TAMU – Survivor Support Guide

http://studentlife.tamu.edu/sas.supportguide

The following information was compiled to assist Texas A&M University faculty and staff in working with survivors of sexual violence.  Many survivors feel loss of control over their lives.  Therefore, the ultimate goal for University faculty and staff when approached by students is to empower the student to make her/his own decision(s) in a supportive and nonjudgmental manner.

 There is no one way a survivor will feel or act after being victimized.  However, oftentimes survivors are unsure how to deal with their feelings and the behaviors that stem from these feelings.  They may also be confused about their legal, administrative, health, and social support options. If members of the University community are aware of the options available to survivors, they will be in a better position to assist survivors.

UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL ASSAULT

**Who Commits Sexual Assault?**

Ninety percent of college women who are survivors of rape or attempted rape know their assailant.  Their attacker is often a classmate, friend, boyfriend, or ex-boyfriend (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000).  In the case of male survivors, the assailant is almost always a heterosexual-identified male (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), but sexual assault can be perpetrated by either gender and upon individuals of either gender.

**Who Are The Survivors?**

More than ninety percent of all sexual assault survivors are female, but men can also be sexually assaulted or raped. Regardless of gender, sexual assault is never the fault of the victim. Offenders are always responsible for the choice to assault someone else. The only person who can prevent this crime from occurring is the perpetrator.

**What is the Difference Between a Victim and a Survivor?**

The terms ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ are typically interchanged words for the injured party in a sexual violence incident. However, there is a subtle difference. A victim is someone who has recently been attacked, or is currently in an abusive situation, while a survivor has begun to move past the experience and seek help. Please try to use the term “survivor” following an assault.

## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

 When dealing with students who have encountered any form of sexual violence, it is important to keep the following things in mind:

* Assume that what s/he tells you did happen. According to the FBI, 99% of reports are true.
* Be a patient and active listener.
* Do not press for details.
* Offer comfort, but do not touch the survivor unless invited to do so.
* Reassure her/him that what happened is NOT okay and that s/he is not at fault nor alone.
* Allow the survivor to take CONTROL– do not make decisions for her/him.
* Offer information regarding available resources.
* Remind the survivor that s/he has options.
* Offer support – Remember that you are not serving in the role of a therapist; however, the survivor may need your continued support.
* Find information if you do not know the answers – it’s okay not to be the expert, but be sure to help the survivor find someone who is.
* Educate yourself about sexual violence – seek information and utilize the resources available before an incident is reported to you.
* Know  the University’s protocol for reporting a sexual assault – As an employee, you have a legal obligation to report a sexual assault if you are given the alleged perpetrator’s identifying information.
* Refer to the [Sexual Violence Resource Guide](http://studentlife.tamu.edu/sas.resourceguide) for a list of on- and off-campus resources.