

We're listening. We believe.

end violence  
*wise*  
share hope ♦ change lives

**Surviving Sexual Violence**  
information, tips and resources

## Getting started

You have the right to control what happens to your body. Being touched or interacted with sexually in a way that you did not want is a violation of your rights over your body. If this happened to you, no matter what the circumstances, it was not your fault and it was not okay.

Everyone has their own thoughts, feelings, and responses to sexual violence. This booklet offers information that may be helpful to you in trying to understand the dynamics and impact of sexual violence - whether it has happened to you or someone you care about.

It is important that each person can make choices for themselves after being impacted by sexual violence. Each person is the expert in their own life. With information, resources, and support, everyone can make the best decisions for what comes next.

**You survived.**

**This is your life.**

**You and only you can make the choices  
that are right for you.**

## You are not alone . . .

- **1 in 4** girls and **1 in 20** boys will be sexually abused or assaulted before they turn 17 (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, Hamby, 2014).
- **22%** Black women, **18.8%** White non-Hispanic women, **14.6%** Hispanic women, **10%** Asian/Pacific Islander women, and **33.5%** women identifying as multiracial (non-Hispanic) report being raped in their lifetime (CDC, NISVS, 2010-2012).
- American Indian and Alaska Native women experience sexual assault at a rate **2.5** times higher than women in general, and are most likely to be assaulted by a non-native perpetrator (DOJ, American Indians and Crime, 2004).
- **47%** trans people have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime (U.S. Transgender Survey, 2015). Trans people and bisexual women experience the highest rates of sexual violence overall (CDC, NISVS, 2011).
- **1 in 4** college women report surviving rape or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime (Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000;

Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). This rate has remained steady since studies in the 1980s (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewki, 1987).

- **1 in 5** women and **1 in 71** men in the U.S. have been raped at some time in their lives (CDC, SV Facts at a Glance, 2012).
- **1 in 3** women and **1 in 6** men in the U.S. experienced some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime (CDC, NIPSVS, 2010-2012).
- For male victims, **52.4%** are raped by an acquaintance and **15.1%** by a stranger (CDC, NIPSVS, 2010-2012).
- For female rape survivors, **98.1%** of the time a male was the perpetrator. For male rape survivors, **93%** of the time, a male was the perpetrator (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, & Merrick, 2011).
- **91.9%** of female victims of rape were a partner or acquaintance of the perpetrator (CDC, NIPSVS 2011).
- Sexual assault is one of the most under reported crimes, with **60%** left unreported (U.S. Department of Justice, 2008-2012).

## What is sexual violence?

You should be touched only in the ways you want to be. **Any sexual behavior or contact that occurs without consent is sexual violence.** It is a violation. The following are common terms that are used to describe sexual violence. If they do not feel quite right, use whatever language works for you. It is your life to define as you choose.

An act that involves any non-consensual physical, sexual contact is called **sexual assault**. The term **rape** is used when the sexual assault includes penetration of the mouth, anus or vagina, no matter how slight. The penetration can be with a body part or foreign object.

**Voyeurism** is when someone (or people) watches you in a private or sexual situation and you did not agree or know they were there.

**Sexual harassment** is when sexual words, pictures or gestures are used which create a hostile environment.

Laws on sexual violence vary. Even if something is not illegal, it has an impact on the person(s) and is not okay.

The majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the victim knows—an acquaintance, friend, family member or partner, for example. Some people are assaulted by strangers. Whether or not the victim knows the perpetrator, it is always violence.

Research shows that most people who perpetrate sexual assault are men, no matter who the victim is. Many male perpetrators commit sexual assault multiple times against a number of people. This is not the same thing as saying all men are rapists. Other people can also perpetrate sexual assault, although it is much less common.

Sexual violence is a type of **gender-based violence**. No matter who the perpetrators or victims are, the violence reflects a history of men being expected to have power over others. Sexual violence is one tool that is used to maintain this power imbalance.

