

Tips on Supporting Someone Who Hasn't Disclosed Their Survivorship



While the only way you can truly know if someone in your life has experienced sexual violence is through their disclosure to you, there are proactive steps you can take to support loved ones you suspect might be a survivor. Remember, sexual assault happens across generations, class, religious affiliation, race, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Anyone can be a survivor. Read below for some ideas on how you can show up for folks even if they haven't disclosed.

When you suspect someone of being a survivor but they haven't disclosed to you:

- **Be mindful of what you say.**
Don't make assumptions about what happened. Consider using phrases like "I'm here for you" so they know the door is open if they decide they want to disclose. Survivors often shame themselves for the abuse they experience, even when they don't disclose it. Don't let it fly.
- **Maintain regular communication with them.**
Check in to see how they are doing. Ask questions like: how is your heart today? You can send affirmations and offer to spend time together.
- **Let them guide the conversation.**
- **Be mindful of your expressions and body language.**
Having extreme reactions can cause discomfort and fear.
- **Build a safe container for them to ask for what they need.**
Be there to listen.
- **Don't hypothesize about someone's assault and don't tell others about what you suspect.**
It sets up distrustful dynamics within your relationship. It may force the survivor to be on guard. It may also start rumors and confidentiality is key
- **Ask for consent before any physical contact happens.**
For example, ask "Would you like a hug?"
- **Ask them if they've had water or eaten.**
- **Remind them that they are believed.**
- **Don't make it about you.**
- **Do your own research.**
Don't rely on the survivor to educate you.
- **Send letters, care packages or offer to cook for them.**
- **Do your best to ensure that they feel safe with you.**
Be mindful that they still may not want to disclose to you. That is their right.
- **Don't drastically shift the dynamics of your relationship with that person just because you suspect they are a survivor.**
They probably don't want your relationship to change.
- **Make space for them to feel whatever emotions they are feeling and let them know that all of them are valid.**
Survivors can feel a wide range of emotions along a spectrum of intensity. Honor and validate where they are with their feelings in a given moment.
- **Don't walk on eggshells with folks.**
It's not what they need and it might place them in a position where they no longer feel like they can share information about their lives with you. They also may begin to self isolate.
- **Leave wherever you are when they want to.**
If they are triggered and need to leave a place, support them in leaving and go with them with no questions. Survivors are often triggered and sometimes have flashbacks.
- **Post publicly about your support of survivors. Let them know that you are listening if they ever need an ear.**
Remind whoever is reading that you believe survivors first

and that you know they deserve good things. Folks are paying attention to everything online. Even if they don't say it. They notice your silence.

Additional Resources

Looking for more information to better understand if your friend or loved one might be a survivor? Check out these useful resources that walk through signs and symptoms common to those who have experienced sexual violence:

- [Rainn: Warning Signs](#)
- [Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape: Warning Signs of Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Cabrillo College: Signs a friend might have been sexually assaulted](#)

Finally, if someone has recently shared with you that they are a survivor, check out our [other infosheet that offers tips on how to support them](#) during and following their disclosure.