

Top 10 Best Ways to Help A Friend

- 1. Be aware of your thoughts and feelings.** Acknowledge your perceptions of the issues and your reactions both prior to and during conversations with your loved one. Your perspectives and feelings impact how you convey thoughts and are perceived by the person who has been affected.
- 2. Express your concerns.** While your loved one is the expert in his/her own life, you also have a distinct perspective of his/her situation. Perhaps you have recognized the impact of violence or abuse in his/her life. It is okay to reinforce his/her reality or to share your concerns for his/her safety. Acknowledge the difficult, scary, dangerous, etc. situation. Trust your instincts. Be prepared: Your concerns may not be accepted.
- 3. Remain calm.** If someone you know seeks your support, the dialogue should be to empower them. Releasing strong emotions in an uncontrolled fashion may cause your friend to encounter a situation where he/she is out of control, echoing his/her traumatic experience. As someone who cares, it is not uncommon to experience your own emotions. However, consider confiding in a trusted friend, family member, or professional.
- 4. Listen.** The most effective means of support is listening. Creating a space where he/she can release thoughts and emotions without the confinements of judgment gives control to your friend, something he/she has had taken from them. Let your loved one guide the discussion, even if his/her train of thought appears inconsistent.
- 5. Believe him/her.** A common concern of survivors is that he/she will not be believed if he/she shares his/her experience. By demonstrating your belief in your friend/loved one, you are reinforcing the path for healing and change.
- 6. Recognize your friend's strengths.** Building upon your loved one's strengths can help him/her heal. Identify his/her resiliency, willingness to share his/her experiences, optimism, etc.
- 7. Be nonjudgmental.** Identifying how your friend could have acted or should have responded can re-traumatize him/her. Most likely, your friend/loved one has these thoughts flowing through his/her head. Reinforcing these thoughts can lead to victim-blaming. Regardless of your loved one's decisions, he/she did not deserve or cause the violence or abuse.
- 8. Empower your friend to make his/her own decisions.** Your loved one is an adult. He/she knows his/her own experiences more intimately than anyone else can. You can never fully understand his/her feelings and thoughts. It is ultimately his/her decision how to respond. Remember, your primary role should be to provide support, not solve the problem. Approach the possible avenues for help as options, not required steps.
- 9. Reach out for support.** Know campus and community resources. If you don't have the answer, say you don't. Providing support does not have to fall solely on your shoulders. Contact a community resource or Belles Against Violence Office. You are not alone.
- 10. Be there. And stay there.** Never underestimate the power of unconditional support. Your friend/loved one will encounter a roller coaster of emotions. At times, he/she may pull away or display anger or resentment toward you. Other times, he/she may appear to have returned to normal. It is important to recognize that this reaction is common. Despite this, it is important to demonstrate consistent support.