## Consent

Consent is how we know that every person involved is willing to participate in what is happening. It is everyone's responsibility when engaging in sexual activities to understand if their partner wants to be doing the activity. Getting consent requires that we understand everyone is autonomous, has different experiences, and feels comfortable with what is happening. Consent is the minimum requirement.

For there to be consent, every person must be able to freely choose - without force, manipulation, or coercion. If there is any vagueness or confusion about whether or not someone wants to participate, sexual activity should not happen. Words, body language, and participation should all communicate that a person wants to participate. If any of these are missing or are unclear, the sexual activity should stop.



Rapists often make it seem like consent is confusing – as if there is a miscommunication or misunderstanding. They intentionally ignore victims’ words and body language. Rapists may use alcohol, drugs, pressure, past sexual activity, isolation, or any other tool they can think of to take away victims’ agency and credibility. They may target people’s vulnerabilities, or do things that make it seem like what happened was romantic rather than violent.

People who are incapacitated by drugs or alcohol, or who are asleep, cannot consent. If someone is afraid of consequences for saying no, it is not consent. Having sex with someone in the past does not mean there is consent to other times or for any activity.

Minors who are under the legal age of consent, cannot consent. Every state has laws about the age at which someone can legally consent to sexual activity. The age of consent laws exist to protect young people who may be manipulated by someone older and with more power or authority.

Understanding whether or not someone is consenting to sexual activity is not confusing. Consent means that it is clear that everyone wants to participate in the activity. If it is ever unclear whether or not someone is interested in being sexual, it is not consensual.

If you are not able to make a genuine decision about a sexual activity, then you are not given the opportunity to consent. A genuine decision means that you know what you want - without any fear of consequences - that you are able to communicate your needs and wants, and that your needs and wants are respected throughout the experience.

It is sexual violence if someone ignores what you are saying, how you are acting, or if you do not have the chance to communicate what you want. It is sexual violence if someone does not get your consent for sexual activity, or if what you communicate is ignored. **It was not your fault.**

## Alcohol & other drugs at the time of the assault

If you were assaulted after using alcohol or other drugs, or if you were given a substance without your knowledge, it is called **drug-facilitated sexual assault**.

Some victims are given alcohol and other drugs without their knowledge to cloud their judgment or make it impossible to remember what happened. It may not be clear if you were given drugs, especially if you were drinking alcohol. If you felt different from how you have felt before, or you have no memory of the situation and this is unusual for you, you may have been drugged. You know your body best and know when something is not right.

If you were using alcohol or other drugs recreationally before being assaulted, the perpetrator(s) may have known and targeted you. Perpetrators sometimes use drugs or drinking as a way to camouflage their behavior and make people question your credibility, memory, or make it seem like a regular party or hook up. Being drunk or on drugs does not cause sexual violence. It is a tool used to commit sexual violence. The assault was not your fault.

## Responses to sexual assault

When we are in danger, our bodies get ready to protect ourselves by turning on our survival system. The survival response makes us freeze, run away, fight back, or submit. Many victims say they thought they were going to be killed when they were being assaulted. Many could not process what was happening or how it could be happening. When we feel this kind of threat, a common reaction is to freeze or submit. This is normal and instinctive. It is what humans do to survive the experience.

A freezing reaction means you cannot fight or scream even if you want to or think you should. This reaction might happen subconsciously or it could be a decision you make to survive. Freezing might be the safest option. If this was your experience, it might feel as though you did not defend yourself. Sometimes this response can make it more difficult to talk to others about the assault(s). You might be worried that they will not understand that you could not fight back. You did what you had to do to survive and it worked. We know this to be true because you are reading this booklet.

## Dissociation during sexual assault

Dissociation is the sense of being detached from, or “not in” one’s body. It is common, instinctive, and important for surviving traumatic events. It helps us get through situations that we otherwise may not be able to endure. It is a way to protect ourselves from something we should not have to experience.

During an assault, you may feel as though you left your body, or might have been paying a lot of attention to details like a piece of furniture or what was on the radio or television. Afterwards, it may feel like what you focused on did not make sense or did not help to protect yourself, but this is not the case.

