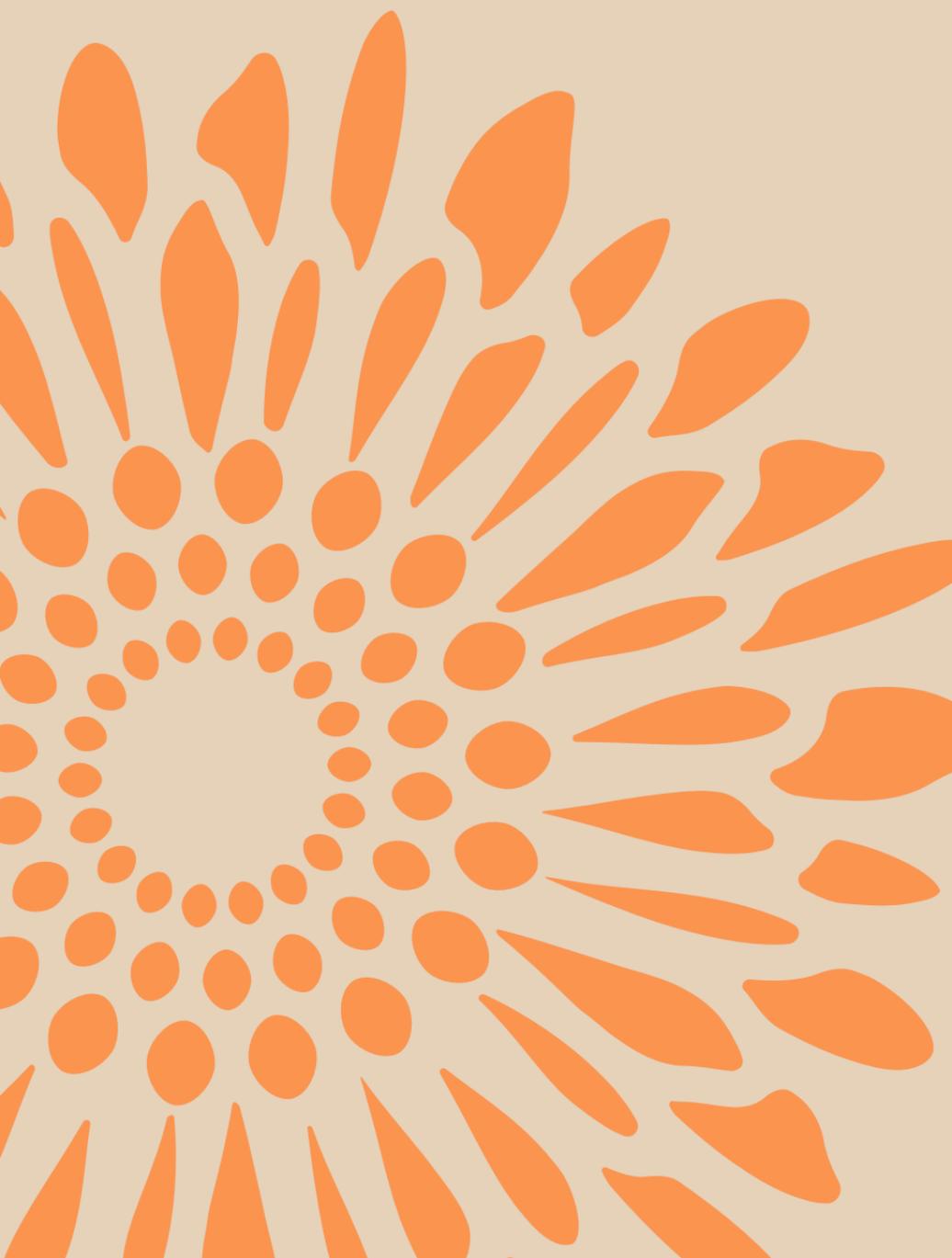




UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA
MAXINE PLATZER LYNN WOMEN'S CENTER

helping a friend

HOW TO SUPPORT A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL
ASSAULT OR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



You might be a bit overwhelmed and that's *understandable.*

You have a friend who has just told you that they have been sexually assaulted, is in an abusive relationship, or maybe is a survivor of prior violence as a child or a teen. You might be a bit overwhelmed, and that's understandable. The information in this brochure can help you help your friend, and it offers reassurance if you feel nervous about making a mistake or somehow saying the wrong thing.

SUPPORTIVE RESPONSES TO A FRIEND WHO CONFIDES IN YOU

Here's what you can say.

