

[DONATE](#) [ES](#)

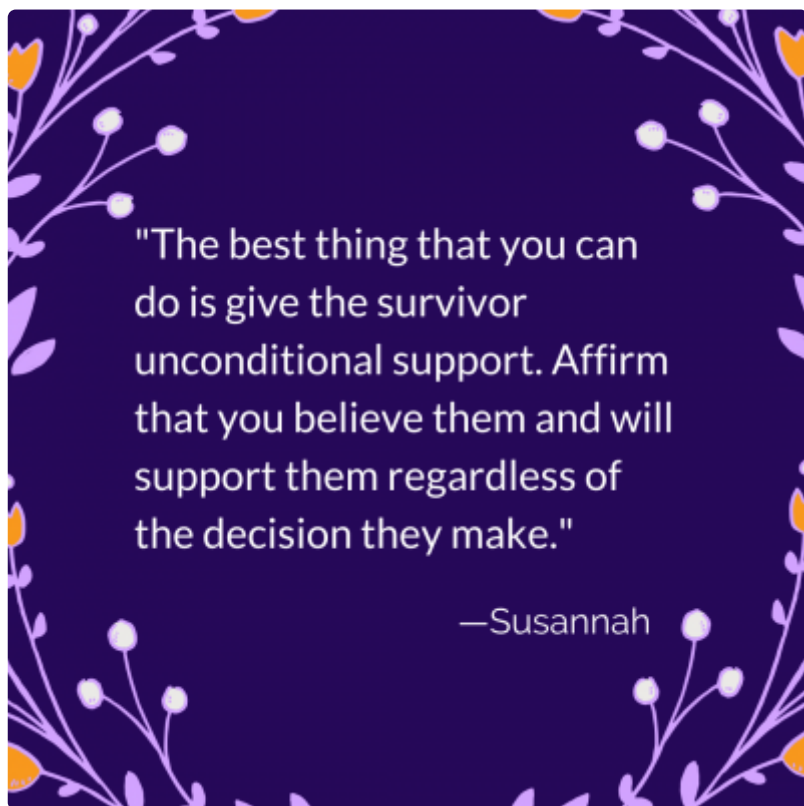


News

[HOME](#) / [NEWS](#) / [HOW LOVED ONES CAN...](#) /

How Loved Ones Can Support Survivors Before, During, and After a Hospital Visit

📅 MONDAY, JUNE 08, 2020 📁 IN THE COMMUNITY



Especially during COVID-19

We asked a few of our [Medical Advocacy](#) volunteers to share their thoughts on how significant others and loved ones can support the survivors in their lives who may be visiting the [hospital](#) for a sexual assault exam and evidence collection kit. Read on for their insight.

How can you support a survivor when they are deciding if they want to go to the hospital, report to the police, etc.?

"Remind yourself that your job is not to make the decision, it's to provide support. It might feel like there's a lot of pressure to help your significant other make 'the right choice,' but remember that there is no right or wrong when it comes to reporting, etc.—whatever feels best to them is going to be the right thing to do. In this moment, they are sorting through what probably feels like a million different options, so being there to listen and affirm their thought process will go a long way." —Malika

"Help your loved one to care for themselves. This might mean making their favorite foods so they are still eating or reminding them to drink water and take their meds. You may want to be in charge of your loved one's well-being and you might try to make decisions for your survivor after an assault and as they recover—but that can hurt more than help. Someone decided to hurt the person you care about, and your loved one needs you to support their decisions. You're not the boss of them, but you can be their home base for support, love, care, and understanding. Remember that you don't need to know the details of 'what happened' to support your loved one. And you can ask them what is the best way that you can support them." —Audra

"At this time, survivors are faced with a tough choice when deciding whether to go to the hospital or not. They may feel that they are putting themselves and others at risk. Generally, even when not faced with increased health risks, survivors may not be willing or able to seek help. The best thing that you can do is give the survivor unconditional support. Affirm that you believe them and will support them regardless of the decision they make. You can give gentle advice if requested, but be an active listener as they weigh their options. Remind them that they can call the BARCC hotline if they want to discuss their choices with someone else." —Susannah

"First, by exploring in which way they would (or would not) like your input/support in this decision—this empowers them and gives them agency, in the midst of a traumatic experience that often leaves

survivors feeling powerless. Asking, 'How can I hold space for you as you make this decision?' Survivors may want you to listen to them as they explore pros/cons of going, or might want your insight before deciding. If the latter, allowing the survivor to navigate any emotions that come from making this decision, while you take a more logistical approach (e.g., coordinate travel to the nearest hospital, contact police. etc.) could also be helpful. Additionally, try not to influence this decision-making process with any leading statements (for example, "You should go to the hospital," "You need to report because . ." etc.). An alternative (if prompted) would be to present reasoning for either decision solely as if you are giving information, and finishing by affirming to the survivor that you support them and their ability to decide what is best for themselves." —Julia

During physical distancing, how can you still be of support while the survivor is in the hospital visit?

Note that currently during the COVID-19 public health crisis, survivors most likely will not be able to bring a support person with them into the hospital. That may change over the coming days and weeks; if you are hoping to bring a support person, call the hospital first to ensure guests are allowed at the time of your visit.

