

MODULE

14

SUPPORTING FAMILY & FRIENDS OF SURVIVORS

This section explores the important part of an advocate's work that involves providing support to the significant others of survivors. It discusses the impact of sexual violence on friends, family members, and community and the various ways advocates can be a supportive presence in their lives. It also explores considerations advocates should be aware of to be mindful of their ethical commitments to uphold confidentiality for all parties they are working to support.

LESSON 1: Understanding Effects on Family and Friends



OBJECTIVES

Participants will be able to:

- Describe three reasons survivors' significant others seek advocacy support.
- Name two ethical considerations when working with survivors' significant others.
- Name two ways that supporting survivors' significant others can positively impact survivors



MATERIALS

- Training agenda (if you create one)
- Flipchart paper or dry erase board and markers
- Pens/pencils and paper for each trainee
- Copies of “Scenarios for Supporting Family and Friends” handout [included in module]
- Computer with screen, projector, internet, and audio [optional]



TIPS FOR PREPARATION

- Print or otherwise obtain the articles and handouts listed in the Materials section of this module and make copies for participants.
- Review articles, materials, and lessons to be comfortable with the material before the training session.



POINTS TO CONSIDER

- **It's important to normalize that sexual violence affects us all.**

Sexual violence deeply affects survivors' close circles and greater communities. Advocates serve survivors who are directly impacted by sexual violence, as well as friends, family, and community members who may also need support because of what has happened to the survivor.

- **Survivors' significant others may have wide-ranging needs.**

There are many reasons and ways that someone may seek advocacy support. For example, a family member, significant other, or friend may seek support with a survivor or they may seek support on their own. Survivors'

significant others may seek information on how to be supportive to a survivor, or they may seek support for their own emotional reactions about what has happened. It's also possible that survivors may know or not know their friends and family are seeking support. Friends and family members of survivors may be close or estranged, and can have complicated relationships that can sometimes make navigating working with all parties less than straightforward. Significant others might also be survivors themselves. Helping participants to understand the many dynamics that could be at play is essential to supporting strong advocacy.

- **Attention to ethics and privacy is critical.**

It is important to acknowledge that anyone seeking support should receive it. Special care should go into maintaining privacy and boundaries when working with friends and family of survivors to ensure that each person who is seeking support has their needs prioritized and that what they share remains confidential. If your program has particular guidance on how to approach this, be sure to review it and share it with participants during the training.

- **Working with family and friends requires not making assumptions.**

Different dynamics are present in every family and community and assumptions should not be made about a survivor's relationship with family and vice versa. Often, families and friends can be strong resources for survivors. In other cases, they may be unsupportive, or linked to painful memories. Awareness of these varying dynamics is key to good advocacy work. Acting without assumption is critical to providing ethical and person-centered support.

- **Sexual violence can occur within families and friend groups.**

Sexual violence commonly happens within families or by someone who is close to the family or friend group. For this reason, the responses and roles of family members, friends, and communities in supporting a survivor can vary and are often confusing and difficult for survivors to navigate.

LESSON 1: UNDERSTANDING EFFECTS ON FAMILY AND FRIENDS

LECTURE AND BRAINSTORM

Provide context for this topic using the information from the *Points to Consider* section above. Then, explore with participants the reasons a friend, family member, or significant other of a survivor may seek support.

Ask participants: What are some reasons a friend, family member, or significant other might seek support?

Common reasons friends, family, and significant others may seek help:

- *A friend, family member, or the survivor themselves may have recommended they seek support*
- *They may be looking for help processing their own emotions and establishing coping methods*
- *They may feel helpless and unsure of how to help the survivor*
- *They may feel scared and alone*
- *They may be feeling triggered related to past experiences with sexual violence*
- *They may be having a hard time understanding what the survivor is going through*
- *They may feel guilty or responsible for what happened*
- *They may want to understand what resources are available for themselves, other family/friends, and survivors*

Ask participants: What do advocacy programs offer them?