- I believe you. I am not going to judge you or blame you.
- You are not crazy. This is a normal reaction to a traumatic experience.
- This was not your fault. No one deserves this.
- You were raped/abused because they made the decision to rape/abuse you. Your drinking, flirting, clothing, etc., wasn't the reason that this happened.
- Anything you need to do that will help you feel safe is okay, as long as it doesn't actually endanger you or cause you harm.
- There is no right or wrong way to feel after this.
- You don't have to go through this alone.
- I admire the strength you have shown in getting yourself through this.
- Thank you for trusting me enough to share this. I know it is really hard, but I'm so glad that you are willing to talk to someone about what you're going through.
- I'm here to listen, whenever you're ready to, or need to, talk.
- You have a right to (be in a relationship, in your home, dance, flirt, drink, etc.) and not be hurt.
- It doesn't matter that you didn't fight back. You did what you had to do in order to get through it.
- What happened was a terrible violation. It makes sense that you feel this way.
- It's hard to leave an abusive relationship. It doesn't matter how many times you leave and go back; I'll still be here for you whenever you need support.

Start by Believing

The most important way people can help survivors is by believing them. Remember that it's often very difficult for a survivor to come forward and share their story. Your reaction may have an impact on whether or not they choose to continue to share this information with others and seek further support. Tell your friend that you believe them and you want to support them in any way that you can. Try not to get frustrated with your friend if they aren't following your well-meant advice. What survivors need is someone to listen to them without judgment, who says, "I believe you, and you didn't deserve that."

Sometimes preconceived ideas of who can be sexually assaulted or abused in a relationship impacts our initial reactions to a disclosure. Anyone can have this experience regardless of sex, gender-identity, or gender expression.

Don't ask for specific details or question your friend about what happened. You can best help your friend by focusing on their feelings and reactions.

Respect Privacy

Do not share your friend's story unless they specifically tell you to or allow you. Keep confidentiality unless doing so will endanger them.

Focus on Safety

Your friend's safety is paramount. If they don't feel safe, ask permission to contact your RA, Sexual Assault Resource Agency (SARA), Shelter for Help in Emergency (SHE), or the police. Don't be afraid to say, "I'm concerned about your safety." Contact the Women's Center for resources to help you talk about healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as a safety planning worksheet to help them take steps to increase their safety.



Don't be discouraged if your friend is hesitant to talk. Simply remind them that you're there to listen whenever they're ready to, or need to, talk.

Resources for Support

- **POLICE: 911**

Don't worry about making a "big deal" out of abuse. The police can make sure your friend is safe, help them get the right medical attention, and inform them of their rights to file a criminal complaint.

- **SHELTER FOR HELP IN EMERGENCY**

24-hour crisis line: (434) 293-8509

SHE provides crisis counseling, safety planning, and guidance to victims of intimate partner violence and stalking.

- **SEXUAL ASSAULT RESOURCE AGENCY**

24-hour crisis line: (434) 977-7273

SARA provides crisis counseling and guidance to adult and child victims of sexual assault.

For Survivors of Sexual Assault

Receiving medical care after an unwanted sexual encounter is extremely important. Physical evidence of a sexual assault can be collected up to 72 hours after the assault. If your friend tells you within that window of time, encourage them to get medical attention at the Elson Student Health Center (during regular business hours) or the UVA Emergency Department immediately, where a specially trained forensic nurse (a SANE nurse) will treat them. The SANE Nurse can help determine the extent of injuries and your friend's needs. Offer to go with them, and remind them that they do not have to formally report the assault in order to receive medical help. The cost of evidence collection is covered by the Commonwealth of Virginia. If they don't want the rest of the exam covered by their insurance, they should tell the forensic nurse.

If you are informed more than 72 hours after the assault has occurred, encourage your friend to go to Student Health to be checked for sexually transmitted infections or (for women) pregnancy prophylaxis. Remember to be sensitive to your friend's fear and nervousness about going. You can offer to go with them if you are comfortable doing that or ask who they can call to go with them.

Point them towards psychological, university, or legal resources. Emotional support after this kind of trauma is very important.

For Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Intimate Partner Violence takes many forms, but the goal is the same: to have power and control over someone in an intimate relationship. Most abuse is emotional or psychological and goes on 24/7. Stalking and tracking is another common behavior of abusers. Two major red flags of danger are if the abuser has choked (strangled) your friend in an argument (even if the violence didn't "seem" extreme) and suicidality in the abuser. If your friend has plans to leave, or has already left an abusive relationship, discuss a safety plan, because this is the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship. In these cases, urge your friend to call the police or the SHE hotline. A hotline counselor will be able to assess how much danger your friend is in and provide useful guidance. The police and Office of the Dean of Students can offer a great deal of help and support in seeking safety from an abusive relationship.

Keep in mind that mental abuse can be more harmful than physical abuse; leaving becomes very hard. Abuse survivors leave and return an average of 12 times before finally getting away permanently. Try not to get frustrated with your friend if you see a pattern of breaking up and returning; this is common. If you need emotional support, seek help for yourself as well.

Continue to Offer Your Friend Support

Some survivors are shy about repeatedly discussing their feelings. It may be helpful if friends approach them in private and simply ask them how they are doing. Don't be discouraged if they are hesitant to talk, simply keep offering your support.

