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Supportive Friends & Family Workshop



OVERVIEW

It takes courage and strength for a survivor of sexual assault or domestic violence to come forward and share their story. If you have been chosen for them to share their story with, chances are you are a source of comfort and safety for them. Never underestimate your ability to have a positive effect on the survivor and their healing journey. Remember, you don't have to be an expert to provide support. Although you can't take away what happened to someone, you can be a source of comfort and safety. Throughout this workshop, we will go over, discuss, and practice tools on how you can best support the survivor in your life while feeling comfortable and prepared to do so.

What We'll Cover

1. Types of Trauma & What is a survivor
 1. Sexual Assault
 2. Domestic Violence
2. Effects of Trauma
3. Understanding the Trauma
4. Cycle of Abuse
5. Supporting survivors
 1. Ways to help when someone gets triggered
 2. Communication
 1. Language
 2. Non-judgemental Listening
6. Local Resources
7. Self-Care
8. Re-caps & Clarifications on anything

When it comes to supporting survivors, it is important to understand the type of trauma they have experienced and how that can affect them. Although trauma can take many forms, the

two specific categories we will be focusing on throughout this curriculum is sexual assault, and domestic violence.

This discussion of sexual assault and domestic violence is intended to educate supportive family and friends on how to be supportive for their loved ones and to further understand the dynamics of trauma. And to recognize signs of abuse in the relationships of their loved ones.

Sexual Assault

The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:

- Attempted rape
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body
- Penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape

What is rape?

Rape is a form of sexual assault, but not all sexual assault is rape. The term rape is often used as a legal definition to specifically include sexual penetration without consent. For its Uniform Crime Reports, the FBI defines rape as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” To see how your state legally defines rape and other forms of sexual assault, visit RAINN's [**State Law Database**](#).

What is force?

Force doesn't always refer to physical pressure. Perpetrators may use emotional coercion, psychological force, or manipulation to coerce a victim into non-consensual sex. Some perpetrators will use threats to force a victim to comply, such as threatening to hurt the victim or their family or other intimidation tactics.

Who are the perpetrators?

The majority of perpetrators are someone known to the victim. Approximately eight out of 10 sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, such as in the case of intimate partner sexual violence or acquaintance rape.

The term "date rape" is sometimes used to refer to acquaintance rape. Perpetrators of acquaintance rape might be a date, but they could also be a classmate, a neighbor, a friend's significant other, or any number of different roles. It's important to remember that dating, instances of past intimacy, or other acts like kissing do not give someone consent for increased or continued sexual contact.

In other instances the victim may not know the perpetrator at all. This type of sexual violence is sometimes referred to as stranger rape. Stranger rape can occur in several different ways:

- **Blitz sexual assault:** when a perpetrator quickly and brutally assaults the victim with no prior contact, usually at night in a public place
- **Contact sexual assault:** when a perpetrator contacts the victim and tries to gain their trust by flirting, luring the victim to their car, or otherwise trying to coerce the victim into a situation where the sexual assault will occur
- **Home invasion sexual assault:** when a stranger breaks into the victim's home to commit the assault

Survivors of both stranger rape and acquaintance rape often blame themselves for behaving in a way that encouraged the perpetrator. It's important to remember that the victim is never to blame for the actions of a perpetrator.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or technological actions or threats of actions or other patterns of coercive behavior that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate,

frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. Examples of abusive behavior include:

Physical Abuse: Hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, hair pulling, etc. are types of physical abuse. This type of abuse also includes denying a partner medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use upon him or her.

Sexual Abuse: Coercing or attempting to coerce any sexual contact or behavior without consent. Sexual abuse includes, but is certainly not limited to, marital rape, attacks on sexual parts of the body, forcing sex after physical violence has occurred, or treating one in a sexually demeaning manner.

Emotional Abuse: Undermining an individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem is abusive. This may include, but is not limited to constant criticism, diminishing one's abilities, name-calling, or damaging one's relationship with his or her children.

Economic Abuse: Controlling or restraining a person's ability to acquire, use, or maintain economic resources to which they are entitled. This includes using coercion, fraud, or manipulation to restrict a person's access to money, assets, credit, or financial information; unfairly using a person's personal economic resources, including money, assets, and credit, or exerting undue influence over a person's financial and economic behavior or decisions, including forcing default on joint or other financial obligations, exploiting powers of attorney,

guardianship, or conservatorship, or failing or neglecting to act in the best interests of a person to whom one has a fiduciary duty.