**Your body was doing what it needed to do in order to survive.**

## Memories

During traumatic experiences our bodies' survival instincts cause our brains to store information differently than in everyday life. Your memories of being hurt are probably different than other memories you have. Often they will not be in chronological order, will come back in pieces, or will be more sensory. You may remember colors, smells, feelings, or flashes of an event. Memories can also come back in nightmares making sleep difficult and falling asleep scary.

Some memories may come back as if you are watching a movie of the assault. Other memories can make you feel like you are experiencing the assault again. These are all ways that we remember dangerous situations.

Sometimes a memory comes back after being triggered by a reminder of some sort. Triggers can be sensory or metaphorical. Your body may connect certain sights, sounds, smells, or touches to the assault. Sometimes your mind connects situations or ideas to the violence. These triggers can cause the same survival responses in your body as actual assaults.

You may feel like you are in danger or experiencing assault again, even if you are not. It can be an ongoing attempt by your body to keep you safe. It can be hard to explain because the thinking and language parts of our brain work differently when we recall this kind of experience. Remember that these are normal responses and part of your survival instincts. People like [WISE](#) advocates, who understand the impact of sexual violence, will understand.

Memories can make you feel out of control. You may find that concentrating is more difficult now, and that it is hard to do what you want or need in your life. Sometimes we try to change our lives to avoid the terrifying memories. While it makes sense to avoid painful experiences, it can limit our lives. You may find yourself not doing the things you need and want to do, to live a happy and full life. If this is happening to you, you do not have to figure it out alone. There are lots of ways that you can work with your body to keep you present. A [WISE](#) advocate can talk with you about these strategies. It is possible to feel more comfortable and joyful in the world.

## The impact

How you are affected by sexual violence may take you by surprise. While sexual violence is pervasive in our society, every person and situation is unique. Everyone is affected differently. There is no amount of time after violence when people should be “over it.” The aftermath can ebb and flow in the way you process the experience. It is important to pay attention and take care of yourself in ways that are good for YOU.

Sometimes survivors see their lives as “before” and “after” violence. For others, it may feel as though the violence has dominated their whole lives. You may not feel like the same person. Feeling as though you do not recognize yourself can be difficult. You may feel as though your world has turned upside down. You may feel like violence has always been a part of your life. Whatever your experience, it is possible to process the violence that was done to you and determine the life that you want.



Most women and people who are LGBT+ have experienced some form of sexual violation. Some are harassed at work or on the street. Some are sexually assaulted once. Some experience many assaults throughout their lives. Each violation may have a different impact. In general, people try to make sense of things that happen, so they can feel safe that it will not happen again. It may not be possible to make sense of sexual violence in this way. There is nothing that you did to cause someone to hurt you in this way.

If you knew and trusted the person who hurt you, it may feel unsafe to be with anyone. It might make you doubt your own judgment. If the person who hurt you was a stranger, it can seem as though anyone unfamiliar can be dangerous.

Whatever the situation, it is common to feel scared and/or anxious for a long time after an assault(s), or for a long time after remembering a past assault(s). There can be a frightening realization that the world is not as safe as we once thought. This is not only true for the survivor, but for friends and family as well.

Sometimes people want to believe that there is a reason to explain the violence, so that they can do something different to be safe. This idea gives us a false sense of security and ultimately puts the blame and responsibility on survivors rather than perpetrators. It is important to be clear that perpetrators are the only cause of sexual violence.

Our bodies call up a lot of energy to protect ourselves during and after an assault(s). It can feel exhausting just getting through each day. You are not being lazy; there is nothing wrong with you. Your energy is being used to process what has happened. It is okay to be gentle with yourself, take your time, and do things that feel good to you.

You may experience bursts of energy or anxiety connected to reminders of an assault(s). Sometimes the feelings may not appear to have any connection. This energy is part of your body's survival instinct, but can create an undercurrent of nervousness that can be hard to understand and handle. It is common to feel out of control and afraid, sometimes feeling one way one minute and the opposite the next minute.

