



## **CARING FOR A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER FOLLOWING SEXUAL ASSAULT**

*"I feel so helpless because I wasn't able to protect ... (him/her).  
I feel like I have let them down."*

You may experience some powerful emotions when you learn that someone close to you has been sexual assaulted. You may feel anger and sadness that this has happened to someone you care about. You may feel guilt that you were not able to do something to prevent the assault and you may feel confusion about what you can do to help.

*"I want to help, but I don't know what to do or say. I'm afraid  
of making it worse."*

It is important for you to understand that a person who has been sexually assaulted may experience some or all of the following reactions:

- A feeling of being isolated and alone and out of touch with the rest of the world
- A belief that no one understands what they are experiencing
- Confusion or an inability to think clearly or to concentrate
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, nausea, stomach aches, loss of appetite, fatigue
- Changes in sleeping patterns and experiencing nightmares
- A feeling of being dirty
- A sense of grief and loss
- Emotional reactions such as shame, guilt, anger, rage, fear
- Not being able to stop thinking about the assault
- Feeling responsible for the assault
- A change in the way they feel about sex
- An unwillingness to be touched by anyone
- Difficulty in trusting others
- Feeling unsafe when alone
- Feeling nervous and anxious
- A lack of self-confidence

You can assist by:

- Believing ... (him/her)
- Listening and allowing ... (him/her) the opportunity to talk about the event in their own time and in their own way
- Not judging ... (him/her)
- Spending time with them
- Allowing them some private time
- Reassuring them they are safe
- Allowing them the opportunity to express their feelings
- Not taking the person's anger and feelings personally
- Assisting with some tasks such as minding the children or cooking, if this is what they want
- Not saying things such as "lucky it wasn't worse". People who have experienced a trauma are not consoled by these statements

*"I feel so awkward talking about something so personal, but I know ... (he/she) needs my support."*

Your friend or family member may need help and support in redeveloping trust in the world around them. Building a new sense of trust and safety is one of the most difficult steps in recovering from sexual assault.

Their reaction to the sexual assault may be strong enough to lead to difficulties in your relationship. You may feel hurt and upset by the newfound distrust or detachment from you and angry that this situation has occurred at all. Try to be patient and gentle and understanding as ... (he/she) struggles to come to terms with the assault. Support ... (his/her) efforts to make changes and help to find the resources needed to cope with the experience.

It is important to take care of yourself as well during this difficult time. You may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor about your feelings.

For additional support and information, or to discuss counselling, contact the Sexual Assault Resource Centre on (08) 9340 1828 or freecall 1800 199 888. Crisis counselling support is available 8.30am to 11.00pm daily.