Psychological Abuse: Elements of psychological abuse include - but are not limited to - causing fear by intimidation; threatening physical harm to self, partner, children, or partner's family or friends; destruction of pets and property; and forcing isolation from family, friends, or school and/or work.

Technological Abuse: An act or pattern of behavior that is intended to harm, threaten, control, stalk, harass, impersonate, exploit, extort, or monitor another person that occurs using any form of technology, including but not limited to: internet enabled devices, online spaces and platforms, computers, mobile devices, cameras and imaging programs, apps, location tracking devices, or communication technologies, or any other emerging technologies.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, sex, or gender identity. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Domestic violence occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, dating, or share a child.

Children and Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence not only affects those who are abused, but also has a substantial effect on family members, friends, co-workers, other witnesses, and the community at large. Children who grow up witnessing domestic violence, are among those seriously affected by this crime.

Frequent exposure to violence in the home not only predisposes children to numerous social and physical problems, but also teaches them that violence is a normal way of life - therefore, increasing their risk of becoming society's next generation of victims and abusers.

What is Trauma

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2022) trauma is an emotional response to an event such as an accident, natural disaster, or rape. The APA goes on to further explain that following the event denial and shock are both normal responses. However, long term effects of trauma emotions that are unpredictable, flashbacks, strain on relationships. Effects of trauma can also be taken on in physical symptoms such as headaches and nausea (American Psychological Association, 2022).

Understanding Trauma

Trauma alters three primary parts of the brain:

- **Prefrontal cortex:** thinking center - located behind your forehead and is responsible for rational thought, problem solving, personality, planning, and empathy.
- **Anterior cingulate cortex:** emotional regulation center - located next to the thinking center and is responsible for regulating emotion. When healthy, the emotional regulation center works closely with the thinking center.
- **Amygdala:** fear center -located deep inside the brain and cannot be controlled by our conscious. The fear center is responsible for determining what is and is not a threat, and when it detects danger, it creates feelings of fear.
 - When an individual has experienced trauma, their thinking and emotional regulation centers are underactive and the fear center is overactive.

Different Types of Trauma

According to Early Connections (n.d) there are three main types of trauma that can have lasting adverse effects on one's physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing.

➤ **Acute**

- A singular traumatic event that is brief in duration and narrowly focused in nature
such a car accident or assault

➤ **Chronic**

- repeated and prolonged such as domestic violence or abuse

➤ **Complex**

- exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature

Supporting Survivors

- Listen
- Believe
- Mindfulness
- Encourage
- Support
- Follow up

Listening vs Reacting:

Keep in mind that although your first reaction may be to offer advice or action to fix the situation, what they often need most is a supportive ear to be present with them and listen to what they are saying. This is where active listening skills come in.

Active Listening:

- **Give them time:** Let them talk at their own pace – it's important not to pressure or rush them.
- **Focus on listening:** Try to respect what they are choosing to share, rather than asking lots of questions.
- **Accept & validate their feelings:** Give them the space to feel their feelings and reassure them that their feelings are valid
- **Don't blame them or criticize their reactions:** You might wonder why they didn't do something differently, but they survived however they could at the time.
- **Use the same words they use:** People vary in how they prefer to describe their experiences. For example, it's their choice whether to talk about being a 'victim' or 'survivor' of trauma.

- **Don't dismiss their experiences:** For example, don't tell them not to worry about things or that it could be worse – this isn't usually helpful to hear. Try to remember that people can't choose what they find traumatic or how they're affected.
- **Only give advice unless you're asked to:** They might prefer to simply hear that you believe them and are there for them.

Effective communication

Effective Communication is important to a victim's wellbeing.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Remain calm.** You may feel shocked or outraged, but expressing these emotions to the victim may cause confusion or discomfort.
- **Believe the victim.** Make it clear that you believe the assault happened and that the assault is not her or his fault.
- **Give the victim control.** Control was taken away during the assault. Empower the victim to make decisions about what steps to take next and try to avoid telling her or him what to do.
- **Be available** for the victim to express a range of feelings: crying, screaming, being silent, etc. Remember, the victim is angry with the person who assaulted her or him and the situation, not with you. Just be there to listen.

- **Assure the victim of your support.** She or he needs to know that regardless of what happened, your relationship will remain intact.

- **Avoid making threats against the suspect.** Threats of harm may only cause the victim to worry about your safety and risk of arrest.

