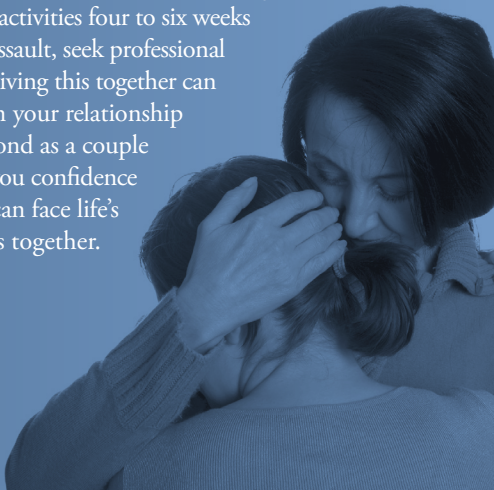


## Symptoms

You may find that your loved one is distracted and distant since the attack. This may cause you to feel isolated and lonely. You may grieve and feel a sense of loss of the closeness you once had with the victim. Partners may worry that their sexual relationship will never be the same. You may feel that your own needs are being ignored right now.

This is a common experience and these feelings are natural. It will take time for your loved one to feel safe and be able to trust enough to be vulnerable again. Try not to take the distance personally. Be patient and have faith that in time your relationship can be close and intimate once again. Partners, if sex is too scary for the survivor at first, find ways to show intimacy and affection for each other that are not sexual. Call your local rape crisis center to see if they offer a support group for significant others. It can help tremendously to talk to others in your same situation. Further, this will show your loved one that you care enough to work on this issue with her/him.

The bottom line is to be patient with your loved one and yourself. The healing process can take a long time. Your lives will never be exactly as they were before the assault, but life can be fulfilling and happy once again. If you and/or your partner are still experiencing severe symptoms such as nightmares, extreme anger, appetite disturbances, and difficulty resuming every day activities four to six weeks after the assault, seek professional help. Surviving this together can strengthen your relationship or your bond as a couple and give you confidence that you can face life's challenges together.



## Helping Your Loved One Recover

Many significant others feel inadequate to say and do the things that will be most helpful to the victim during the recovery process. Review the list of do's and don'ts below. Remember, there is great healing power in simply being present with the person who is hurting.

### Don't:

- ▶ Don't take outbursts personally.
- ▶ Don't isolate yourself. Seek support.
- ▶ Don't force the survivor to forgive. This is a slow process and takes time.
- ▶ Don't set timetables or give the survivor ultimatums.
- ▶ Don't blame the survivor for what happened.

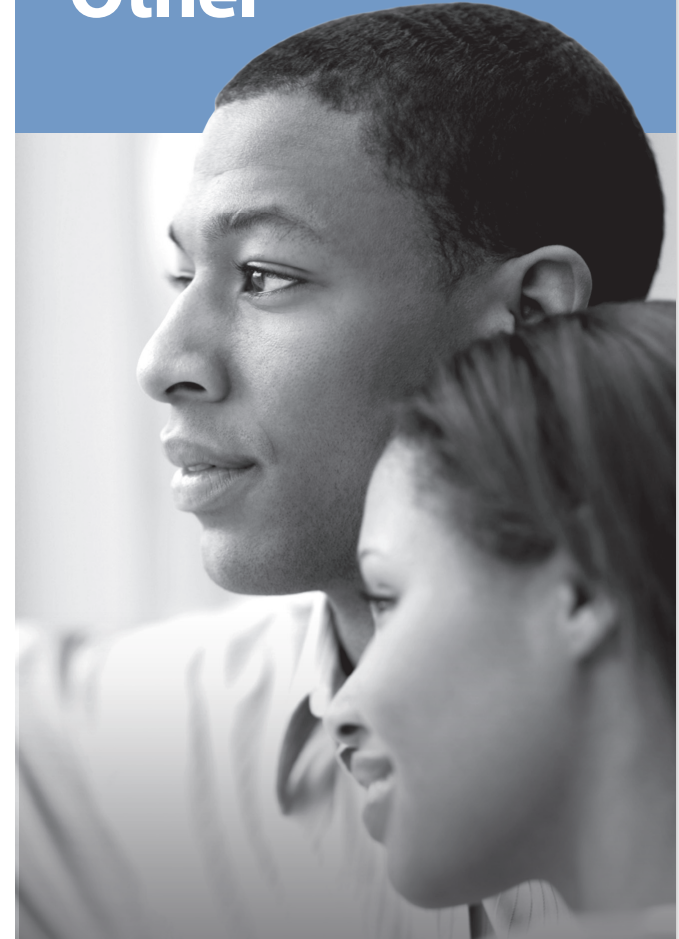
### Do:

