



REBECCA STREET

YOU CAN HELP

A Guidebook for Family and Friends of Survivors
of Sexual Abuse and Assault

FIVE WAYS TO HELP YOUR LOVED ONE HEAL

REASSURE. Victims of sexual abuse and assault generally suffer from deep and pervasive feelings of shame. What has happened to them is a violation not just of the body but also of the spirit, often resulting in low self-esteem and a loss of dignity. Tell your loved one that you (a) believe, (b) respect, (c) love, and (d) admire her or him. Reassuring words are powerful healing tools.

LISTEN. Perhaps the most important and effective thing you can do to facilitate the healing of someone who has been sexually abused or assaulted is to encourage that person to talk about his or her trauma and then to listen with your heart. Because of the sheer ugliness of the events, many well-intentioned people choose silence over open communication. Silence is the biggest obstacle to recovery.

LEARN. There are many resources (some listed on my website) that inform and educate family and friends as to the symptoms and effects of sexual trauma. Be pro-active. If your loved one suffers from PTSD, learning about the disorder will enable you to understand and comfort your loved one during those painful times. Another way to learn how you can help is to simply and lovingly ask, "What can I do?"

SUPPORT. Support your loved one by acknowledging the courage and tenacity it takes to work through the trauma. That work nearly always includes therapy and/or group counseling. Sometimes it involves going back to school or changing careers. If you are in a position to assist financially and your loved one cannot afford these things, providing that support is a wise investment.

CELEBRATE. It is a highly rewarding albeit difficult endeavor to participate in the healing of a loved one. Celebrate the achievements! Even when old behaviors and debilitating symptoms reappear, do not let those negate the progress that has been made. Believe in your loved one's ability to create a healthy life; and whenever and however possible, provide outlets that bring levity and joy.