- **Maintain confidentiality.** Let the victim decide who to tell about the assault.
- **Encourage counseling.** Give the victim the hotline number for the nearest rape crisis center, but let the victim decide whether or not to call.

- **Ask before offering physical support.** Asking “Can I give you a hug?” can re-establish the victim’s sense of security, safety, and control.

- **Say what you can guarantee.** Don’t make promises you can’t keep, such as saying the victim will never be hurt again, or that the offender will be put in jail.

- **Allow the proper authorities to deal with the assault.** Confronting the person who committed the sexual assault may be harmful or dangerous. Attempting to investigate or question others who may know about the assault may hamper a legal investigation. Leave this to the proper authorities.

- **Be patient** and recognize that healing can take years with advances and setbacks.

- **Take care of yourself.** If you need support for yourself, please contact your local rape crisis center for a confidential place to discuss your feelings.

Cycle of Abuse

Through extensive observation and interview processes with women who'd experienced abuse and domestic violence, Walker identified a few stages that tend to repeat in an abusive relationship.

The stages of the cycle of abuse are:

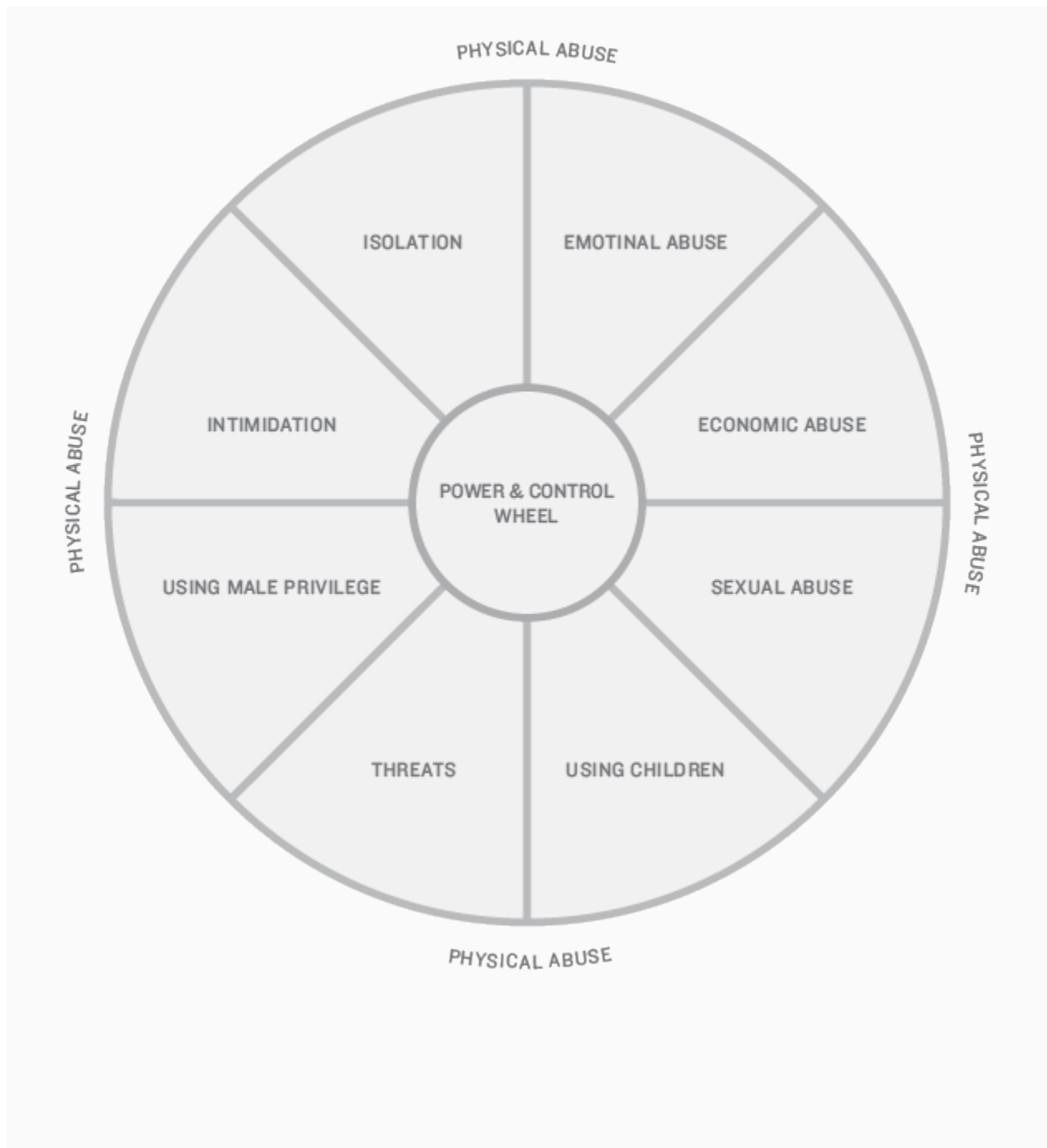
1. stage 1: Tension building
2. stage 2: Incident of violence
3. stage 3: Reconciliation
4. stage 4: Calm