Powerlessness, anger, sadness, pain, nausea, jumpiness, being on guard, wanting to withdraw, loss of trust in others, and eating and appetite changes are other common responses. These are all normal reactions. It can help to talk to someone, like a **WISE** advocate who knows about sexual violence, to process these reactions and work through them.

Many survivors come to understand all of the ways that they are strong and capable. It can be a struggle to come to terms with being violated and what that means in your life. You are a whole person, and much more than a victim of the violence that has been done to you.

**It does not define who you are.**

## Anniversaries

For many people anniversaries can be difficult. Even if you are not aware of the connection, you may experience physical or emotional reactions on anniversaries related to violence. Taking extra care to notice how you are feeling and getting support around these dates might be helpful. Indulging in soothing activities can be a good place to start, and you deserve to feel good. You are the expert in your own process and can decide what you need.

## Alcohol & other drugs after assault

Using alcohol and other drugs may offer a temporary escape and a way to relax and feel less anxious. Drug and alcohol use may also have risks. Some substances have high rates of physical and emotional dependency. Illegal drug use may make people more vulnerable to exploitation or arrest.

You may feel that your substance use is isolating you from the support you deserve and is having other negative impacts on your life. You can talk to a **WISE** advocate about what you need. Advocates will not judge you for using substances and can help you think of additional ways to cope if you want to reduce and quit using substances. You might find help with groups, drugs that may treat symptoms of trauma, relaxation and other mind-body techniques such as Somatic Experiencing, meditation and yoga.

## Attempts at mastery

Sometimes people try to “reenact” a time that they were powerless in order to prove to themselves that they can change the outcome, or to create a sense of control over the situation. This is called an attempt at mastery.

Some survivors will unconsciously seek out situations that are similar to when they were assaulted in hopes of having a different outcome, thus “mastering” what happened. If you were assaulted after going to a certain place, you might go back there to try to prove to yourself that you can be safe under similar circumstances.

It can be hard to understand why people continue to talk to their perpetrators or return to the place where they were assaulted. Instincts to try to normalize or regain control over a dangerous situation are strong and do not mean that the violence did not happen. Perpetrators may use this impulse to discredit or further target victims. If you think this might be happening, it could be helpful to talk to someone about it.

## Police and court

What someone did to you may be against the law. Deciding whether or not you want to report it to law enforcement is up to you. For some people it can be empowering to involve the criminal legal system, for others it can be re-victimizing. You can talk to an advocate about what to expect and to help you decide what makes sense for you. To involve the criminal legal system, you start by contacting the police. A **WISE** advocate can help you do this.

Crimes are investigated in the towns and cities in which they occur. If you live in another area you can start with your local police. Providing a statement to the police may start an investigation. It can be difficult to answer all of the questions the police ask. A **WISE** advocate can be with you when you give your statement.

Even though we hear people talk about someone “pressing charges” or “getting someone arrested,” in fact, only the state or federal authorities can arrest and only the state can “take someone to court” for a criminal offense.

Working with the legal system is often a long process and the crimes that are being charged may seem confusing or different from what you experienced. A **WISE** advocate can be with you the whole time and help you navigate the system. You may also be able to access a Victim's Advocate from the state to help you understand the process. Victims' Advocates work within the criminal system so information you share will not be confidential. Victims' Advocates are different than **WISE** advocates, who are always confidential.

## **Lawyers**

An attorney can be helpful if you are considering reporting to the criminal or civil legal systems or if you want to know about your rights after an assault. Attorneys work with survivors regarding civil legal needs, to protect your privacy, or address complications with work, school, or housing. Your rights may have been violated by a business or institution in addition to the perpetrator. You may also be able to access money to pay for damages or harm. **WISE** can recommend attorneys who may be able to work for a reduced fee.



## Title IX

Under a federal law called Title IX, schools must provide an equitable educational environment for all students regardless of gender. Sexual assault is considered to be a barrier to education. Schools have a responsibility to support survivors to stay in school without fear.

