

How to Support Survivors



It is hard to know what to think or say to a friend, family member, co-worker, or neighbour who suffers trauma and harm from violence, abuse, or harassment. Myths and assumptions in our culture prompt us to be judgmental. By finding the right words and responding with compassion, you can support the person, involve the community, and right the world. Here are a few ideas to help you support survivors.

<i>SUPPORT THE PERSON</i>	
<i>Instead of...</i>	<i>Support survivors by saying...</i>
Did that really happen? Why didn't you say anything sooner?	I believe you. I am sorry this has happened to you.
Can you give me more details? Can you explain better what happened?	This shouldn't have happened to you. I know it is traumatic to repeat this story. I am listening to you and won't interrupt.
Why don't you seem more upset? Can't you pull yourself together?	Whatever you are feeling or expressing is normal. I understand.
He mustn't have meant to hurt you. He seems like such a good guy.	There is no excuse for what he did to you. I'm on your side. You matter to me.
You should go to the hospital. You should go to the police. You should go to a women's shelter.	I will accompany you if you want to go to the hospital or the police or a women's shelter.
You should tell your story so that no one else gets hurt.	The person who hurt you is responsible for his actions. Your story is yours and no one else's. You decide.
Why don't you just leave? Why don't you just break up with him?	How can I help? What do you need right now? I will be here for you when you are ready to get help.

This resource focuses on male violence against women and children. Messages to support survivors can help survivors of any gender who have been hurt by people of any gender.

Purple Ribbon Campaign Against Violence: Support Survivors

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY <i>Instead of...</i>	<i>Support survivors by saying...</i>
Did you hear about what happened to so-and-so? Did you hear what so-and-so did?	I respect the confidentiality of people who have trusted me with their stories.
What happens in a relationship or family is none of my business. I don't want to hear about private things.	Violence or abuse against anyone affects everyone. I want to live in a community where people are safe, respected, and treated well. I want to live in a community where people who harm others are held accountable.
I should just stay out of this and let government or police or whoever take care of the issue.	I know I have a role to play. I will do what I can. I know I am part of the solution. What victim-serving organizations can I support?
I don't know enough about violence, abuse, or harassment to do anything about it.	I will seek out more information from victim-serving organizations. I will educate myself by finding reliable sources of information about violence prevention.
I don't see violence happening. I don't think it's much of an issue in our society. I know what a victim looks like and would recognize someone who experienced real violence.	There is very likely someone in my life who has survived violence or is experiencing it now. Statistics say that half the women in my life have experienced trauma from sexual assault or other forms of violence since they turned sixteen. Survivors are around me every day, working as hard as they can to thrive after trauma.

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RIGHT THE WORLD

Instead of...

Support survivors by saying...

Violence and abuse are a natural and normal part of human life. They can't be prevented.

Everyone has the right to live without violence.
It is not normal to expect violence in your life.
A person who uses violence is making a choice. There are always better choices than violence available.

Women and girls need to take more steps to protect themselves. Women need to change the way they behave and the way they look to prevent assault.

Violent men need to stop sexually assaulting women and children.
Violent men need to stop predatory, abusive, and controlling behaviour towards women and children.
Men need to treat women and children with respect and help to keep them safe.

Violence equally affects every age, gender, class and race.

Violence, abuse, and harassment, especially sexualized forms of these, are always about dominance, power, and control.
Greater social equity is always part of the solution to prevent violence.

The issue of violence is too big, and I don't know what to do about it.



Any genuine first step to gaining understanding of the issue and acting compassionately to support survivors is the right step.
We can all take action to be good bystanders when we see signs of violence, abuse, and harassment. Small actions can make a big difference, or even save a life.

Need help? KidsHelpPhone.ca: 1-800-668-6868 | Text CONNECT to 686868
PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre: 902-566-1864
Victim Services: Charlottetown 902-368-4582, Summerside 902-888-8218