

## taking care of yourself

It can be easy to forget that you need to look after yourself too. Here are some points to think about:

- Remember, you are not a miracle worker. You must be a special person for her to trust you.
- Make time to look after yourself. YOU are important too.
- Remember, you might feel helpless at times, but just being there is important in itself.
- Be gentle with yourself.
- Remember to have fun if you can.

Remember that you may need support too, so that you can continue to be supportive. It can be hard to see someone you care about in pain and distress. Being able to talk to someone in confidence can make a big difference. If you need information, guidance or to seek support contact us on our helpline: 0131 556 9437. We can offer you telephone support or face-to-face session(s) with a support worker.

**All our leaflets are available in larger print. If you would like copies please contact us on 0131 556 9437.**

We are committed to providing a high quality support service. For this reason, from time to time, our helpline is monitored internally for training purposes.

**July 2008**



**edinburgh women's rape  
and sexual abuse centre**  
support, advice and advocacy for women and girls

## useful contact numbers

### GUM Clinic

0131 536 2104

### Rape and Abuse Line

0808 800 0123

### Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline

Freephone helpline open daily:  
6pm-12midnight

08088 01 03 02

[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

### Samaritans

0131 221 9999

### The Amethyst Team

(Family Protection Unit)

0131 316 6600

## recommended reading

**Allies in healing: when the person you love was sexually abused as a child**

Laura Davis, ISBN-13: 978-0060968830

**Ghosts in the bedroom: A guide for partners of incest survivors**

Ken Graber, ISBN-13: 978-1558741164

**Recovery from rape**

Linda Ledray, ISBN-13: 978-0805029284

**Strong mothers: a resource for mothers and carers of children who have been sexually assaulted**

Anne Peake & Marion Fletcher,  
ISBN-13: 978-1898924043

These books are available to order through

**DABS: Directory and Book Services:**

tel: 01709 860023

[books@dabsbooks.co.uk](http://books@dabsbooks.co.uk)

[www.dabsbooks.co.uk](http://www.dabsbooks.co.uk)

**information for family,  
friends and partners**

**helpline: 0131 556 9437**

**administration, outreach  
& training: 0131 557 6737**

**minicom: 0131 557 6757**

**fax: 0131 558 1612**

**support@ewrasac.org.uk  
info@ewrasac.org.uk**

**c/o P.O. Box 120**

**Brunswick Road  
Edinburgh, EH7 5WX**

Registered Charity Ref. SC 006208

Registered as a limited company by guarantee No. 297142.  
Registered Company Address: Edinburgh Women's Rape  
and Sexual Abuse Centre, c/o Quartermile One, 15 Lauriston  
Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9EP

## about supporting a woman you know

If you are supporting someone who has been raped or sexually assaulted it can be painful and confusing at times. It is often difficult to know how to act or what to say. This leaflet aims to give some guidance on how to respond if a family member, partner or friend has experienced rape, sexual assault or sexual abuse in childhood.

It can take a long time for a woman to be able to talk about what has happened to her. It is important for her to be listened to and believed, regardless of when the abuse happened. If she chooses to talk to you, you can make it easier for her by:

- Making time to listen without judging, criticising or questioning.
- Not forcing her to talk. Be patient.
- Reassuring her that no-one has the right to rape or abuse her and that every woman has the right to be safe, in all circumstances.
- Understanding that survivors can experience a range of different reactions and emotions. She may feel calm and controlled, or feel nothing. She may feel anger, guilt or worthlessness and she may feel suicidal. These are a natural response to her experience. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way for a woman to react – and whichever way she does react is ok.

## do . . .

**Listen** – to what she has to say in her own time. It might not be easy for her to start talking to someone about an event that she has kept to herself. It may be difficult because she may have been told not to tell anyone by the abuser.

**Believe** – she needs you to believe. People rarely lie about rape or sexual abuse. It is important to believe.

**Respect** – her feelings and decisions. If she starts to cry let her. It can be part of her healing process.

**Remember** – she is not to blame. No-one wants or deserves to be abused. The blame lies with the abuser, not the woman.

**Recognise** – the courage it takes for her to speak out. This must be respected and praised.

**Empower** - a woman or girl who has experienced sexual violence may feel that she has no control over what is happening to her and how she is feeling. A major step towards healing is for her to regain a sense of control over her life.

## don't . . .

• Don't pressure her into talking about, or into doing things, that she is not ready for. Let her decide when she is ready. If she doesn't want to talk to you, don't take it personally. It can be incredibly difficult to begin talking, and she may find it easier to talk to someone she doesn't know.

• Don't tell her what to do. She needs to be in control. You can help to explore options that are available to her.

• Don't tell her to forget about it or say "It happened a long time ago, why does it suddenly bother you now?" Healing can take a long time and some people block out or try to forget traumatic events as a way of coping. Remembering can be triggered by events such as marriage, having a baby, a new relationship, or even smells or colours.

• Don't ask her why she didn't fight back. People can freeze when confronted with a terrifying situation. Also, it can be the safest thing not to fight back. She has nothing to justify to anyone.

• Don't ask why she didn't say anything sooner. If it happened when she was young she may have tried to tell someone but have been ignored or disbelieved. She may not have been able to understand or describe what happened to her. She may have felt entirely to blame for the abuse, have been threatened or have been too frightened to say anything. Most people do try to tell someone at some point.

• Don't cast doubt on what she tells you. Do listen and believe her, and be accepting of the way she is reacting. The fact that you are listening and believing DOES help.

## what about sexual contact?

If your partner has just been assaulted or has remembered past abuse which she has blocked out, she may find sexual and intimate contact difficult. It is important to realise that this is not your fault. It is to do with her feelings and memories. Reassure her and let her take things at her own pace. With your help, understanding and patience she can heal from the trauma.