

# Taking Care of You

For families, friends & partners of survivors

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## For Families, Friends & Partners

### IMPORTANT ALLIES

Supporting a family member, partner or friend who discloses sexual abuse can be very challenging. You are likely to feel a range of emotions including sadness, rage, disgust, anger, fear and powerlessness.

Family, friends and partners are important allies for survivors of child abuse, but survivors often struggle with communication and trust in their close relationships. Romantic relationships can be especially fraught. When a survivor decides to address the impact of abuse on their life, this can put even more stress on a relationship or a friendship. The survivor can quickly feel overwhelmed as painful emotions and memories flood back. Partners, in particular, can be left feeling unloved and unappreciated.

### BEING THERE

It's hard to watch someone you care about in pain, and some people walk away. Partners and supporters often feel helpless as they watch their loved ones struggle with issues that they may not understand. However, simply "being there" with a survivor as they try to reconnect with the world makes the journey easier. Partners and friends don't need to be heroes. It's a fine line to walk between offering support, and trying to "rescue" someone, but it's an important one. Survivors need people who can be a constant, consistent and trustworthy presence in their lives.

### TIPS FOR LISTENING

- **Stay Present:**  
Keep your attention on the person speaking and what they are saying.
- **Communicate that you have heard them:**  
Many survivors have not been heard or believed in the past. A different experience can carry some healing; while the same experience of not being heard or believed can be re-traumatising.
- **Don't Give Advice:**  
Don't give advice unless it is specifically requested.
- **Trust the Process:**  
Don't dive into solutions.



## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

During periods of crisis, or when the survivor is incapacitated, partners, friends and family can experience high levels of stress. For many, being confronted with the reality of child abuse and its consequences can challenge their understanding of themselves and their world. Just as survivors can feel alone on their journey, so can their supporters. They too can feel as though there is no one to talk to, as if no one understands.

It is important that partners, family and friends develop clear boundaries, and look after themselves. Being a support person offers some opportunities too, such as developing a deeper capacity for empathy, compassion and understanding. Make sure you keep doing the things that bring you joy and sustenance, stay connected with your own support network and prioritise your physical and emotional wellbeing. Seek counselling for yourself if you need to. Counselling can provide a safe, non-judgemental space to process your thoughts and feelings about the abuse your loved one has experienced.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

There are several agencies that provide support to partners and family members as well as to the survivor. The organisations listed below can provide you with information about coping strategies and other services that might assist you.

Service	Description	Contact
<b>ADULTS SURVIVING CHILD ABUSE (ASCA)</b>	Telephone counselling and workshops designed specifically for supporters of adult survivors of child abuse.	1300 657 380 <a href="http://www.asca.org.au">www.asca.org.au</a>
<b>1800 RESPECT</b>	24 hour sexual assault and domestic violence support.	1800 737 732 <a href="http://www.1800respect.org.au">www.1800respect.org.au</a>
<b>RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA</b>	Services include counselling, family dispute resolution and a range of family support and education programs.	1300 736 966 <a href="http://www.relationships.org.au">www.relationships.org.au</a>
<b>Lifeline</b>	24-hour crisis support.	1311 14 <a href="http://www.lifeline.org.au">www.lifeline.org.au</a>

## CONTACT US

**knowmore** is an independent legal service giving free legal assistance to people who are considering telling their story or providing information to the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

**You can call us from anywhere in Australia:**

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*Source: This Resource Sheet has been adapted from material on the Adults Surviving Child Abuse website [www.asca.org.au](http://www.asca.org.au)*