



With sexual violence dominating the headlines, thousands of people are coming forward and sharing their stories of sexual assault. The National Sexual Assault Hotline experienced a significant increase of more than 30 percent this past week alone. At the same time, there are thousands of survivors who may never share their stories with anyone. Whether you are a survivor or not, this news coverage can be deeply distressing.

Heading into the weekend, we wanted to take this moment to point you to some tools—words, actions, and resources—to help you to take care of yourself and to support someone who shares their personal experiences with you.

As we take in events, information, and opinions from the media, it takes a toll on each of us in a very personal way. When we interact with our environment, like the news stories of this week, it can awaken memories of a past experience—your own or a loved one’s—that can affect us in the moment.

Begin by checking-in with yourself and asking yourself if you are safe. Do an analysis of how your mind and body feel—what emotions are you feeling? Are you experiencing thoughts or memories related to your own or a loved one’s trauma? Are you feeling tension in your body or are you holding your breath? Common bodily responses to trauma include tension, fear, anger, sadness and maybe even feeling unsafe. Remind yourself that what you are experiencing is a common response to your own experience of a traumatic event. If you are feeling in any way unsafe, create a safety plan such as calling a friend or talking to your therapist if you have one. What can you bring in to help you build safety and what support can you access? Having a good source of support can make a difference in your healing process.

Allow your feelings to exist and be gentle with yourself as you process them. It is common for us to feel shame or guilt for feeling a certain way or for having a certain response, such as crying. As you allow your feelings to surface, it can be easier to cope with them. There are other creative and helpful ways of addressing your thoughts and feelings about this situation such as talking, journaling, drawing or making a collage. Additionally, creating daily practices that involve exercise, relaxation or breathing exercises can help you release tension from your mind and body and reduce stress. While these suggestions may seem like enough in the moment, this is a first step to check in with yourself. Each of us knows best how to care for ourselves. [You can get more information about self-care practices on our website.](#)

As you are caring for yourself you may also be called upon to help someone who shares their experience with you. You don’t have to be an expert to support someone. All you have to do is listen. Listen without judgment. Listen with an open heart. [Here are a few tips that can help you feel more confident.](#)

Listen. Validate. Ask what more you can do to help.

In listening to a person's story, your response can have an enormous impact on that person's healing journey. Although you can never take away what happened to someone, you can be a source of comfort. Just remember, if someone shares their story with you, that means you're probably already a person they look to for support, compassion, and guidance. Supporting someone does not have to mean listening to or sharing the details of what happened, but it can mean connecting to that person's experience now. You just have to be yourself.

Know where to point someone to for more help.

You can best help the survivor by offering options and leaving space for them to decide where to go from there. Here are some national resources—services that can point someone to local resources in your area.

If you or someone you know needs help, please contact:

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network

1 (800) 656-4673 | www.rainn.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1 (800) 799-7233 | www.ndvh.org

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline

1 (866) 331-9474 | www.loveisrespect.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1 (800) 273-8255 | www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.

As I have said so many times before, it matters deeply how we respond to these issues—and we all have a role to play in creating a society that supports survivors and doesn't tolerate sexual assault. Remember you can be your best self for someone else when you give yourself space to honor your needs.

With gratitude,



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Joyful Heart Foundation

