

# DECIDING WHAT TO DO WHEN A FRIEND NEEDS HELP

## AS HARD AS IT IS TO BELIEVE...

Sexual abuse or sexual assault can happen to anyone. It is more common than we would like to think. Some sexual abuse involves family members and can go on over a period of years. Some sexual abuse involves peers and may just happen once. There really are no “typical” cases. There really are no “typical” victims. It can happen to girls and to boys. The offender can be someone the victim knows well, or only slightly. It is rarely a stranger, however.

## AS HARD AS IT IS TO TELL...

People who have been sexually abused or assaulted often want someone to talk to. They try to find someone who will listen and support them. They need someone they know and trust, and someone who will not blame or turn away from them. They often tell a friend before telling anyone else.

## AS HARD AS IT IS TO HEAR...

Hearing from a friend that he or she has been hurt is very difficult and can feel overwhelming. Being a friend means showing support and being understanding. It also means knowing when to seek adult assistance. *If a friend confides in you, you are already a trusted person.*

## TO SHOW YOU ARE SUPPORTIVE:

**Listen.** It does not matter so much what you say, but more how well you listen.

**Believe your friend.** People rarely make up stories about a sexual assault. Reassure your friend that he or she is not to blame. No matter what the situation, the offender is responsible for the assault.

### Ask for help.

Along with the story of what happened you might also hear that your friend is:

- Embarrassed
- Ashamed
- Fearful
- Feeling at fault
- Humiliated

It is understandable to want to be protective. It is tempting to think the best way to do that is to keep the abuse a secret from everyone. Although confidentiality is important, the best way to be truly protective is to ask for help from a trusted adult.

## WHAT TO DO NEXT:

Decide with your friend who in your lives you will tell. This person could be a parent, teacher or school counselor. Support staffs who work at sexual assault centers or counseling agencies also know how to help. Show that you care. This may be the first time your friend has ever told anyone about the sexual assault. Give whatever expression of support is comfortable for both of you. *There are laws in place to protect teens and children.*

## **IF YOU NEED HELP:**

If you have experienced date/acquaintance rape or dating violence, there are people who can help. Perhaps those you usually turn to for support can help:

- Parents
- Friends
- Brothers and sisters
- People at your church, temple, synagogue
- Trusted adults at your school

If you need support and information call KCSARC's 24-hour Resource Line at 888.99.VOICE.