

<http://pubweb.ucdavis.edu/Documents/RPEP/friend.htm>
Helping A Friend

Medical attention should be sought as soon as possible whether or not the assault is reported. The victim may have been injured without her knowledge. She also needs to be tested/treated for venereal disease and pregnancy. She may request that medical evidence be taken (which is required for the report). The evidence exam is similar to a Pap Smear exam (also includes gathering of semen, hair, and particles of the attacker's clothing, and description of physical injuries.)

* If the assault is reported, there is no charge for evidence gathering. If the woman needs medical attention, medication and v.d. and pregnancy tests, she is responsible for payment.

Emotional care and support is extremely important to your loved one right now. She has been violated, degraded and has probably lost trust in people. You can help her regain her dignity, respect and trust by:

Listening

- Let her talk about the experience.
- Give her the chance to talk about her feelings.
- Don't pry or ask for specific details.
- Be there just to listen or sit with her quietly.

Supporting her

- Tell her you care about her and how she is feeling.
- Respond to any emotions she is having as understandable and normal.
- Help her to get professional help.
- Don't be judgmental about her actions before, during, or after their assault; remember that no one has the right to treat another person the way she was treated.

Taking care of yourself

- Recognize your own limitations.
- Suggest she talk with someone who is trained to help sexual assault victims.
- Don't Project your feelings onto her, such as anger, blame or frustration. She is not your damaged property; she is a person who has been attacked.
- Seek understanding from a friend or professional counselor. Your feelings matter too.

After the assault she may not feel like herself for several weeks. Many victims experience shock and disbelief, followed by fear, helplessness, shame, anxiety and anger. Expect and be prepared for times of depression, nightmares, and personality changes. Women often need to talk about the experience repeatedly until their anxiety decreases and they can begin to deal with the aftereffects of the assault. It is important that they talk to a supportive and sympathetic person.

Making love can often be comforting in times of stress, but remember, she was violated by someone who perverted the act of love. What is most important now is the reassurance that she is still loved. This can be expressed by cuddling, holding, and non-sexual caressing. Please move at her own speed; she has placed a lot of trust in you.