

## 9 Principles of Survivor Support

- 1) Health & Safety First
- 2) Restore Choice
- 3) Believe
- 4) Shut Up and Follow the Lead
- 5) No More Violence
- 6) Know Your Limitations
- 7) Stay Committed & Stay Flexible
- 8) It is not about you.  
It is not about you.  
It is not about you.
- 9) Work to Understand the Process of Survival

## SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ASSAULT



This booklet was prepared through a collaborative effort by UBUNTU and Men Against Rape Culture.

## SURVIVOR SUPPORT RESOURCES

### About MARC

Men Against Rape Culture (MARC) is a multi-racial, anti-racist organization of men in Durham, NC, committed to ending the epidemic of male violence by attacking it at its roots. We educate, organize, create, and live in ways that seek to offer alternatives to a culture that privileges some, oppresses many, and limits the choices for all of us.

MARC can be contacted at (919) 683-2301, [TriangleMensGroup@yahoo.com](mailto:TriangleMensGroup@yahoo.com), or online at [www.marcnc.blogspot.com](http://www.marcnc.blogspot.com)

UBUNTU is a Durham-based movement, led by women of color and survivors of sexual assault, dedicated to creating a world without sexual violence. We are transforming the pain and rage of lived and relived victimization in our community into healing, connection, and leadership by embodying and demanding democratic community accountability, and creative social change. A sustaining, transformative love is the center of our work and the model of our movement.

To contact UBUNTU, please e-mail [ubuntuNC@gmail.com](mailto:ubuntuNC@gmail.com).

### About UBUNTU

Orange County Rape Crisis Center  
Main: (919) 968-4647  
Crisis: (919) 967-7273 or  
(866) 935-4783

Durham Crisis Response Center  
Main: (919) 403-9425  
Crisis: (919) 403-6562

Interact - Raleigh  
Main: (919) 828-7501  
Crisis: (919) 828-3005

UNC- Chapel Hill  
Campus Health Services  
Phone: (919) 966-3658  
Free Counseling:  
<http://caps.unc.edu/appts.htm>

N. C. State University  
Counseling Center: 515-2423  
24 Hour Rape & Sexual Assault  
Response Line:  
(919) 618-RAPE (7273)

North Carolina Coalition Against  
Sexual Assault  
Main: (919) 431-0995

Duke University  
Sexual Assault Support Services  
Crisis Information:  
(919) 681-6882

KIRAN  
(Domestic Violence and Crisis Services for  
South Asians in North Carolina)  
Main: (866) 547-2646

North Carolina Central University  
Student Health and Counseling  
Services  
Phone: (919) 530-6317

North Carolina Council for Women  
Phone: (919) 733-2455

Gay and Lesbian Helpline of  
Wake County  
Phone: 919-821-7095  
Helpline: 919-821-0055

Rainbow Hope  
(Online Support Group for Lesbians Survi-  
vors of Abuse and their Partners)  
<http://www.rainbowhope.org>

Victim's compensation (NC)  
Helpline: 919-821-0055  
<http://www.nccrimecontrol.org/>

## DISCLAIMER

None of this is a magic recipe. Believe in yourself; believe in your friend. Realize that rape is about power, oppression, and control, so recovery must be about giving, loving, and sharing. It won't be easy, but in the long run, both you and your friend will have grown more and learned more than you can ever imagine. Please use this document as something to help guide you through this process, but know that you might have to make your own list of things to do.

Feel free to send feedback about  
this document to us by emailing  
[marc\\_nc@riseup.net](mailto:marc_nc@riseup.net)  
and  
[ubuntuNC@gmail.com](mailto:ubuntuNC@gmail.com).

For those of us who live at the shoreline  
standing upon the constant edges of decision  
crucial and alone  
for those of use who cannot indulge  
the passing dreams of choice  
who love in doorways coming and going  
in the hours between dawns  
looking inward and outward  
at once before and after  
seeking a now that can breed futures  
like bread in our children's mouths  
so their dreams will not reflect the death of ours

For those of us  
who were imprinted with fear  
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads  
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk  
for by this weapon  
this illusion of some safety to be found  
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us  
For all of us  
this instant and this triumph  
We were never meant to survive.