Schools are required to investigate reports of sexual assaults that occur on campus, and to provide accommodations to survivors who are struggling with housing or school work as a result of the assault. Different schools have different ways to comply, but all must have a Title IX Coordinator who can explain what the process is, what an investigation would look like, and what resources and accommodations are available to survivors.

A **WISE** advocate can help you navigate the options both on and off campus, find information for filing a report or requesting accommodations, and can be with you during an on-campus investigation. **WISE** advocates are confidential, and do not have to report sexual assaults.

## Evidence collection and healthcare

Your health is important and you deserve care. If you go to the hospital after being sexually assaulted, you can be seen by specially trained providers called Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE). They are trained to provide care after sexual violence and collect forensic evidence from the assault. You may have heard this called a “rape kit.” You can have evidence collected even if you are not sure you want to involve the police. It can be collected and stored anonymously for a period of time to give you a chance to decide if you want to report the crime.

Evidence collection can only happen within a certain amount of time after an assault, and the time varies by state. The sooner the exam is done, the more likely evidence will remain for collection. NH and VT will pay for an adult’s exam if it is within 5 days of an assault. In the Upper Valley, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center and Mount Ascutney are the hospitals most likely to have a SANE available. A [WISE](#) advocate can talk to you about

what might happen at the hospital, meet you there, and be with you during any exam.

Even if you do not want to have evidence collected, it is worthwhile to see to a healthcare provider in case of injuries, sexually transmitted infections (STI), or pregnancy. There are medications which reduce the chance of getting a STI or becoming pregnant if the assault was recent.

Some medications are available at a pharmacy (emergency contraception or “Plan B”) or at Planned Parenthood without an exam. A primary care provider can be a good place to start if it is more than 5 days after the assault.

People aged 14 and older do not need parental permission for care. If you are under 18 years old, and you tell a provider that you were assaulted, the medical provider will have to report the assault to the police or child protective services. **WISE** advocates are always available to talk about what an exam or report might look like and how to safety plan for you to get the care you need.

**You have choices.**

## What helps

When someone violates us, it can feel like we have lost control over our own bodies and lives. Having control and power in your life is important. It can start with being able to make your own decisions about how you want to process violence. Some things to consider:

**Give yourself permission to have as much time as you need.** Remember, you survived the assault. Recognize your inner resources, your strength, and the steps you have taken to get you this far and celebrate them. There is no timeline, it is not something to just “get over.”

**Create a sense of safety.** You deserve to feel safe. Take time to sense when you are comfortable in your life and honor that feeling. You can gently and carefully explore the edges of discomfort but do not force it. If you start to feel like you cannot feel safe doing anything, it could be a sign that you need more support. You can ask for help.

**Take a break.** Your life is more than the assault(s). You likely have a lot going on in addition to trying to deal with the aftermath of violence and it is easy to feel overwhelmed. It is okay to prioritize yourself by doing things like finding time for a cup of tea, a healthy meal, a walk, time with a pet or outside with nature, visiting a special place, being creative, or whatever you find soothing.

**Move your body.** Movement can help reduce anxiety. Yoga, tai chi and other mind-body practices can be particularly helpful, especially if the teacher has some knowledge of sexual assault or trauma. Being in nature can also feel calming for some.

**Get it out.** People can feel a sense of relief when they share their “story” or experience(s) of violence. Writing or creating art can validate you, release some emotions, find community and give you a way to express your experience to other people.

**Find and talk to people who support you.** Telling someone can be an important part of your process, as long as the person supports you in ways that are helpful. Being listened to and believed by others can make a huge difference. You may not want to tell anyone because you do not know what the reaction will be. You can start with one person who you are pretty sure will be understanding. See what that is like and build out from there. Friends and family can also talk to a [WISE](#) advocate to better understand the impact of sexual violence, and how to be supportive.