This isn't meant to be comprehensive of all experiences related to abuse. Not every abuser or abuse situation follows this cycle.

Often psychological abuse can leave someone feeling fearful, helpless and powerless to act on their own behalf. People affected by domestic violence are rich, poor, married, divorced or single, from all ethnic backgrounds and economic levels. They can be able-bodied or with a disability, heterosexual or homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender. As someone

affected by domestic violence and battering they will find that they have common issues with many others who have also experienced this type of violence.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over their partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



Power & Control Wheel

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Putting her down or making her feel bad about herself, calling her names, making her think she's crazy, and mind games.

ECONOMIC ABUSE

Trying to keep her from getting or keeping a job, making her ask for money, giving her an allowance, or taking her money.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Making her do sexual things against her will, physically attacking the sexual parts of her body, or treating her like a sex object.

USING CHILDREN

Making her feel guilty about the children, using the children to give messages, using visitation as a way to harass her.

THREATS

Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her emotionally, threaten to take the children, commit suicide, or report her to welfare.

USING MALE PRIVILEGE

Treating her like a servant, making all the “big” decisions, acting like the “master of the castle”

INTIMIDATION

Putting her in fear by using looks, actions, gestures, loud voice, smashing things, destroying her property.

ISOLATION

Controlling what she does, who she sees and talk to, where she goes.

Tension building

During the tension stage, the abusive partner may begin to display signs of abuse and behaviors that slowly increase in intensity and frequency.

This may be related to external stressors like financial difficulties, interpersonal challenges at work or other environments, or health challenges.

The increasingly tense behaviors can include:

- emotional outbursts
- irritability
- impatience
- shortness of temper

As the outside world starts to feel more out of control, the abusive person may start to turn to the relationship as a way of feeling in control again.

As the tension starts to become evident, the non-abusive partner may also feel increasingly anxious. This may lead them to act in specific ways — such as “walking on eggshells” — to ease and appease the abusive partner’s tension and prevent an abusive incident.

Incident

At some point, the tension from the first stage in the cycle of abuse starts to break. This may culminate in one or more abusive incidents.

This stage is the abusive partner's attempt to overtly regain a sense of power and control.

An abusive incident may look different every time or from relationship to relationship. It could include:

- intimidation
- threats of violence
- breaking of things in the home
- insults, name-calling, and other verbal violence
- physical violence
- sexual violence
- shaming and blaming
- manipulation tactics like the silent treatment or gaslighting
- humiliation
- social isolation
- financial abuse

- emotional abandonment

It's possible that the incident stage escalates with every cycle. For example, intimidation and insults may be present in the first few cycles, transitioning to physical violence later on in the relationship.

Reconciliation

After the incident of abuse, the abusive partner may feel like the tension starts to dissipate. This can be quite the opposite experience for the person who's on the receiving end of that abuse.

Once that tension has abated, they may feel inclined to make amends for their behavior. They may apologize, shower you with affection, or promise they'll never do it again.

During this phase, the abusive partner may seem genuinely ashamed of their behavior and committed to reform. Because you care about them, you may feel inclined to believe what they're saying and give them another chance.

It's possible that the abusive partner starts doing things that may seem romantic, supportive, and loving during the reconciliation stage.

Calm

During the calm phase, their partner may continue to be attentive; however, you might notice a shift from them being apologetic to now excusing their actions.

During the calm stage, abusive behaviors may be minimized. You may notice your partner:

- shifts responsibility for the abuse (“I’m sorry but it’s all because of so-and-so.”)
- justifies their behavior (“If the garbage man didn’t do that, I wouldn’t get so angry.”)
- gaslights you (“It really wasn’t that big of a deal.”)

This stage can feel confusing. Their partner seemed to want to make things right, but there’s now an underlying tone of dismissal you just can’t put your finger on.

After a while, you may start experiencing tension again, as the cycle of abuse starts once more.