"If the survivor decides to go to the hospital, help them think of ways to reduce their risk of infection and items that they can bring along for support. If they don't want to bring personal items, they can always bring something disposable like play-doh. If possible, offer to drive them to the hospital and wait in the car for them. If you cannot be physically present, offer to be available by phone call or messaging throughout their visit." —Susannah

"Asking how you can be of support can be helpful, although the survivor may not have a clear indicator on their wants/needs (and that is ok)! If they do not, assuring them you'll be in the car waiting for them when they leave may be a good starting point (and that you will be phone accessible should they want to call you at any time). Additionally, because survivors oftentimes cannot eat or drink anything while doing the exam, waiting for them with their favorite snack or drink could be helpful as well." —Julia

"Physical distancing doesn't mean that a survivor has to be alone in their experience. Do not underestimate the power of your presence, even if that presence is virtual! Ask if you can FaceTime them if they need support while they are in the hospital. Send a supportive text message to let them know they can reach out to you if they need you. Make sure they know that you are around, even if you

can't be there in person. I find that many survivors feel unsure or express guilt about saying 'no' to things while they are in the hospital. I think letting them know that they are justified in saying 'no' is a huge way to provide support. Be the voice that empowers them to make their own choices!" —Malika

What can you do to support a survivor immediately following the hospital visit?

"I think there are different types of approaches to this question. The more logistical way of supporting a survivor after their visit could be what I outlined above (being their ride home, having their favorite snack/drink in hand); more emotional-based support can vary pending how well you know the survivor and can 'anticipate' certain needs they may have (for example. listening to them, offering a shoulder to cry on, ordering their favorite meal, putting on their favorite movie, etc.). Additionally, offering space if they want it! This seems counterintuitive, but agency is really key after a traumatic experience like this. Affirming to them that you love and support them, and are happy to navigate this process of healing with them in a way that honors them, can be really important." —Julia

"Ask them what they need. Do they want to talk about what happened? Would they rather not say a word about the experience? Do they want to be alone, or do they need companionship? What will make them feel safe, comfortable, and supported? Whatever it is, let them know that you're there, and let them take the lead." —Malika

"When a survivor first leaves the hospital, they may feel mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted. If you live with the survivor, help them manage the extra precautions that they need to take after leaving the hospital. Offer to do their laundry and sanitize their belongings, to cook a meal for them, or help them prepare a comfortable area to quarantine. Gather some books, puzzles, and other activities that they enjoy to use while they are isolating. If you cannot see them in person, offer to call them if they need support. A friendly voice can be a welcome distraction after a difficult hospital visit." —Susannah

What support can you provide long-term?

"Check in with them, and let them know that you're around. The road to recovery is not a straight one, and there may be days that are harder than others—let your loved one know that you'll be there for them regardless, and reassure them that it's okay to have good and bad moments." —Malika

"Make time to check in with the survivor. Many people are feeling isolated during this time, so it is important to reach out to them and offer support if you can. You can offer to listen if they want to talk, but you can also just be present with them on the phone or in person. If they reported to the police, offer to help them manage tracking the status of their kit. If they want to reach out to BARCC for more resources, find the phone number and help them plan what they want to discuss." —Susannah

"I'd say doing a mix of the above, and very importantly having a solid support system for yourself that you can fall back on. It may be hard at times to separate the survivor's healing process from your own—their assault may affect you deeply (and that is okay). Making sure you also understand that this process is *not* linear—meaning, some days the survivor may feel great and make strides in their healing, and others, the opposite may seem to occur. This is normal and there is no 'time limit' on healing from this kind of experience. Continue to pour into your own cup first so that you can pour into theirs. Additionally, being mindful of whether the survivor may need professional help (for example, are they expressing suicidal thoughts, or wanting to hurt themselves/others? etc.). Our hotline is here to continuously support you through this as well." —Julia

What information is important for a significant other to have?

"Know that there are also [resources available to you](#). As a loved one of a survivor, you may also experience trauma or triggers as a result of the incident. Even if the survivor does not pursue other resources, you can call the [BARCC hotline](#), and there are virtual [counseling](#) options available. It is important to take care of yourself; you can better support the survivor if you are practicing self-care and feeling well supported."—Susannah

"It's helpful to have information regarding [victim's compensation](#), the [Access to Forensic Information line](#), and the BARCC hotline number and brochure." —Julia

"In my experience, a survivor's visit to the hospital can be overwhelming—they're receiving a lot of information in a short amount of time. On top of that, they may not be in the right headspace to receive and process information about victim's compensation, receiving kit results, etc. while they are in the hospital. As a significant other, you can play a critical role in keeping track of these details and helping the survivor sift through it later, when they're ready, and probably in a more soothing environment. A seemingly small but very important gesture could be something as simple as noting and writing down

their kit number, the toxicology hotline phone number, etc. so they can refer back to it on their own time." —Malika

Additional resources

- ["How to Support a Survivor in Your Life"](#)
- ["Supporting Survivors: Families and Friends"](#)
- ["Being There for Survivors: Tips for Supporting the Survivors You Love"](#)

[< PREV POST](#)[NEXT POST >](#)

SEARCH...



IN THIS SECTION

[All Recent Updates](#)[BARCC Media](#)[In the Community](#)[Stories of Impact](#)[Press Releases](#)[Statements](#)[Covid-19](#)[Events](#)