Common answers include:

- *Learn that their own reactions are normal and that sexual violence has an impact on survivors, families, friends, and communities*
- *Process their own emotional reactions*
- *Learn ways to talk with and listen to a survivor*
- *Understand the power of words and how to avoid victim-blaming attitudes and language*

- *Learn about their personal role and supporting survivors in making their own decisions about what they need*
- *Manage their expectations of survivors*
- *Deal with any triggers that have come up about their own history of experiences related to sexual violence*
- *Learn words that are supportive*
- *Process a shifting worldview*
- *Empathize with the survivor's experience*
- *Understand and normalize reactions to trauma*
- *Accept and practice boundaries that support the survivor*

GROUP DISCUSSION

Building upon the previous group brainstorm, explore the following questions with participants. You may invite participants to do this as a large group, break into pairs, or ask them to reflect on the questions individually and then come back together to discuss as a group.

Question 1: Why is it important to focus on the needs of a friend, family member, or other significant other in front of you?

Examples that might come up in discussion include:

- *When we understand that sexual violence affects everyone and that the work of advocates is to help everyone impacted, we recognize we must center whomever we're working with at any specific time and prioritize their needs.*
- *It does a disservice to everyone to focus on anyone other than the person right in front of us.*
- *Everyone is harmed by sexual violence. It can cause pain for everyone impacted and can cause fissures in families, relationships, and communities.*
- *A significant other may be in a state of crisis that affects all aspects of their life.*
- *A significant other may need their feelings and concerns normalized and met with empathy.*
- *A significant other may need help developing coping skills.*

Question 2: What are ways that family and friends who seek support may be able to better support survivors?

Examples that might come up in discussion include:

- They can work through any feelings or reactions they are having in a non-judgmental space that can help avoid inadvertent victim-blaming or insensitive comments to the survivor.
- They can ask questions that may be burdensome if asked of survivors.
- They can learn about sexual violence.
- They can find more information out about possible resources.
- They can talk about any of their own experiences with sexual violence.

Question 3: What ethical challenges that may come up with friends and family who are seeking advocacy support?

Examples that might come up in discussion include:

- Maintaining privacy and confidentiality when working with interconnected parties
- Family/friend perspective different than survivors' perspective
- Familial or cultural expectations that don't match survivors' needs
- Disbelief or victim-blaming
- Pressure to influence survivors' decision-making
- Frustration with lack of support of family
- Being asked to be a mediator or a communicator between survivor and family

SCENARIO DISCUSSION

In small groups or pairs, invite participants to read and discuss the “Supporting Friends and Family Scenarios” available as handouts in this module.

Come back together as a whole group and review each scenario and groups’ responses. Consider follow up discussion including:

- Where participant groups had similar and different responses to the questions
- How participant groups centered the needs of friends, family, and significant others
- How participant groups acknowledged and offered culturally relevant suggestions and resources
- How participant groups acknowledged places where they may have made assumptions or might need to find out more information to support the person seeking help
- Exploration of participants questions and thoughts about the scenarios and supporting survivors’ significant others

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

You are meeting with Mark today and your co-worker is meeting with his 14-year-old son Theo. Mark and Theo are both White, and Mark is a single father to Theo and one younger child in a small town in your service area. Mark was referred to your program because Theo was sexually abused by his teacher and she is under investigation by the police and school board. The investigation is well-known in their small town, but nobody knows yet who she abused. Mark shares with you that some of Theo's friends know or suspect it was Theo. They've been congratulating Theo on "getting lucky," but giving him a hard time for getting the hot teacher fired before they "got to do her." They call him gay and wimpy for telling his dad. Since their teasing began, Theo's been having nightmares again. Mark is upset and angry by the whole situation and just doesn't know how to help Theo. Mark confesses that while he loves and supports his son he also sometimes doesn't understand what the big deal is and sometimes even thinks that Theo's friends are right and Theo is just a sissy.

