

# Supporting a Friend: Options After an Assault

A lesson plan from Healthy Connections: A Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center Sexual Health Education Curriculum for high school students

**Grade:** 10-12

**Time:** 50 minutes

## Materials Needed:

- Computer/projector to display PowerPoint
- Supporting a Friend Activity Sheet (printed)
- Supporting a Friend Activity Key (printed)
- Accessing Medical Care After an Assault: A Resource for Young People handout (either printed or digital version)

## Washington State Health Standards:

Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

- Describe laws related to accessing sexual health care services. **H3.Se6.HS**
- Identify ways to access accurate information and resources for survivors of sexual offenses. **H3.Se5.HS**
- Identify local youth-friendly sexual health services. **H3.Se4.HS**

## OVERVIEW

Students will learn the do's and don'ts of supporting a friend after a sexual assault. Students will learn about local resources for survivors of assault.

## OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Know the definition of sexual assault, survivor, and perpetrator
- Demonstrate the best ways to support a friend after an assault
- Know about local sexual assault services

## TEACHER PREPARATION

- Print copies of Supporting a Friend Activity Sheet (one for each student)
- Print one copy of Supporting a Friend Activity Key
- Research your school's Title IX policy

## A NOTE ON INCLUSIVITY

This curriculum is inclusive of all gender identities and expressions. You are encouraged to use gender-neutral language when presenting this lesson. That means, using "they/them" pronouns rather than "he/him" or "she/her" pronouns, unless otherwise specified.

When talking about sexual assault, do not assume the genders of the survivor and the perpetrator. Do not always assume perpetrators are male-identified, and do not always assume survivors are female-identified.

Please keep in mind that people of any race, gender, sexual orientation or ability can experience sexual assault.

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### AGENDA

#### Introduction - 5 minutes

**Slide 1:** *Hello everyone, welcome to today's presentation on how to support a friend after an assault. [Introduce self if needed]*

**Slide 2:** *Before we get started, I need to give a content warning for this lesson. This lesson will discuss topics such as sexual assault, rape, and other related issues. If these topics are challenging for you, please take care of yourselves as needed. You can participate as much or as little of this presentation as you want.*

*It's important to note that no one will be asked to share personal experiences or act out any scenarios.*

**Slide 3:** *Before we get started, here are some gentle reminders as we go through the presentation. First, everyone should be respectful of others. That means try not to speak over each other and instead speak one at a time. Second, be mindful of what you share. I am what's called a mandated reporter. Does anyone know what that means? [Pause for responses]. A mandated reporter is someone who cares about the safety of students and has a legal obligation to report if a student has been assaulted or abused to the police or Child Protective Services. Please keep that in mind as we go through the lesson. If anyone wants to report anything, find a mandated reporter you trust, so a teacher, coach, or counselor, and they will help you. Lastly, no shaming others. Everyone should feel safe here. Let's get started!*

**Slide 4:** *This is our agenda for the day. First, we're going to go through some definitions. Next, we'll discuss how often sexual assault happens and which groups are most affected. Then we'll talk about the best ways to support a friend after an assault, and things to avoid. Then we'll go over medical options after an assault, and end the lesson with an activity.*

#### Discussion - 25 minutes

**Slide 5:** *Now let's go through some definitions. You may often see the term sexual assault abbreviated to 'SA'. Sexual assault is any sexual contact done without someone's consent. This may include unwanted sexual touch, coercion, and rape. Coercion is defined as forcing someone to do something sexual without their permission. Rape is defined as forcing someone to have non-consensual sex.*

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**Slide 5 (continued):** *A survivor is someone who has experienced sexual assault. Sometimes survivors are referred to as victims. It's up to the person impacted to determine which term they prefer. We will be using the term survivor throughout this lesson.*

*Lastly, perpetrator is someone who commits a crime. In this case, a perpetrator is someone who has sexually assaulted someone else.*

*Any questions about these definitions? [Pause for responses]*

**Slide 6:** *Some groups experience sexual assault more than others.*

*Sexual assault unfortunately happens more frequently than some people think. For example, 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men in the U.S. experience unwanted sexual contact. Nonbinary and gender-nonconforming people also experience sexual assault, but unfortunately there isn't a lot of data for that population.*