If you can, try to tell your support person what you want and need. People are often unsure about what would be helpful. Sometimes they get so worried about making a mistake that they do nothing or they avoid the topic. If the person you are telling is someone you are close to, they may react with a lot of emotion. It is hard to hear about violence that someone we care about has experienced. They too may struggle with the loss of control and sense of vulnerability caused by the violence. While it is not your job to take care of them, if you know there are certain things they can do or say that would

help, see if you can tell them or write it to them. A [WISE](#) advocate may be able to help you with this.

**Connect with other survivors.** This might be in a support group, an online community, or just in your regular life. Sexual violence is so common that you probably know others who are survivors too, they might just not have told you. Many survivors find strength in being together, helping others, volunteering and working to end sexual violence. Organizations like [WISE](#) have opportunities to do this.

## Help from professionals

There are many people who can support survivors, but their training, approaches and understandings of sexual violence vary. Finding people who meet your specific needs is important.

**WISE** advocates understand the dynamics of sexual violence, and work together with survivors to figure out how to get whatever it is that the survivor needs. Advocates have information about resources, systems, victims' rights and community partners that may be helpful in making decisions about what to do next.

Any communication with advocates is privileged which means that, if you are over 18 years old, they cannot share information about you without written permission.

One-on-one support and opportunities to connect with other survivors are available.

All **WISE** support is free and confidential.



Other professionals like counselors may not have any training in working specifically with victims of sexual violence. Most will provide one-on-one or group confidential counseling sessions. Many work on a sliding fee scale, which may or may not be covered by insurance. You can ask what the provider knows about sexual assault and trauma. [WISE](#) can recommend providers with whom other survivors have had good experiences.

Some survivors connect with professionals in their faith-tradition, substance abuse coaches, or other community supports. These professionals may have varying levels of training about the realities of sexual violence.

We live in a world where sexual violence is common. You are not alone. How you understand and process what happened is unique to you. Experiencing trauma after an assault is a normal reaction, there is nothing wrong with you. You deserve to have professionals who understand both the context and individual impacts of sexual violence.

## Remember

**It is not your fault.** No matter what you were doing, or what the circumstances were, sexual violence is something that the perpetrator(s) did. It was not your choice.

**You survived.** You are here, reading this booklet. Your life matters. You matter. You deserve to live a life that you love.

**It is normal to have times that are hard.** You experienced something that no one should ever have to experience. Give yourself credit for doing what you have been able to do.

**You are not alone.** Moving forward can seem overwhelming, but there are lots of people who want to support and help you. Identify one person who is safe and reach out to that person. It can be hard to ask, but you deserve help and support from people you trust.

**Join with others to end the violence.** We are stronger together.

**Be patient with yourself.** We all have our own process and we each need to work at our own pace. Trying to rush does not help.

**Be good to yourself.** You may find comfort in walking, eating well, taking baths, cuddling a pet, being creative, visiting a special place, being outside, having alone time or having time with friends. You deserve to have joy in your life. The more positive things you have in your life, the more you can process the difficult parts.

**Breathe.** Just remembering to breathe is good. Taking slow, deep breaths and exhaling fully is great.

**This is your life. You are worth it.**

## Supporting survivors of sexual violence

It is hard to know what to do when someone we love has been hurt. Often, we want to help but do not know how or are afraid to do the wrong thing. If someone has shared their experience of sexual violence with you, they are telling you that they trust you. You can start by letting them know that you believe them, care about them, and want to support them in whatever way they need.

People respond to sexual violence in lots of ways. They may behave differently and your relationship may feel like it has changed. Try to keep in mind that they are grappling with something very frightening right now. Expecting someone to behave a certain way or act the same as before is not realistic or helpful.

Allow survivors to process their experience and thoughts about the person who hurt them without pressure to forgive and move on. It is normal to want people that we care about to feel better, but we all have our own ways of doing it.

If you are trying to support someone, it may seem hard to understand what they are experiencing. It is important to understand how trauma and survival instincts may be affecting the survivor, and not blame them or expect them to behave differently. Try to notice how they are feeling and ask them how you can help.

