

## Fact Sheet

# Being the Support Person

## Disclosure

Disclosure is when an individual speaks out about an assault. Whether historical (childhood), recent, or ongoing, disclosure usually means that the individual is seeking help and they trust you. Family members, health professionals, teachers, and peers are most commonly the first point of contact and the most supportive during the recovery process.

The initial reactions that an individual received when disclosing a sexual assault can have a strong impact on how they proceed and what decisions they make. For example a reaction that suggests the assault may not have been 'that bad' or that the individual was in some way to 'blame' will often have an extremely negative impact. Suggestions of shame and guilt may prevent that person from seeking further support, including essential medical care and treatment.

## Supporting friends

Some suggestions of how to respond if someone close to you discloses a sexual assault:

- Listen to what they have to say
- Do not judge their actions
- Allow them to talk as much or as little as they want
- Encourage them to seek appropriate help
- Support them through the process
- Encourage them to eat and sleep well
- Understand that they may experience ups and downs
- Allow them time to heal
- Validate their feelings, thoughts, and emotions
- Spend time with them doing things they enjoy
- Remember it is about them not you or potential feelings you may have about the event

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/>