*Additionally, LGBTQ+ people are 4 times more likely to be assaulted than non-LGBTQ+ people. More specifically, nearly half of transgender people and bisexual women experiences sexual assault at least once in their lives. This is due to things like homophobia and transphobia.*

*People with disabilities also experience more sexual assault than people without disabilities. 40% of women with disabilities and 18% of men with disabilities experience sexual assault. This is due to ableism.*

*Women of color, specifically Black and Indigenous women, are more likely to be sexually assaulted than white women. This is due to the intersection of racism and sexism.*

*Generally speaking, people with marginalized identities experience higher rates of sexual assault.*

*Sexual assault is also most often perpetrated by someone the survivor knows. People often assume that sexual assault is perpetrated by a random stranger, and although that still unfortunately happens, it does not happen as often.*

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**Slide 7:** *Sexual assault affects a lot of people. Statistically speaking, almost everyone knows someone who has been sexually assaulted.*

*Sexual assault is never the survivor's fault, regardless of what they were wearing, how they were behaving, previous sexual experiences, or previous consent.*

*If a friend ever confides in you and says they were assaulted, it's important to remember that they were not at fault for what happened to them.*

**Slide 8:** *If a friend tells you they've been assaulted, there are some basic tips for how to respond in a respectful way.*

*First, thank them for trusting you. It takes a lot of courage for someone to tell others they've been assaulted. If they're telling you, that usually means they trust you with the information. Second, make it clear you believe them. A lot of survivors don't tell people they've been assaulted because of fear that they won't be believed. Third, actively listen. Don't focus on what to say next but really listen to what they're saying. Also make sure to pay attention to your body language; don't squirm or seem uncomfortable.*

*Here are examples of helpful things to say. You could say: "I care about you and I am here to listen or help in any way I can," "How would you like to be supported?," "Thank you for telling me," "I just wanted to check in with you. I'm here to talk if you need anything," and "I'm sorry this happened to you."*

**Slide 9:** *Remember that it's okay to not respond perfectly. It can be hard hearing that a friend has been assaulted, and it's normal to feel shocked or hurt. Make it clear that you are on your friend's side.*

*Like we discussed earlier in this presentation, most sexual assault is perpetrated by someone the survivor knows. So, if a friend was assaulted it's possible that you could know the perpetrator too. Sometimes a perpetrator could be a well-liked classmate or friend. It can be really difficult to learn that someone you know is capable of hurting others.*

*Navigating all of these emotions can be challenging. It's important to hold space for your feelings, but try not to make things about you. The focus should always be on supporting the survivor.*

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**Slide 10:** *Now we're going to talk about things to avoid after a friend tells you they've been assaulted.*

*The main thing you want to avoid is victim blaming. Is anyone willing to share what they think victim blaming is? [Pause for responses] Victim blaming is when survivors are blamed for their assaults, rather than the perpetrator. Victim blaming is another reason why many survivors don't tell people that they've been assaulted. That's why it's important to avoid saying anything that would suggest you think the assault was their fault. So that could be saying things like, "weren't you drinking all night?" or, "why did you wear that?"*

*You also want to avoid telling your friend what you would have done in their situation. That isn't a helpful or supportive thing to do. It's also not helpful to tell your friend what they should have done. In moments of high stress, people don't always react the way they would when they're calm.*

*It's also possible that someone might tell you they were assaulted without giving all the details. Avoid interrogating them or asking specific questions. It's not your job to investigate. Doing this might also add more stress to the survivor, or make it feel like they aren't believed.*

**Slide 11:** *Is anyone willing to share what you think the cause of victim blaming is? [Pause for responses]*

*Thank you all for sharing. Victim blaming is caused by things like sexism and the normalization of sexual assault.*

**Slide 12:** *There are different ways to support a survivor once they've told you what happened to them.*

*First, listen. Some people just want to be able to talk honestly about what happened to them, and don't want or need anything beyond that.*

