**How to Support a Friend or Family Member Who Has Experienced Gender-Based Violence**

* **Listen.** Let your friend or family member control what and how much information they want to share with you. Digging for every detail can overwhelm or alienate them. Many of us are quick to go into “fix it” mode, assuming our friend or family member is looking to us for solutions. Before making this assumption, you might try asking, *“How can I best support you right now?”* This question centers their needs and allows them to control their healing process. Some people will not know what they need in the moment, it is important to let them know you’re there to listen.
* **Use language that communicates your support** instead of your judgment, frustration or accusations. You might try saying, *“I’m worried about you and I would like to help”* instead of *“Why don’t you just leave?”* or *“I can’t believe you put up with that.”* Be careful that what you are saying doesn’t infer victim blaming, for example “You have to be more careful.”
* **Honor their agency.** Despite your best intentions, it is never appropriate to tell your friend or family member that they “need” to make a report, seek therapy, tell their

parents or anything else you think is in their best interest. When we tell survivors that

they “need” to do something, we are taking away their power, just as their assailant/

abuser did. This doesn’t mean you can’t offer resources, but it does mean they should

be presented as options not recommendations.

* **Honor the trust they are putting in you.** Disclosing a traumatic experience takes a lot of trust. It can be helpful to thank them for confiding in you. You may also want to commend your friend or family member for their resiliency and thank them for confiding in you. If they begin to blame themselves, remind them that the only person who could have prevented the violence from happening is the person who committed the violence. Make sure they know you believe, support, and love them.
* **Practice self-care.** Identify your emotional boundaries and acknowledge your limits.

You’ll be better able to respond to your friend or family member’s needs, if you’re also taking care of yourself. If you’re feeling frustrated or angry that your friend or family member has stayed with (or returned to) their abuser, seek support from other friends or counselors – while respecting the survivor’s confidentiality - to help you through this.

 

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