What are some of Mark's needs? How can you address those needs and feelings?

Are there any myths that Mark holds about sexual violence that you may need to dispel? What are some of the possible reactions or feelings that Theo may have currently and over time?

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What are some things that you can share with Mark about how he can support Theo?

What assumptions might you have made about this scenario and the people involved? Consider what biases come up as you read through this scenario and consider how you will respond.

***Remember when working with friends, family members, and significant others to:
Focus on their needs first.
Help them understand.
Let them know how they can support the survivor.***

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SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Over the past year, your program has done a lot of campus outreach work at the small Lutheran liberal arts college in your community. Today, a group of three young White women show up at your office because they saw you earlier this week at a health fair at their college and read some of your program's materials. Jessica, Ashley, and Emily, all tell you that they are concerned that their 4th roommate, Hannah, may have been raped at a party about a month ago. They think she may have been raped for a couple of reasons: Hannah got separated from the group at the party and didn't get home until early the next morning and was drunk and confused; Hannah has stopped going to nearly all of her classes and hasn't been to chapel or church since the party; they hear her crying a lot when she's not sleeping; and she is refusing to take any phone calls from her parents. All of this, they say, is unusual behavior for Hannah who is normally very happy and vibrant. Jessica, Ashley, and Emily share with you that they just want to help Hannah but don't know what to do. They ask if you can call Hannah and talk to her. They also tell you that they feel at fault for whatever happened because they knew it was wrong to go to the party and especially for not sticking together while there.

What are some of Jessica, Ashley, and Emily's needs? How can you address those needs and feelings?

Are there any myths that Jessica, Ashley, and Emily holds about sexual violence that you may need to dispel? What are some of the possible reactions/feelings that Hannah and her friends may have currently and over time?

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What are some things that you can share with Jessica, Ashley, and Emily about how they can support Hannah?

What assumptions might you have made about this scenario and the people involved? Consider what biases come up as you read through this scenario and consider how you will respond.

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SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Today, following the regional coordinated community response meeting for all crime victim service providers, Faye asks you if she can speak with you privately. Faye is the director of the program that serves homicide survivors and you have worked with her over the years on several cases and community events. Faye is a pillar in the victim services community and a strong leader in the Black community in your city. Faye asks you if you have heard about the big sexual abuse case involving the owners of local in-home daycare. You have. Faye tells you that her 4-year-old son, Jason, has attended that daycare since he was 6 weeks old and has been asked by the police to participate in a forensic interview and then possibly an exam. Faye shares with you that she is overwhelmed and astonished that this has happened. She just loves Betty, the daycare provider, and has always trusted her and her husband, Wayne. Faye can't imagine that they would sexually abuse children. She also knows, though, that while children tend to imagine things and make-up stories, they don't usually lie about this type of thing. Faye wants to know what she should say to Jason who is sad and misses Betty terribly. She also wants to know if there is anything she should look for in Jason's behavior to indicate if he has been sexually abused. Faye says it would just make her sick if anything happened to Jason while at daycare.

What are some of Faye's needs? How can you address those needs and feelings?

Are there any myths that Faye holds about sexual violence that you may need to dispel? What are some of the possible reactions and feelings that Faye and Jason may have currently and over time?

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What are some things that you can share with Faye about how she can support Jason?

What assumptions might you have made about this scenario and the people involved? Consider what biases come up as you read through this scenario and consider how you will respond.

