

## **AFTER SEXUAL ASSAULT: WHAT FRIENDS CAN DO TO HELP**

Rape or sexual assault is any sexual contact manipulated, coerced, or forced on a person by a stranger or someone they know. It can be hugging, kissing, touching, or intercourse. It is never the victim's fault. The assailant is responsible, regardless of whatever risks the victim took that increased her vulnerability.

Each person's reaction to being sexually assaulted is unique. Your friend may be calm or upset, eager or reluctant to talk, willing or unwilling to take action, able to continue daily activities or in need of non-routine time and space to heal. As a friend:

- **Believe what you are told.** Accept her experience as the way it happened for her. Don't second guess your friend's behavior.
- **Assure your friend that she is not responsible for the assault.** Many survivors of assault blame themselves for the attack. Let your friend know that no one deserves to be assaulted and that her attacker is responsible for the assault, not her.
- **Let your friend take control of her own recovery.** Sexual assault is an experience in loss of control. It isn't helpful to further rob your friend of control by pushing her. The decisions your friend makes about how to cope with the assault will depend on many variables. **You can help your friend by identifying options and possible outcomes while letting her make the decisions.**
- **Encourage your friend to seek medical attention.** Physical injuries from sexual assault can range from scratches and bruises through severe trauma and are not always visible. Survivors of rape need to protect themselves from STDs and pregnancy. If your friend decides to press charges, a properly conducted physical examination can provide important evidence.
- **Provide emotional support.** Your friend has confided in you because she trusts you and needs your comfort. Follow your comforting instincts – let your friend express all of her emotions, use touch, tone of voice or whatever seems appropriate to communicate your caring. Ask your friend about what helps.
- **Remember that some sexual assault victims are male.**
- **Listen. Listen some more.** As your friend goes through the immediate aftermath of the assault and moves into the long term (sometimes months or more) healing process, he/she may need to review what happened over and over or just be with you without talking.
- **Get support for yourself.** You are a co-survivor. You have your own reactions to the assault – they may include anger, vengefulness, helplessness, sadness, and confusion. Find your own support person to help you talk about what you are experiencing.

Cabrini College Counseling and Psychological Services provides free and confidential counseling for Cabrini students. To make an appointment, call 610-902-8561 or stop by the office in Grace Hall, Room 174.