*On the other hand, some survivors want support finding resources. Maybe they want to get counseling, or advocacy support; you could help them find where to go or who to talk to.*

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**Slide 12 (continued):** *Some survivors report their assaults, and some do not. Regardless, it's the survivor's decision. If a survivor does choose to report their assault, you could help them find a mandated reporter or maybe be there when they report.*

*If a survivor discloses to you, you can provide these options to them. You could say, "Would you just like for me to listen, or do you want help accessing resources? I'm here for whatever you need."*

*It's important to remember that it might take the survivor a while to heal after an assault. Many survivors find that support drops off a couple weeks after their assault. Be there for them as long as they need it.*

**Slide 13:** *Supporting a survivor can be emotionally taxing. Although the survivor should be the main focus, make sure to set boundaries so you're not neglecting your own needs. No one should have 24/7 access to you.*

*You may also want to consider when you should provide support and when you shouldn't. Sometimes things are better suited for mental health professionals. It's okay to say, "I don't think I'm the best person to help you with this." It's also possible that you have your own life stressors going on. You shouldn't ignore your own life in order to support someone else. Make sure you're doing things for yourself too.*

**Slide 14:** *If a friend has been sexually assaulted, it's natural for difficult emotions to come up. You could feel confused, angry, or scared. It is absolutely okay and even encouraged for friends and family of survivors to seek support services themselves, like counseling, support groups, or workbooks. There are many services for survivors and their loved ones in King County, and we will discuss that more during the activity.*

**Slide 15:** *If a survivor ever does want support in reporting their assault, there are several professionals that a survivor could go to for help.*

*A survivor could report to a trusted teacher, coach, or school counselor, medical staff such as a nurse or doctor, a therapist or social worker, or to the police. Whoever a survivor reports to is up to them. All of these professions have one thing in common, is anyone willing to share what that thing is? [Pause for responses] All of the professionals here are mandated reporters. We will talk more about that in the next slide.*



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**Slide 16:** *In Washington State, there are mandated reporting laws. All of the professionals from the previous slide are mandated reporters, which means they are legally obligated to report if a minor has been physically or sexually abused or neglected to the police or Child Protective Services.*

*Some survivors will report without knowing who they're talking to is a mandated reporter. Some survivors may report without knowing what could happen afterwards. It's important for survivors to know how mandated reporting works, so they can make an educated decision.*

*First, it's important to know what mandated reporters do not have to report. Mandated reporters do not have to report poverty or homelessness, parental drug use, witnessing domestic violence, a minor having sex or dating, someone with an intellectual or developmental disability having sex or dating, or siblings sharing bedrooms. But just like with every profession, there are good mandated reporters and bad mandated reporters. Some mandated reporters think, "when in doubt, report," without fully knowing the law or the possible consequences. That's why if a survivor wants to report, they should seek out a mandated reporter that they trust.*

*Once a mandated report is made, there are a few things that could happen. Depending on the situation, the police may get involved and the perpetrator may be charged. If a mandated report is ever made against the survivor's wishes, they have the right to not cooperate with the police or provide any additional information.*

*Any questions about mandated reporting? [Pause for responses]*

**Slide 17:** *Title IX is another option for reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in educational programs and activities. This law protects both staff and students at any elementary school, middle school, high school, community college or university.*

*The types of discrimination that are prohibited are sex-based harassment, sexual violence, pregnancy discrimination, the failure to provide equal athletic opportunity, discriminatory application of dress code policies, retaliation, and more.*

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**Slide 17 (continued):** *In addition, as of August 2024, in compliance with Washington law and guidelines, school districts must treat students consistently with their gender identity. Schools must also ensure students are free from discriminatory harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.*

*So, if a survivor ever wants to report their assault to the school, they could also directly make a report through the Title IX office.*

*Any questions about Title IX? [Pause for responses]*

**Slide 18:** *Sometimes after an assault, the survivor might go to a hospital. They might do this for a few reasons: they may want to report their assault to a nurse or doctor or have some sort of documentation that something happened to them. Or, they may want to prevent or treat sexually transmitted infections. Some survivors may also want to prevent pregnancy. If a survivor is wanting to go to the hospital after an assault, the sooner they go, the better.*