- ▶ Do allow your partner to grieve.
- ▶ Do learn about the effects of sexual assault and the healing process.
- ▶ Do help the survivor regain a sense of control and make her/his own choices.
- ▶ Do validate her/his wide range of feelings.
- ▶ Do encourage therapy or attending a support group.
- ▶ Do respect boundaries and limits.
- ▶ Do (if you are romantic partners) communicate openly about sexuality.
- ▶ Do find time to be together.
- ▶ Do **listen** to the survivor.
- ▶ Do blame the offender **not** the survivor.
- ▶ Do be honest about your feelings.
- ▶ Do believe in the survivor and the healing process.

National Sexual Assault Hotline  
Free. Confidential. 24/7.

1-800-656-HOPE

# Practical Advice for the Significant Other



**taasa**  
TEXAS ASSOCIATION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

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## When the One You Love is a Victim of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is an extremely invasive violation that has a dramatic impact on the lives of its victims. This crime can also be traumatic for those who love the victim. Further, this experience might bring other problems within the family to the surface. Significant others might make the situation even more painful if they are not educated about this issue. Spouses should be aware that the divorce rate among sexual assault survivors is extremely high. Be prepared to work hard on recovery and the preservation of the relationship. In order to offer the best possible support while also maintaining and protecting the relationship it is important that significant others understand not only the impact of a sexual assault on the victim, but also how this incident will affect them personally.

### Some Important Facts

- ▶ The primary motive for sexual assault is power not sex.
- ▶ Someone's actions or dress cannot send a message "asking" to be raped.
- ▶ Most rapes are planned in advance. It is not an impulsive act.
- ▶ It is not uncommon for victims to "freeze" when confronted with danger. Not fighting back does not mean the victim "wanted it."
- ▶ A sexual assault brings up strong feelings of powerlessness. It is important to allow the victim to make choices and be in control of what they need and want to recover.

## The Impact of Sexual Assault on Partners and Significant Others

When the one you love becomes the victim of a sexual assault there are a multitude of emotions and stressors that you too will need to cope with.

### **You might feel guilty that you were unable to prevent this terrible thing from happening to your loved one.**

This is a natural feeling. However, had you known that your loved one was in danger and you could protect her/him from getting hurt, you surely would have done so. Further, being preoccupied with guilt will not change what has happened. More importantly, it will distract you from being able to give your full attention to coping and helping your loved one to cope with this tragedy.

### **You may feel rage toward the perpetrator and fantasize about revenge.**

This is a natural and an understandable reaction. However, seeking revenge could result in your arrest. You will be unable to provide the comfort or even the protection you wish for your loved one if you are in jail. Stay focused on your primary purpose of providing a safe space for your loved one to heal. Allow the authorities to take responsibility for bringing the assailant to justice.

### **You may also experience feelings of anger and resentment toward your loved one for not being "more careful."**

Naïve or even dangerous choices made by the victim do not justify what has happened. No one deserves to be raped, whatever the circumstances. The only person responsible for this attack is the rapist! It is important to focus the blame where it belongs – on the perpetrator!

### **Spouses and partners may find that they feel jealous that someone else had sexual contact with their partner.**

Remember this was not a mutual sexual "relationship." This was an assault just like any other physical attack. The perpetrator simply chose sex as a means to establish control and dominance over the victim. Sexual assault is an attempt to control and humiliate the victim. It is not a crime of passion or desire for a sexual relationship with that person.

### **You may find that you become the target of your loved one's overwhelming rage, sadness, and confusion.**

Again, try not to take this personally. An overflow of strong emotions is common and quite normal. Stay calm and reassuring. Remind your loved one that you are on her/his side. Encourage her/him to attend a support group or speak to a counselor at your local rape crisis center.