Supporting survivors is very important. The most important thing you can do is ask how you can be helpful to them. Here are some general suggestions:

**Listen.** Let them talk without feeling judged. Many feel a sense of relief when they share their story or experience(s). Try to let them set the balance of talking about it and not talking about it. Avoiding the subject can feel isolating, but it does not have to be the only thing you talk about.

**Believe.** You may not want to believe that violence happened to someone you care about, or that it was done by someone you care about. It may be tempting to try to come up with other explanations that seem less terrible. Research has proven that people do not make up sexual violence. If someone says they were assaulted, they most likely were.

**Put blame where it belongs.** Perpetrators use excuses about what people were doing, drinking, wearing, or where they were to try to avoid responsibility and undermine their victims. These factors did not cause the assault. The perpetrator is the only person responsible for causing the sexual violence.

**Stay connected.** When someone is violated, they may feel powerless and out of control. When supported and encouraged to make decisions that are right for them, survivors can build their own power. Tell them how proud you are that they survived, that you know it can be a struggle and that you respect their process. Ask them how they are doing and check-in if you have not heard from them in a while.

**Give them time.** You probably want the person that you care about to “get better” or to be happy again. Rushing someone may make it feel like they need to pretend to be fine around you or feel badly about struggling. It is really important for everyone to have the time they need to process what happened to them and figure out how they

want to move on. It is not linear, there will be good days and bad days. Be patient.

**Encourage survivors to do what makes them feel good.**

Walks, eating well, taking baths, yoga, or spending time with friends can be healing activities. We all want and need different things. Help identify what would be comforting. Let them know that they are worth it, maybe offer to do activities with them. Do not assume that you know what they need or what will help. Ask them what they want.

**Let go of expectations.** Just like other major life events, people integrate their experiences of sexual violence into their lives in their own ways. Some people are never the same, others go about their lives as if nothing happened. Both of those outcomes and everything in between are okay. There is no timeline or expectation for how people process and understand the violence they experienced.

**Support yourself.** One of the best things you can do for your loved one is get support for yourself. Knowing about the violation may bring up your own feelings, or make you angry. Expressing your feelings to the survivor puts them in the position of supporting you. It is important to keep the conversation about them and find your own support for what you are feeling. Supporting someone else is hard work. Only focusing on your loved one's needs can be draining and it is important not to forget your own needs. A **WISE** advocate can help you process your own feelings.

**Compassion is to share the pain  
without sharing the suffering.**

*- Shinzen Young*



## Ending sexual violence

Individual perpetrators choose to commit the crimes of sexual violence but, like other forms of gender-based violence, the choice to perpetrate sexual violence does not happen in a vacuum. Cultural norms and expectations make perpetrators feel as though what they are doing is normal and/or they will not be punished for it.

If we want to end sexual violence, we must shift the culture that supports it. We can call attention to behaviors and comments that reinforce stereotypes about gender.

Stereotypes about masculinity and femininity normalize gender-based violence against women, people who are LGBTQ+, children, and other men. These stereotypes are used as justifications for violence by the perpetrator and by community members who hear about the violence.

Survivors must be believed when they disclose violence and perpetrators must be held accountable for their harmful behavior. Our increased exposure to violence has desensitized us to the harm, and our culture regularly

portrays violence as an expected characteristic of masculinity. Instead of ignoring violence and aggression, and displaying a lack of empathy, we can encourage alternative behaviors. It is necessary that we hold people accountable in ways that allow them to learn from their mistakes and make amends.

We can also make sure gender-based violence is addressed systemically. We can elect officials who understand the impact of gender-based violence and are committed to ending it. We can make sure our schools have a holistic response to instances of gender-based violence on school grounds and a comprehensive prevention program to eliminate it from our children's lives.

Call [WISE](#) and learn how you can be involved in ending gender-based violence.

It is the policy of WISE to provide services to victims/survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence and stalking regardless of age, health status (including HIV-positive), physical, mental or emotional ability, sexual orientation/identity, gender identity/expression, socioeconomic status, race, national origin, parental responsibility, language, immigration status, or religious or political affiliation.

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