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SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Rosa is a Latina woman in her 40s who has started seeing one of your co-workers due to a sexual assault that happened when Rosa was in college. Rosa has just recently disclosed the assault to her husband, because she has been having nightmares and crying spells ever since their daughter, Savannah, started college last fall. Rosa and your co-worker have asked you to meet with William, Rosa's husband, who came with Rosa today to her appointment in order to talk with someone because he has been having a "hard time" since Rosa disclosed to him. William tells you that he is at a loss for how to help Rosa who is constantly in a bad mood and snaps at him whenever he asks how he can help. William says that Rosa hasn't been sleeping and has been crying a lot ever since Savannah left for college. At first, William thought Rosa was just sad about Savannah leaving but last month she finally told him that she was raped in college. William doesn't know what to do with this information and doesn't know how he is supposed to feel. He tells you that he feels like finding the creep and killing him for what he did to his wife and family. He also tells you that he feels somewhat betrayed by Rosa because he thought they had an open and trusting relationship. He doesn't understand why she didn't tell him before now. He doesn't know how he is supposed to act around Rosa now and is afraid of touching her because he doesn't want to scare her. William also tells you that now he is also overwhelmed with worry about Savannah's safety and has been texting her several times a day to make sure she is okay.

What are some of William's needs? How can you address those needs and feelings?

Are there any myths that William holds about sexual violence that you may need to dispel? What are some of the possible reactions and feelings that Rosa and William may have currently and over time?

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What are some things that you can share with William about how he can support Rosa?

What assumptions might you have made about this scenario and the people involved? Consider what biases come up as you read through this scenario and consider how you will respond.

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SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

You meet with Amita and her boyfriend, Sahil, at the police department. Amita and Sahil are both second generation Indian-Americans in their mid-20s. Amita went to a party last night. She had too much to drink, and got a ride home from Sahil's friend, Louie. You were at the ER with Amita for the exam; she called Sahil after the exam was done. Sahil meets the two of you at the police department. The three of you talk for a bit, and then Amita goes outside to call her sister before she talks to the detective. As soon as the door shuts behind her, Sahil tells you that he was supposed to go to the party with her, but picked up a shift at work instead. He wanted to work the shift so he could get extra money before Amita's birthday, and thought she would be okay at the party without him because Louie was going. He feels betrayed by his friend, and can't understand why Louie would do such a thing. Sahil asks you a lot of questions about keeping Amita safe, like if he should add locks to her windows and doors at home or get her pepper spray. He wants to know what else he should do to protect Amita.

What are some of Sahil's needs? How can you address those needs and feelings?

Are there any myths that Sahil holds about sexual violence that you may need to dispel? What are some of the possible reactions and feelings that Amita may have currently and over time?

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What are some things that you can share with Sahil about how he can support Amita?

What assumptions might you have made about this scenario and the people involved? Consider what biases come up as you read through this scenario and consider how you will respond.

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SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Mei is a first-year Japanese-American student at a college in your town. She was referred to your advocacy program by the counseling center on her college campus. She was sexually assaulted by another student earlier in the semester and is currently going through a campus adjudication process that she's uncertain about whether she wants to continue. She avoided telling her parents about what happened as long as she could, as she was afraid they would not understand and be upset with her. However, she has been missing a lot of classes and struggling with her health and was encouraged by friends and campus administrators to talk with her family. She reluctantly confided in her mother that something happened, but asked her to come to campus because she was afraid to talk about what happened over the phone. Mei's family flew in yesterday from across the country and today will be seeing Mei for the first time in months. Mei has asked that you help her talk to her family about what happened. She is feeling anxious and has explained that her family does not talk about these types of things and is afraid that her family, especially her father, may feel a lot of shame about what has happened. Upon Mei sharing what happened with her family, Mei's father begins weeping and is speechless. Mei's mother insists that the campus proceeding must end and explains that they will handle it as a family.

What are some of Mei's parents' needs? How can you address those needs and feelings?

Are there any myths that Mei's parent's holds about sexual violence that you may need to dispel? What are some of the possible reactions and feelings that Mei's parents may have currently and over time?

SCENARIOS FOR SUPPORTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

What are some things that you can share with Mei's parents about how they can support Mei?

What assumptions might you have made about this scenario and the people involved? Consider what biases come up as you read through this scenario and consider how you will respond.

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