*As we discussed earlier, medical staff are mandated reporters. If a survivor is a minor and they go to the hospital after an assault, the staff will legally have to report it. That being said, remember that minors can choose if they want to cooperate with the police.*

*It's important to note that oftentimes after an assault, there is no visible injury to the body. That is perfectly normal and does not mean the assault didn't happen.*

*For more information about medical options, please refer to the "Accessing Medical Care After an Assault: A Resource for Young People" handout.*

**Slide 19:** *We talked about a lot of important things today. Here are some takeaways: sexual assault is never the survivor's fault; sexual assault can happen to anyone and it affects a lot of people; and, we can all learn more about local resources to help a friend after an assault.*



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### Activity - 18 minutes

**Slide 20:** *Now we're going to do an activity. Everyone will fill out a worksheet independently. I will read out each question and give you a time limit to write your responses. You will not have to share your responses to the first two questions. Once everyone has finished, I will ask if anyone can share their responses to the third question.*

#### [Instructions]

1. Pass out the activity so each student has a sheet
2. During this activity, play some music to set the tone (something light and age appropriate)
  - a. Suggestion: lofi music on Youtube
3. Read out the first question: *"1. Think about one of your closest friends. What emotions would you feel if this friend told you they were sexually assaulted? What thoughts or concerns would you have?"*
  - a. Give students 2-3 minutes to write their responses
4. Read out the second question: *"2. What are some things you could say to your friend after they told you they were assaulted?"*
  - a. Give students 2-3 minutes to write their responses
5. Read out the third question: *"3. If you're able, take out your phone or laptop and research local sexual assault resources. Where could your friend go to get support after their assault? What services do some local organizations provide?"*
  - a. Give students 4-5 minutes to write their responses
6. After students have responded to all three questions, read the following script: *"Please finish up your last thoughts. Is anyone willing to share what local sexual assault resources you found online?"*
  - a. When students share a resource, ask them what services they provide
  - b. As students share their response, write the organization names on the board
  - c. Refer to the key for possible resources - make sure to point out resources that students may have missed
7. After several responses, read the following script: *"Thank you to those who shared. Now we all know of several local resources for survivors of sexual assault. Keep these resources in mind for yourself or others."*

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### Conclusion - 2 minutes

**Slide 21:** *Thank you for listening to today's presentation. Does anyone have any additional questions about this lesson before we end?* [Pause for responses]

**Slide 12:** [Sources - may share with students if needed]

## HANDOUTS

- Supporting a Friend Activity Sheet
- Accessing Medical Care After an Assault: A Resource for Young People

## Activity for Supporting a Friend Lesson

Instructions: Work on this activity independently. Silently reflect on the questions below and write down your responses. Each question is optional. You will not have to share your responses to questions #1 and #2, but you may for question #3. You will not have to turn this activity in.

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1. Think about one of your closest friends. What emotions would you feel if this friend told you they were sexually assaulted? What thoughts or concerns would you have?

2. What are some things you could say to your friend after they told you they were assaulted?

3. If you're able, take out your phone and research local sexual assault resources. Where could your friend go to get support after their assault? What services do some local organizations provide?

## Key for Supporting a Friend Lesson Activity

Possible organizations students could list while answering question #3 in the activity (and their services):

- Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center (HATC)
  - Provides advocacy and support services, medical services, therapy, sexual assault prevention, and foster care assessment.
- King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC)
  - Offers sexual assault prevention and education, support through the legal and medical system, support for parents, guardians and caregivers, and specialized individual therapy for children ages 6-up and adults.
- Sexual Violence Law Center
  - Provides legal assistance and representation for survivors of sexual assault, presentations to community members and organizations on sexual violence, and advocacy support.
- API Chaya
  - Serves survivors of sexual violence, human trafficking, and domestic violence from Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Asian, and South Asian communities through direct service and community organizing.
- Coalition Ending Gender-Based Violence
  - Provides violence prevention and community safety, behavioral health services, and advocacy for survivors navigating the legal system.