Types of abuse

Abuse can be both subtle and evident. Bruises, for example, from a physical abuse altercation are obvious.

Emotional signs may be far more challenging to spot, and may go undetected until years down the road.

These are some of the most common types of abuse:

- **Physical:** Hitting, kicking, biting, burning, or any other physical source of harm.
- **Emotional.** Using manipulation tactics like blaming and fear to control and cause distress.
- **Sexual.** Imposing unwanted sexual activities or experiences.
- **Verbal.** Insults, criticism, hurtful sarcasm, or other verbal attacks.
- **Neglect.** Not attending to basic human needs for physical and emotional well-being.
- **Technological.** Using technology, like computer use monitoring, to control a partner.
- **Financial.** Using financial control to keep a partner unable to act independently.
- **Immigration.** Using immigration status to leverage a partner.
- **Stalking.** Constantly monitoring where someone is and what they are doing.

How to end the cycle of abuse

Stopping abuse isn't as easy as "just leaving." It's natural for victims to feel afraid for their safety, the safety of their kids, or the welfare of their pets.

It's also valid if they feel you don't have the resources to exit the situation. These are all common situations that many abusive partners may take advantage of to keep them around.

In the case of emotional abuse, (they) you may not yet realize you're in an abusive cycle.

But it is possible to leave an abusive relationship and it may start with identifying those toxic behaviors you won't tolerate.

These other tips may help them work on how to end the cycle of abuse:

Confiding in someone

Speaking with a trusted friend or family member can help them see — and verify — patterns of behavior that may indicate abuse. It may also help you find a safe space where to go to when you're in the tension and incident stages.

Seeking professional guidance

A professional in the mental health field can help you navigate relationship challenges and identify signs of abuse.

They can also support them in cultivating new thoughts and behavioral patterns that can lead to coping skills.

A mental health professional can also provide them with resources and safety plans for exiting an unsafe situation.

Rebuilding their confidence

They have every right to be in a safe and respectful relationship. They may not feel that way right now, or they may think they won't "find anyone or anything better." This is what an abusive and controlling partner may want them to believe, so they can exert power over them.

It's natural if their self-confidence has been affected by their experiences.

- Try to go back to the things that give them joy and confidence.
- Consider connecting with loved ones they haven't seen in a while.

- Investing in education, even if informal, make help them feel empowered.
- If they're living with anxiety or depression, getting support may be essential.
- Try to spend some time engaging in [relaxation techniques](#) that may protect your mental well-being.

Seeking outside intervention

Not everyone's abusive situation is the same. You may not feel safe ending the cycle of abuse on your own, and that's OK. (they're) You're not alone and help is available.

Not all abusive relationships are the same. In some cases, though, abuse may go through a cycle of four stages: tension, incident, reconciliation, and calm.

Abuse may be evident or subtle, but its effects are real. It's OK if you haven't found the ways to exit the situation, but ending the cycle of abuse is possible.

“The biased use of pronouns serves to perpetuate the culturally based myth that men are perpetrators and women are victims. This myth is extremely damaging to the millions of male victims of sexual and physical abuse who live unacknowledged by our society.”

— David Lisak

Domestic violence against men tend to go unrecognized:

Why might this be?

- Less likely to admit and report
- Embarrassed
- Fear of ridicule
- lack of support services

In a study done by Machado 2017, found that most of the male victims reportedly experienced gender-stereotyped treatment from professionals and services, and that seeking formal help frequently led to secondary victimization in the form of statements or behavior that could cause them further distress

Guilt:

- Guilt is indeed concerned with one's responsibility for a harmful attitude or behavior.
- Why might a survivor feel guilt?

Shame:

- shame implies a nonmoral negative self-evaluation
- Why might a survivor feel shame?.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8XoNtHNjFM> 6:50-7:15

Support & Self-Care

- One of the challenges to supporting survivors is we might be emotionally impacted by what they tell us.
- It is important for us to address these challenges. When we fail to address our distressing thoughts and feelings, we might experience what is called secondary trauma or vicarious trauma.
- Secondary or vicarious trauma is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.
- If our own emotions after hearing about trauma are unaddressed, we might experience symptoms such as:
 - o Difficulty sleeping
 - o Decreased academic performance
 - o Trouble concentrating
 - o Nervousness
 - o Irritability

- If we do experience symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, we can seek support and assistance.

discuss the resources and support systems available to everyone if they need them

It's important to know that there is no normal or one way to react when you find out someone you care about has survived an act of sexual violence. Regardless of what you're feeling, these emotions can be intense and difficult to deal with. Learning how to manage these feelings can help you support the survivor in your life and can help you feel less overwhelmed.

