sexually assaulted in these ways:

- Listen to them.
- Believe what they tell you.
- Validate their feelings. Pain, fear and anger are natural reactions that need to be expressed and heard.
- Respect the fact that it takes time and space to heal.
- Recognise the harm that was done to the person who was assaulted.
- Acknowledge the strength and courage it has taken them to survive a traumatic event.
- Do not be judgemental. The assault was not the fault of the person who was assaulted, although self-blame is a common reaction:

**'maybe I gave out the wrong signals'**

**'I shouldn't have got into that car'**

**'I shouldn't have gone there alone'**

**'I shouldn't have ...'**

Statements like this suggest that the survivor had some responsibility for the assault taking place. This is not so. *Sexual assault is never the victim's fault.* The assault was solely a result of the assailant's choices and behaviour.

It is essential that you are clear about this in your own mind if you want to support someone who has been assaulted while they go through the healing process.

Most people feel disorientated after an assault. Reactions may include headaches, nightmares, insomnia, depression, fear of certain people or places, denial, emotional numbness, guilt and shame. These are all common reactions and may take some time to subside. In the healing process, everyone must be allowed to progress at their own pace.

Many people feel that their lives will never be the same again. But it is possible to heal from the effects of sexual assault and regain a sense of control and personal power.

It may be tempting to 'take over' and make decisions for someone in distress but this will only increase the sense of helplessness they may already be feeling. Remember that the person concerned knows better than anyone else what he or she needs. Support them in the choices they make. (The only exception is if someone is putting their own life at risk).

If someone who has been abused or assaulted chooses to discuss their feelings about it, be open to this and be clear about what you are able to offer. Don't make commitments or promises that you can't keep. Provide information about other available resources (such as counselling services). Survivors of abuse should be supported in taking any steps they feel will help them.