

What can you say...

If someone tells you about sexual assault

It can be quite difficult to hear that someone has been sexually assaulted. Because, what do you say in such a case? And what can you do to support someone? But also: how does what happened to them affect you? Please know that you can do a lot for someone else, just by staying calm and listening to them. The Sexual Assault Center has some tips for you:

A conversation

Your reaction is very important for how someone else recovers. People who are supported by their environment recover faster than those who aren't. So when someone tells you about a bad sexual experience, it is important to respond in a quiet and supportive manner.



Helpful statements

- I'm so sorry this happened to you.
- It was not your fault.
- This never should have happened.
- You're very brave for sharing your story.
- I believe you.
- You are not strange/weird/dirty.
- I am here for you.



Helping questions

- What do you want to tell me about it?
- How are you doing now?
- How has this changed your life?
- How has this affected you?
- What would you like?
- What do you need?
- How can I help you?
- Would you like professional help?





Helping actions

- **Please listen with attention and without judgement** - Let them know that you are there for them and listen with attention and without judgement. Many victims are afraid that they will not be believed, so they struggle to share their story. If you do not know what to say then simply say that you are there to listen. That is often enough.
- **Stay calm** - Even if you feel intense emotions yourself, it's important to stay calm. That helps the other person the most. What you want to show them is: 'Okay, it happened, but everything will be fine. I am here for you.'
- **Offer practical help** - Can I do some groceries for you? Shall I come with you to your appointment? Practical help can be useful when someone has had a bad sexual experience. So please ask if you can do something for him, her, or them.

More tips on supporting someone who has had a bad sexual experience (including online) can be found via www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl/supporting-someone/

Not helpful: victim blaming

Many people who have had a bad sexual experience get bad reactions from their environment. They are not believed or are seen as the guilty party. They may also be faced with questions that can be seen as accusatory, such as: Why did you go there? Or: You could have just said no? These reactions are called victim blaming. Victim blaming can have negative consequences for victims. It can make it difficult for them to process the experience and ask for professional help because they are ashamed or blame themselves.

Finding help

For someone who has experienced sexual assault, it is important to find professional help as soon as possible. This can help prevent physical and psychological issues in the future. Even if the assault was a while ago, it can be worthwhile to find professional help. It is never too late to find help in the event of sexual assault experiences.





Actions

- Make the other person aware of the possibility and importance of professional help. This is not a necessity. Let someone make their own choices.
- Take a look at the website of the Sexual Assault Center Violence together. Here you can find a lot of information about sexual violence, its (possible) consequences and what help you can get.
- Call **0800-0188** for advice or assistance.
- Prefer to chat with a counselor? See: www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl/csg-en/



For you

- It makes sense that someone else's story of sexual assault affects you. It can even evoke intense emotions in you, such as sadness, powerlessness, guilt or even anger. These are normal responses to abnormal situations. Don't keep it to yourself. Talk to someone you trust or through the chat at www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl/csg-en/
- If you have ever been sexually assaulted yourself, it can be extra difficult to hear someone else's story of sexual assault. Any memories you have pushed away can suddenly come flooding back. Please know that you too can get professional help in working through your trauma.
- If you have never had a bad sexual experience then you may not be very understanding and you may have many questions. Try not to transfer these feelings to the other person and instead try and get answers to your questions by, for example, reading up on the topic or asking the Sexual Assault Center for advice.

Sexual Assault Center

The Sexual Assault Center is there for anyone who has had a bad sexual experience, whether in real life or online and whether recent or a long time ago. For help or advice call **0800-0188** or chat via www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl/csg-en/.

