How Friends and Family Can Support A Trauma Survivor

**WAYS TO BE SUPPORTIVE**

* **Do listen** - Allow them to tell their story in their own time. Leave the door open for whenever they are ready.
* **Do have empathy** - Show them that you understand their feelings and emotions.
* **Do ask about suicide** - If the survivor’s outlook seems dark or if they seem hopeless, they may be feeling overwhelmed and need professional help to ensure their safety.
* **Do offer to follow up** - Call them, visit with them. Don't put the burden on them to call you, because they probably won’t at first.
* **Do offer resources** -Ask what they think will help, and then help them get that help. Provide the number to a trauma-informed crisis line or to counseling. Go with them if they would like you to. Assist with daily needs (diapers, food, etc.)
* **Do provide sensory support**  -  Help to create a calming environment, taking into consideration the 5 senses: Sight (dim the lights, view nature); Smell (candles/essential oils/aromatherapy); Sound (soft background noise or soothing music); Touch (a cozy blanket or comfy chair, a warm bath or shower); and Taste (something to drink and eat helps one feel cared for.) Do let them sleep and restore themselves.
* **Do seek your own support** - Become informed. Education is essential. Caregiving is a difficult responsibility and caregivers often experience “vicarious” or secondary trauma.  Be sure to take care of yourself; take breaks, and get help when you need it.

**ACTIONS TO AVOID**

* **Don't judge** - There is no “right” way or “right” amount of time to heal from trauma. Work with survivors in the context of their culture.
* **Don't question their response to the trauma** - Know that they coped in the best way they knew how with the resources they had at the time. Understand that, in some circumstances, a survivor may still love or identify with the aggressor.
* **Don’t blame them for the trauma** -Sometimes this can be subtle and sometimes it can be overt. Understand that they did not choose for the event to happen and that nobody asks for traumatic situations. The following are examples of blaming the victim: “What were you wearing?”, “What were you doing out that late?”, “Why were you there in the first place?”, “Why didn’t you listen to me?”
* **Don’t disbelieve them** about the event’s accuracy. Sometimes details may not add up because people often dissociate during a traumatic event. Not believing them about the event can actually intensify the trauma and significantly damage your bond.
* **Don’t expect them to just get over it** -No two people experience the same situation in exactly the same way, especially a traumatic situation. Many situations may seem the same on the surface but may be quite different if you listen long enough.
* **Don't force them to do things they don't want or are not ready to do** - Doing so can cause them to re-experience the trauma by reminding them of how powerless they felt during the incident.