

### What about my feelings?

The feelings you are experiencing are justified, but may add to the emotional distress for the survivor. They may feel responsible for upsetting you. Safeline can also offer you support in coping with your emotions. The Safeline helpline and website are open to family and friends and we also run groups for carers, family members or friends.



For more information or an informal chat please contact us at:

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**3 Trinity Mews**  
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- Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales
- BBC Children in Need
- Warwickshire County Council
- Stratford-upon-Avon Town Trust - a registered charity
- Home Office
- The Coalfields Regeneration Trust



**Safeline**  
Surviving Abuse



## Information for families, carers and friends of survivors

Ring us today for free confidential advice in a safe environment

**01926 408 315**

Counselling Support Groups  
Library Services  
Befriending Website  
Freephone Helpline:  
0808 800 5005

It is important for a survivor of sexual abuse to be listened to, and believed, whether they have recently been attacked, or are talking about events that happened some time ago, for example, in their childhood.



This leaflet aims to give some helpful information on how to respond if you are in the situation where a family member, partner or friend has just started speaking out about their own experience of childhood sexual abuse or rape.

#### Do not...

Do not tell them to forget about it.

Do not say "it happened a long time ago, why does it suddenly bother you now?"

Healing can take time and some people block or try to forget traumatic events. This is a way of coping with the trauma of abuse.

Remembering can be triggered by events such as the birth of a baby, a TV programme, marriage, changing job, starting a new relationship, death of an abuser etc.

Do not ask them why they did not fight back. People can freeze when confronted with a terrifying situation.

Do not ask them why they did not say anything sooner. If it happened when they were young they may have tried to tell but were ignored or disbelieved. Most people do try to tell someone at some time.

Do not tell them what to do. They need to be in control of their own decisions about matters that affect them. You can help them to explore options that are available to them.

Do not pressure them into doing, or talking about things they are not ready to face. When they are ready, they will speak.

#### How can I help?

**LISTEN** to what they have to say and let them take their time. It might not be easy for them to start talking about an event that they have kept silent about for a long time. It may be difficult because they may have been told not to tell by the abuser at the time.

**BELIEVE** people, they rarely lie about sexual abuse or rape. Why would they? It is important to believe what they are saying.

**RESPECT** both their feelings and decisions. If they feel like crying, let them, it can be part of their healing process.

**REMEMBER** it is not their fault. No one asks to be abused and they cannot be blamed for not preventing the abuse. The blame lies with the abuser.

**RECOGNISE** the courage it takes for a survivor to speak. It takes a great deal of courage to face up to fears and also talk about any concerns.

#### What about sexual contact?

If it is your partner that has just remembered some past abuse, which they have blocked out, they may find sexual and intimate contact difficult. It is important to realise that it is not something to do with you – it is do with the memories and feelings they have. Reassure them and let them take things at their own pace. With your help, patience and understanding, they can heal from trauma.