How am I supposed to react?

There is no "right" reaction to hearing that someone you care about has survived an act of sexual violence. You may experience some of the following emotions:

- **Anger.** You might feel anger for a number of reasons: towards yourself for not being able to protect the survivor; towards the survivor for telling you about something that is hard to hear, or because they waited a period of time before telling you; or towards the perpetrator for carrying out the assault and hurting the survivor. It can be difficult to keep anger from affecting the way you

communicate. Let yourself acknowledge this emotion and find another outlet to express it.

- **Anxiety.** You might feel anxious about responding the “right” way or worried about how this event will impact your relationship with the survivor. Reassure the survivor that the assault was not their fault and that you believe them. These can be the most powerful and helpful words for a survivor to hear.
- **Confusion.** You might feel confused by what you’re hearing. You might not understand how it could happen or why it has happened. Sadly, sexual assaults are more common than we’d like to think. Although you may be struggling with feelings of confusion, especially if you know the perpetrator, you should always try to believe the survivor. They are never to blame for the assault.
- **Disbelief.** When you first hear about the assault you might be surprised or shocked, and you might have trouble believing the assault happened. After a traumatic experience, it’s common for survivors and those around them to experience denial. It’s important to focus on believing the survivor and acknowledging their story.
- **Guilt.** You may feel guilty that you could not prevent the assault from happening or that the survivor didn’t feel comfortable telling you about the assault the right way. You may feel guilty that something so terrible happened

to someone else and not to you. It can be helpful to refocus your energy on making the survivor feel supported as they move forward.

- **Sadness.** When you learn that a trauma like sexual assault happened to someone you care about, it's normal to feel sad, hopeless, worried, or powerless. You might feel sad for the survivor or mourn how this has changed their life. If you know the perpetrator, you might feel sad for how this has changed your life as well. Self-care strategies and coping skills can help you move through these feelings.

How do I practice self care?

Good self-care enables you to better care for others, especially if there is someone in your life who has survived sexual violence. The principles of self-care for friends and family are similar to the self-care concepts for survivors, but there are some additional aspects to consider.

- **Maintain your lifestyle.** It can be difficult to stay emotionally strong if you are mostly focusing on the sexual assault. Maintaining your lifestyle and continuing to do what you enjoy is important for your emotional wellness. If you enjoy painting, cooking, exercising, spending time with friends, or other activities, keep them up. It may seem challenging to make time to do these activities, but they can be helpful self-care strategies in the long run.

- **Make plans.** Sometimes talking about what happened can help you cope with your feelings, and other times it can make you feel more stuck. Make plans that give you a break from talking or thinking about the assault. It could mean starting a new hobby or revisiting one you already enjoy. You could go to dinner with a group of friends who understand this isn't time to discuss what happened. Maybe you prefer a solo activity, like going on long walks. Let this be a time where you can take your mind off the assault.
- **Reach out and talk about it.** It's normal to have a difficult time processing the sexual assault of someone you care about. It can continue to be difficult as time goes on and the survivor begins the healing process. You can call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) or visit at online.rainn.org to chat with someone who understands what you're going through. You can also consider talking to someone who is trained professionally to help you deal with these thoughts and feelings, like a mental health professional.
- **Take time to relax.** Relaxation looks different for everyone. You might consider meditation or deep breathing exercises. Maybe journaling helps you sort through your thoughts and find peace. Build time into your day for these moments of relaxation so that you don't skip out.
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Questions to think about:

1. What gets in the way of you taking care of yourself?
2. What does our culture say about self-care?
3. What would be your ideal self-care routine?
4. What is the most helpful thing you are doing for yourself right now?
5. What is one habit you wish could replace, and what would it be? Which area of your life do you feel the most stress?
6. What is the behavior are you practicing that is causing you the most harm? What activity in your life brings you the most joy?
7. Are you satisfied with your eating habits?
8. When do you feel like you are operating at your best?
9. Do you feel like you are making the most out of each day?
10. How often do you spend time outside? How do you feel when you walk into your workspace or your home?
11. Describe your sleeping patterns. What negative thinking patterns keep you from growing into the person you want to be?
12. What negative thoughts about yourself are you holding on to?
13. How are you managing your time?
14. What areas of your life do you prioritize?

15. What is the first thing you thought about when you woke up? How often do you reflect on your life or your behaviors?

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