WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS ASSAULTED…

It is normal for you to feel angry and/or confused.

- You may feel helpless and blame yourself.
- You may feel responsible for “fixing it”.
- You may be tempted to make decisions for the survivor, or be over-protective.
- You may want to hide the assault from others - afraid of what other people might think about your loved one or about you.
- You may find it difficult to listen when the survivor needs to talk about feelings. You may hope that by not talking about “it”, the feelings both of you are having will go away.

DO’S AND DON’TS

You can become an important part in your loved one’s healing process.
There are several things you can do to help:

• Do let your loved one lead you and tell you what s/he needs.
• Do let your loved one know s/he is not to blame for what happened - that there is nothing that justifies sexual assault. Continue telling your loved one, "it was not your fault".

WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE AFTER A SEXUAL ASSAULT…

Every sexual assault survivor reacts differently and at different times.

- You might see some changes in behavior in your loved one after the assault.
- Your loved one might become very emotional, have drastic mood changes, or s/he might become controlled and numb.
- Some survivors of sexual assault seem to go on with their lives unaffected and then experience reactions later on, sometimes years later. Other survivors may respond immediately.

All of these reactions are very common and are a normal part of coping with sexual assault.

*Confidential counseling is available for your loved one and for you.
• **Do** help your loved one regain a sense of control over her/his life that s/he lost during the sexual assault. One way to do this is to let your loved one make his/her own decisions and choices *without being judged*.

• **Do** let your loved one know you care and that it is OK to talk about the assault *whenever they are ready*. Talking is part of the healing process.

• **Do** let your loved one decide whether or not to report to the police and participate in an investigation.

• **Do** tell your loved one that s/he is *not* going crazy. **Don’t** assume that you know what your loved one is feeling.

• **Do** watch for warning signs: if your loved one says that s/he wants to kill or hurt her/himself or other people, encourage her/him to talk to someone at SACASA or a mental health agency for counseling. In extreme cases you might have to make the contact yourself.

• **Don’t** ask “why” questions. (For example, “Why were you out so late?”). “Why” questions suggest that it was their fault.

• **Don’t** assume you already know what is best for her/him.

• **Don’t** take away choices or options. (For example, “I’ll take care of everything because I know what’s best for you”).

• **Don’t** make decisions for your loved one unless s/he specifically asks you to. Even then, always keep her/him informed.

• **Don’t** pressure your loved one to talk, s/he may need more time. The best thing you can do is to always be patient with your loved one.

• **Don’t** second guess your loved one’s decision. Your loved one needs to put control back into her/his life.

• However your loved one reacts know that s/he is *NOT* going crazy!

WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS ASSAULTED...

IF THE SURVIVOR IS YOUR SPOUSE OR PARTNER...

Your partner may need days, weeks, or months before being intimate with you. (This may include touching, hugging, kissing, having sex, etc). Don’t take it personally if your partner pulls away or does not want to be intimate with you after the assault. Your partner is responding to the memory of the assault, not to you.

**Do not blame yourself.**
KEEP IN MIND…

φ *Any type of sexual assault is a violent crime.*
Rape is *not* about having sex or about being turned on. Sex is only the weapon. Many people confuse rape and sex just because the same parts of the body are involved. It is important that your loved one understands that rape is *not* sex. It is also just as important that your partner knows that you *know* that rape is not sex.

φ *Always listen to your partner and respect her/his boundaries.*
There may be times when your partner might decide that s/he feels ready to be intimate with you, but may suddenly change her/his mind after you have started—this could even happen right in the middle of having sex. This is very normal. **It is extremely important** that you listen to your partner and stop what you are doing as soon as s/he tells you to. Your partner needs to know that s/he has complete control over what happens to her/his body. Be patient and go at your partner’s pace.

φ *Tell your partner that you love (care) for her/him.*
Don’t ever physically *force* affection on your partner, even if it’s just a hug to show how much you care. If your partner does not want to be touched, don’t touch her/him. By doing this, you are helping your partner take back some of the control s/he lost during the assault.

DON’T FORGET TO
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF TOO!
YOU WILL BE A BETTER SUPPORT
FOR YOUR LOVED ONE.