

A Hard Conversation

You're receiving this because someone whom you care about has experienced some form of sexual violence, and they want to talk about it with you. Please try not to react or ask questions until you reach the next page.

This is one of the hardest things to hear, and this will likely be a very difficult conversation for everyone. You may find yourself feeling strong emotions, realizing uncomfortable truths, or finding yourself confused. You might need space to process this on your own first, and that's okay.

What To Expect

This conversation packet contains text for you to read together and questions for you to ask the other person. Regular text is for you to read, and *italicized text* is for you to ask the other person out loud. This structure aims to help you focus on empathizing, understanding, and connecting, while the other person can focus on sharing their experience with you.

Check-In:

Please answer the following question aloud:

Is this a good time to have this conversation?

If it is not, please establish a day and time when the other person can check in and ask again.

If you are ready, please continue to the next page.

Thank you for agreeing to have this conversation and for being there for your loved one in this difficult time and throughout this difficult process. Please keep in mind the following guidelines that will help make this conversation safe, productive, and meaningful.

Instructions

1. The person sharing their story has been given the opportunity to check off the questions they are comfortable being asked, either digitally or using a pen, and leave the ones they are not comfortable with unchecked. If they have not done so yet, please give them the opportunity to do so now.
2. Read the text on each page together (aloud or silently), starting from the top of the page, then moving toward the bottom of the page.
3. When you reach the questions section, please ask the person sharing their experience the questions that are checked off. Do not ask them any questions are not checked off unless they explicitly state that they have changed their mind and now want to be asked that question. This is what questions will look like:

Ask a question that looks like this

Ask a question that looks like this

Ask a question that looks like this

Ask a question that looks like this

Skip a question that looks like this

~~Skip a question that looks like this~~

If the person sharing their story wants to mark questions a different way, please feel free to do so. Just indicate to the other person what mark means the question should be asked and what mark means the question should be skipped.

For Google Docs users, you may also make a copy of this document and digitally delete the questions that you do not want to be asked.

4. You may ask follow-up questions, but make sure to keep the ground rules and guidelines below in mind when doing so.

Ground Rules

1. Nobody is obligated to say or answer anything. Please respect requests to stop or move on to a different section at any point.
2. This conversation is for empathy, understanding, education, and support. It is not an investigation, so don't try to "figure out what really happened." Just believe what the other person says and try to understand their feelings and experience as best you can.
3. This will likely be hard and that's okay, but people have limits. Check in often (after every block of text and every question) to make sure everyone is comfortable. Ask, "are you comfortable with continuing?" regularly.

Guidelines for Supporting a Survivor

Adapted from [SafeBAE's Ways You Can Support Survivors](#)

1. Change any attitudes that blame victims, including questions like "What were they thinking?" because victims are never the reason that sexual violence happens.
2. Hold offenders accountable by calling out their unacceptable behavior. Do not assume that victims are comfortable with you staying friends with perpetrators of sexual violence.
3. Show support to survivors who are able to share their story with you in the ways that they need, whether that means reporting and opening an investigation or not.
4. Believe survivors when they come forward and don't question or judge their actions, behaviors, dress, or decision to delay or defer reporting.
5. Show gratitude to survivors for trusting you with their experiences and to law enforcement for promptly and thoroughly investigating perpetrators.

Move on to the next page to begin the structured conversation.

The Past

Talking about an experience with sexual violence can be very difficult, so please take your time with this section. Try to focus on understanding the other person's experience and figuring out how you can support them in the present.

Keep in mind the guidelines from the previous section in responding to what they share, and never pressure someone to share more than they are comfortable with.

If there is specific information that you feel you need, please think carefully about why you need that information and make sure that your questions are focused on empathy and support rather than curiosity or blame.

Questions

- Are you comfortable sharing anything that you remember or anything that happened?*
- Is there any term or word that you prefer to use when referring to this?*
- How has that affected you since then?*

Check-In:

Please ask the other person(s):
Are you comfortable continuing?

If not, please decide whether you want to continue the conversation another time.

If you do, please set a specific date or time or agree on how to reach out again.

If you do not wish to continue, you are encouraged to find other means of support that may work better for you.

If you are ready, please continue to the next page.

The Present

The impacts of sexual violence can be long-lasting and deeply significant. Still, each person's experience is unique, so please do not assume or expect that their experience will align with anyone else's.

Questions

- Are there any ways that this is affecting your life now?*
- Is there anything in your life that's making it more difficult to handle or cope with?*

Check-In:

Please ask the other person(s):
Are you comfortable continuing?

If not, please decide whether you want to continue the conversation another time.

If you do, please set a specific date or time when you want to revisit it or agree on what to say once you are ready to continue the conversation.

If you do not wish to continue, you are encouraged to find other means of support that may work better for you.

If you are ready, please continue to the next page.

The Future

Everyone is impacted by sexual violence in different ways, and healing looks different for everyone. While discussing the future, please make sure to value what the survivor wants for their life and consider the perspective that there is no single “right way” to heal or to live your life after sexual violence. The priority moving forward should be the survivor’s safety, wellbeing, and happiness.

Questions

- Are you interested in taking legal action or seeking any kind of professional help (including mental health services, support groups, etc.)?*
- Is there any way that I can better help or support you moving forward? How do you want to be supported?*
- Is there anything else that you wish I knew or that you want to talk about?*

Check-In:

Please ask the other person(s):
Are you comfortable continuing?

If not, please decide whether you want to continue the conversation another time.

If you do, please set a specific date or time when you want to revisit it or agree on what to say once you are ready to continue the conversation.

If you do not wish to continue, you are encouraged to find other means of support that may work better for you.

If you are ready, please continue to the next page, which will help you discuss how this conversation went and whether you want to continue having conversations like this in the future.

Processing Today's Conversation

Thank you for going through this process with your loved one. Before this conversation ends, please take this time to discuss the experience you just shared.

Questions

- Did I respond in a way that was supportive to you or do you wish I would have reacted in a different way? How could I have done better?*
- Is there anything that I might have misunderstood that you want to clarify?*
- Did this conversation go as well as it could have? What might have made it better?*
- Do you think you would feel comfortable opening up to me again in this way in the future?*
 - [If not] *Are you comfortable sharing why not? Is there anything that I can do to make you more comfortable opening up again?*
- Do you want to continue having conversations like this or about this with me in the future?*
 - [If yes] *Would you prefer to decide when your next conversation can be now or to just approach me when you want to have a conversation again?*
 - [If no] *Can you think of anyone else you would feel comfortable talking to or going to for support related to this in the future?*
- Are there any final things you want to say or talk about?*

Thank you for supporting your loved one.

You have reached the end of this structured conversation. You may choose to continue the conversation or end it here. Please remember any commitments you have made to help or support your loved one in particular ways and create a plan, make arrangements, or come up with an agreement about how to move forward. Please continue to keep in mind the Guidelines for Supporting a Survivor outlined above, even beyond this conversation. Thank you for supporting your loved one.