

Adolescence is a time when young people are particularly vulnerable to rape and sexual assault.

If your teenager tells you they have been sexually assaulted, the first step to their recovery has been taken. They have chosen a trusted person to confide in.

The way you respond to your teenager's disclosure is very important. You may have strong feelings of your own to manage. You may not feel able to support your teenager, and may not know where to turn for information that will assist them.

This pamphlet will suggest how you can effectively understand and assist your teenager after a disclosure of rape or sexual assault. It will also identify some common reactions of parents to a disclosure of rape and sexual assault and provide information for support services for your teenager and yourself.

How can you help after a disclosure of rape or sexual assault

Believe your teenager.

Your response to your teenager's disclosure of a rape or sexual assault has a huge impact on their recovery. It is therefore important to convey that you believe entirely what they are saying.

Remain open to talking about the sexual assault when your teenager needs to, but don't ask lots of detailed questions about the actual event. It is more effective to ask what your teenager needs from you, and respond to their needs. For example, your teenager may say they do not want to talk about it. Respect this and reassure them. Allow them to talk about the assault, only if and when, they feel ready.

Convey a non-blaming attitude

It is vital that you do not judge the actions of your teenager. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the assault, what happened wasn't their fault. Your teenager had no control over the situation and was powerless to stop the assault.

Remember, nobody deserves to be raped or sexually assaulted. The responsibility for the rape or sexual assault remains solely with the perpetrator.

Teenagers will not speak out about what has happened if they think that others will blame them for the rape or sexual assault.

Be supportive

As a parent, you can assist your teenager by providing understanding, encouragement and support. To assist them to deal with such a traumatic experience, they need to believe that you still love them. This is because some

teenagers who have experienced a rape or sexual assault question their worthiness to be loved.

Your teenager needs to feel safe and secure after the rape or sexual assault. Try not to change how you effectively relate to your teenager or their usual routine. They need their surroundings and home environment to be safe and stable during this period of emotional upheaval.

While you may feel as if you need to protect your teenager from future incidents, it is important that they do not feel confined and are encouraged to redevelop a sense of freedom and independence.

Decision making

Understand and acknowledge that the rape or sexual assault may have left your teenager feeling powerless. You can help restore their power by allowing them to make their own informed decisions regarding action around the sexual assault. This may mean gathering information regarding the legal, medical and counselling choices available on your teenager's behalf.

Discuss with your teenager how *they* would prefer to respond to the rape or sexual assault. Remember that your teenager has to be ready and willing to undertake the challenging journey associated with police action and/or counselling. You may want your teenager to seek justice using the legal system. However, this needs to be the decision of your teenager as it is only something they can pursue. Understand that once a sexual offence has been reported to the police, the police may pursue the matter regardless of your teenager's wishes.

For more information regarding the choices available for your teenager, please contact Yarrow Place.

PARENTS REACTION TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

After a disclosure of rape or sexual assault from your teenager, you may experience some of these common reactions.

Guilt and self blame

You may experience feelings of failure for not protecting your teenager from the sexual assault. Sometimes parents feel that they should have known that their teenager was at risk of sexual assault. This is particularly so when the perpetrator is a family member or friend.

It is important to remember that you are not to blame. You could not have known it was going to happen. Remind yourself that had you been aware of the risk to your teenager, you would have intervened in whatever way possible.

Anger

You may feel intense anger at the perpetrator of the assault. Your intense anger may result in your desire to retaliate using violence towards the perpetrator. This may be particularly pertinent if the perpetrator was known to your family. However, it is important to understand the consequences of these actions for you, your teenager and your family. Keep in mind how your actions may effect your teenager's recovery.

Shock, confusion and powerlessness

You may feel like you are in shock or that it hasn't really happened to your teenager. Understanding what has happened may take some time for both your teenager and yourself. You may feel very upset, confused and may feel that you no longer have any control or power over the events in your life. However, it is important to ensure that your own emotions do not cloud your capacity to effectively support your teenager.

ACCESSING SUPPORT FOR YOUR TEENAGER AND YOURSELF

You should not feel like it is up to you alone to help your teenager through what may be a difficult time for them.

Yarrow Place offers 24 hour, free, confidential counselling and medical services, for people who were 16 or over at the time of the rape or sexual assault. Yarrow Place also offers counselling and advice for people who are supporting someone who has experienced a rape or sexual assault.

For an appointment to see a counsellor for your teenager and/or yourself, please contact Yarrow Place.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS FOR YOUR TEENAGER

Yarrow Place *does not* offer a service to people who were under 16 years of age at the time of the sexual assault. Some agencies which may be able to assist include;

Sexual Assault Unit of the Police

Ph: 8463 7600

Child Protection Services

Ph: 8204 5485 or 8204 7346

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services

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| Northern region | Ph: 8252 0133 |
| Southern region | Ph: 8298 7744 |
| Eastern region | Ph: 8207 8999 |
| Western region | Ph: 8341 1222 |

The Second Story

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| City | Ph: 8232 0233 |
| Elizabeth | Ph: 8255 3477 |
| Christies Beach | Ph: 8326 6053 |



Information for Parents whose teenager has experienced a rape or sexual assault

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