Watch to make sure there are no dramatic changes in social behaviors, alcohol consumption, eating behaviors or despairing talk that may hint at suicide. Talk to them first about these problems. However, if they continue or get worse, seek help from a Dean, an RA, or the Women's Center for the safety of your friend.

Help them pursue strategies to recover emotionally including journaling, exercising or other stress relieving activities, and maintaining healthy eating and sleeping habits. Continue reminding them that they are safe, if that is true. Offer to talk to them about what happened whenever they need.

Remember that helping your friend make choices is important for their recovery process so that they can feel back in control of their life. Do not tell them what to do but rather let them know you are concerned and that you have information you want to share with them. They may make a choice that you do not agree with. Be aware of your own emotional responses about this and be sure you have support for yourself.

A Word About Responsible Employees at the University of Virginia

When a responsible (non-confidential) UVA employee learns about a situation involving students who have been a target of sexual misconduct, they are required to share this information with the Title IX Office through the “Just Report It” website or some other method. (Students also have their own, voluntary, reporting option on the site.) Once this information is passed along, the survivor will be contacted by someone from the Office of the Dean of Students, who is checking in to make sure they are safe and to offer support and information about resources and reporting options. You can reassure your friend that UVA’s response will be confined to just these specific people (unless it is determined that there are signs of serious danger to the survivor or the community, in which case other steps will be taken) and UVA will seek to honor their preferences whenever possible. It is your friend’s decision whether or not to meet with a Dean, a member of the Title IX Office, or anyone else. There are also confidential employees at the University, such as counselors, health care professionals, and Confidential Advocates in the Women’s Center, who are not required to share information.

For more information on the University’s Title IX process and for a button to report an incident through “Just Report it” visit:

<http://eocr.virginia.edu/title-ix>

Visit the Not on Our Grounds Website

Not on Our Grounds is an umbrella initiative at UVA dedicated to ending sexual violence and gender-based violence in our community through a series of awareness campaigns, prevention education, and outreach efforts. To learn more, visit:

notonourgrounds.virginia.edu



The University of Virginia takes gender-based violence seriously and provides support and information to survivors, friends and families of survivors, and the University community.

For more information

The Gender Violence and Social Change program at the Maxine Platzter Lynn Women's Center collaborates with students, faculty, administrators, staff and organizations across Grounds to build a community free of violence and abuse. We provide confidential advocacy to survivors of gender violence at the University, including students, staff, and faculty, and work hard to engage men as agents of change through the Men's Leadership Project.

Our Survivor Support Network Training prepares members of the UVA community to be informed allies to survivors of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and child sexual abuse. During the course of this training, you will learn effective strategies to support your students and colleagues, learn about local resources, and become part of an on-Grounds network that is designed to make visible the dedicated support for victims that exists at the University. For more information about Survivor Support Network and upcoming trainings, visit:

womenscenter.virginia.edu



This brochure was made possible by the UVA Parents Fund. We appreciate their generous support for many of our efforts to promote student well-being.

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Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center

Since its founding in 1989, the Women's Center has served the University of Virginia community and connected students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends committed to a just and equitable UVA – an unrivaled place to work and learn. Our students learn to create change on the personal, local and global levels, and apply knowledge gained in their coursework to serve in the Charlottesville community they call home during their UVA years.

womenscenter.virginia.edu

We are proud to be a national model as one of the few centers to combine extensive expertise in counseling college students with robust opportunities for training in effective social justice advocacy. Visit our website to learn more about the engaged scholarship opportunities, information resources and services we offer.

Services for Student Well-being

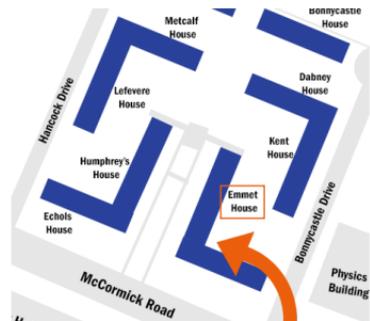
- Tips and How-To Guides
- Counseling Services
- Support Group for Survivors of Sexual Assault
- Reflections*
- Survivor Support Network Training
- Post-Assault Advocacy
- Screenings for Mental Wellness or Eating Disorders
- Confidential Advocacy

Engaged Scholarship Opportunities

- Body Positive
- Gender Violence & Social Change
- Iris Magazine*
- Legal Clinic
- Men's Leadership Project
- Social Media Marketing Team
- Women, Girls & Global Justice
- Young Women Leaders Program

Community Services

- Babysitter List
- Counseling Services
- Jill T. Rinehart Library
- Legal Clinic
- MLK Women's Hope Project



In 2017 you can find us **HERE**

Find us in Emmet House on McCormick Road in 2017 while our home on the Corner is under renovation to reopen in 2018.



Emmet House | Charlottesville, Virginia | 434-982-2361