

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: HOW TO RESPOND, OFFER SUPPORT & NEXT STEPS

If you - or someone you know - experienced sexual violence, the first few days are often overwhelming. There may be a lot of questions and difficult decisions. During this time individuals may not want, or be ready, to make decisions concerning next steps. **This is normal and okay.**

What to Do:

It is recommended that parents or caregivers **FIRST** contact **Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) at 800-841-8371.**

Professionals at BARCC will advise families on all the “next steps” to consider, including how/if to report the assault to the police, when/if to seek medical attention, if schools should be notified, etc.

Guidance for Talking With Survivors

Often listening is the best way to support a survivor.

- For a survivor, disclosing to someone they care about can be very difficult, so it’s important for you to be as **supportive and non-judgmental as possible.**
- Sometimes support means providing resources, such as how to reach the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, seek medical attention, or report the crime to the police.

Helpful Phrases

Below are some specific phrases experts recommend as you offer support through a survivor’s healing process:

“I believe you. / It took a lot of courage to tell me about this.”

Be careful not to interpret calmness as a sign that the event did not occur—everyone responds differently to traumatic events. The best thing you can do is listen and believe them.

“It’s not your fault. / You didn’t do anything to deserve this.”

Survivors may blame themselves, especially if they know the perpetrator personally. Remind the survivor, maybe even more than once, that *they are not to blame.*

“You are not alone. / I care about you and am here to listen or help in any way I can.”

Let them know that you are there for them and will listen when they are ready to share. Remind them that there are professionals who will be able to support them as they heal.

“I’m sorry this happened.”

Express that you are sorry.

What Not to Do

Ask too many questions.

Leave any probing questions to the experts—your job is to offer support.

Doubt your child.

Emphasize that you believe them and are there to support them.

Promise not to tell anyone else.

Let them know you may need to contact professionals and share what they have told you.

Reducing Risk

While there's no way to eliminate the possibility of an assault, there are strategies that **may reduce** the risk.

Please understand that someone could practice all these strategies and an assault could still happen.

No one EVER deserves to be assaulted. The person at fault is the perpetrator NOT the survivor.

With that said, do have conversations with your kids about:

- How to look out for friends (safety in numbers)
- How to be aware of their environment
- The effect of substances on decision making and perceptions
- Giving/denying consent
- How to understand when consent is denied/hearing 'no'

Resources:

Many people benefit from the support of a counselor trained in how to respond to sexual violence. You can find someone to talk with through BARCC or RAINN (contact info below). Together you can develop a plan to determine your next steps.

Resources for Survivors/Reporting:

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
www.barcc.org
800-841-8371

National Sexual Assault Hotline/Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)
www.rainn.org
800-656-HOPE

National Domestic Abuse Hotline
www.thehotline.org
800-787-3224

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline
866-331-8453

Belmont Police Department
617-993-2550

Other Resources:

That's Not Cool: Decreasing Teen Dating Violence
thatsnotcool.com

loveisrespect
loveisrespect.org

See belmontwellness.org for more resources on finding a therapist and supporting mental health for yourself or others.