SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR

It is not always easy to know what to say when someone tells you they have been a victim of violence or harassment, especially if they are a friend or family member. Telling someone they care about can be very difficult, so we encourage you to be as supportive and non-judgmental as possible. Sometimes support means providing resources, such as how to reach advocates, seek medical attention, or report the crime to the police or the campus. But usually listening is the best way to support a survivor.

What Should I Say?
If someone shares their experience of sexual or relationship violence, stalking, or sexual harassment with you it can be difficult to know what to say. The options below can help:

“\textit{I believe you.}“
Sharing their experience can be challenging and many survivors are concerned that they will not be believed or worried they will be blamed. The best thing you can do is to let them know that you believe them. Everyone responds to traumatic events differently so their reaction may seem unexpected, but that does not mean their story is not true.

“\textit{It is not your fault.}“
Survivors may blame themselves, especially if they know the perpetrator personally. Remind the survivor, maybe even more than once, that they are not to blame.

“\textit{You are not alone.}“
Let the survivor know that you are there for them and willing to listen to their story if they are comfortable sharing it. Assess if there are people in their life they feel comfortable going to, and remind them that there are service providers who will be able to support them as they heal.

“\textit{I am sorry this happened.}“
Acknowledge that the experience has affected their life. Phrases like “This must be really tough for you,” and, “I am so glad you are sharing this with me,” help to communicate empathy.
PROVIDING CONTINUED SUPPORT

Every survivor heals in a different way. If someone trusted you enough to disclose to you, consider the following ways to show your continued support.

**Avoid judgment.**
It can be difficult to watch a survivor struggle with the effects of violence or harassment for an extended period of time. Avoid phrases that suggest they are taking too long to recover.

**Check in periodically.**
The event may have happened a long time ago, but that does not mean the pain is gone. Check in with the survivor to remind them you still care about their well-being and believe their story.

**Know your resources.**
You are a strong supporter, but that does not mean you are equipped to manage someone else’s health. Become familiar with resources you can recommend to a survivor like the ones listed above. If the survivor seeks medical attention or plans to report, offer to be there. Your presence can offer the support they need.

If someone you care about is considering suicide please visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or call 1.800.273.TALK (8255) any time, day or night.