

During a time of crisis and/or emergency, survivors may turn to friends or family for their initial support. Family and friends may feel ill-equipped to properly support those who have just shared their experience of sexual violence. As family and friends who are on the receiving end of a disclosure the words that we use, if appropriate, can aid in the healing process. As family and friends and those who are disclosed to, here is one thing that you can say to assist a survivor in their healing.

I believe you.

Let's imagine for a second that you have experienced a crisis or have been in an emergency situation (other than a sexual assault). As you seek help for your crisis, you are at a loss for what and how to say exactly what has happened to you. Your emotions are everywhere, you may or may not cry, you may or may not be angry, and you may just be numb. As you open up to the first person who you have identified as a trusted or safe person, they immediately respond with questions. The questions are centered on your ability to recount the event. You are asked are you sure that it is what you said it was. What is the likelihood that you would continue to seek help? How many times are you willing to risk not being believed?

Doubt of the survivor's word occurs not only for the support people but also for the survivor. Those feelings of doubt and uncertainty of what to do, and what to say create fear for all involved. Survivors may be questioning the details of the assault and may be having difficulty in even expressing that an assault has taken place.

"I believe you" is one of the most important set of words that you can say to a survivor. It is an unfortunate reality that many survivors are not believed when they disclose their sexual assault. It takes a lot out of a survivor to make a disclosure of sexual assault when there is no assurance that the person you shared with will believe you. The first words after a disclosure, of **I believe you** will allow for the survivor to know that it is safe to continue on with their story and seek the additional help that they may need.

There is help.

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As support people of those who are survivors of sexual violence, we may feel lost or helpless without tangible resources to provide to our loved ones.

Fortunately, **there is help.**

If someone you know has disclosed surviving sexual violence to you, say with confidence, **“There is help.”** Provide 855-VOICES4 to your loved one.

When your loved one calls the VOICES4 hotline, their call will be received by an advocate who has been trained in providing empathetic listening, support and warm referrals.

There is help for you as well. 855-VOICES4 can assist you with what to say to be supportive as well as provide support to you as you aide the survivor through their immediate crisis.