And when the sun rises we are afraid  
it might not remain  
when the sun sets we are afraid  
it might not rise in the morning  
when our stomachs are full we are afraid  
of indigestion  
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid  
we may never eat again  
when we are loved we are afraid  
love will vanish  
when we are alone we are afraid  
love will never return  
and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive.

## A Litany for Survival

## YOU KNOW SURVIVORS

If you are a person who is alive and walking around in the world, you know a survivor of sexual assault. The extent to which women, men, and transgender people (people who don't fit neatly into a male/female gender binary) are sexually assaulted is unknown because of the elements of cultural silence, disbelief, and fear of more violence that surrounds rape. Many, however, estimate that at least **1 in 4** women will be raped in her lifetime in the United States. For women, rape is a worldwide epidemic. The estimates for men are lower, but these estimates are equally unreliable. For reasons this document will discuss later, it is nearly impossible to make an estimated guess about the rate that transgender people face sexual violence, though we know it to be common. The point is: you know survivors. They are not statistics, they are people that you care about and love.

**If you speak out against sexual assault, survivors will look to you for support.**

Since you are taking the time to understand the prevalence of sexual assault and the emotional/psychological/spiritual/physical impacts that it has on people throughout their lives, people who have survived an assault will often look to you for understanding. This makes sense. In a culture filled with silence, anyone willing to take a stand identifies themselves as someone who might be trusted with personal information that few others will ever know. The following list of principles is intended to help you support someone through their healing process, should you find yourself in a situation where you can.

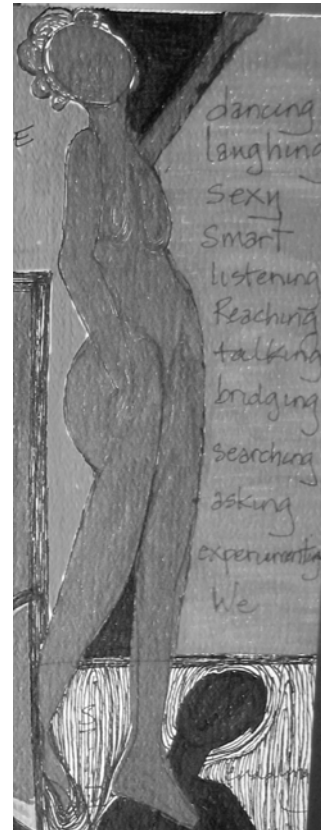
## PRINCIPLE 9: WORK TO UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF SURVIVAL

The leading cause of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the United States, among other mental illnesses, is sexual assault. Movements, touches, places, or words that remind a survivor of a moment; films or songs that

refer to, or depict sexual assaults; unfamiliar and/or unsafe situations: all of these phenomena can literally transfer a survivor back to the moment of their assault. Pay attention as these situations reveal themselves, and do what you can to eliminate your participation in them when you are around the survivor you are supporting. When you see this behavior in friends that you don't know to be survivors, tread with caution and understand that this might be what is happening.

If you are a sexual partner of someone who is a survivor, whether you were a partner with them before, during, or after the time of their assault, be especially cautious in your sexual relationship. Sometimes, they will not want to be sexual or even physically affectionate. Other times, sexual activity will be a great source of regaining their power. Be patient and allow them to set the pace and type of activities that are engaged in, and be aware that small actions can send survivors reeling.

Read books about sexual assault and the psychology of survival. Understand the long-term implications and work to help your loved one heal.



## PRINCIPLE 8: IT IS NOT ABOUT YOU

Even if you are a survivor of sexual assault, this situation is not about you. Often, when people try to offer support to loved ones going through struggle, they end up trying to process their own feelings either with or indirectly through, the person who has been violated. This may be about past abuses you have suffered or witnessed, anger about what has happened to someone that you care about, concern about how your relationship with the person will change, some ego-driven desire for revenge, anything. By responding in this way, you are not helping anyone, you are simply taking up space with your own concerns that should be occupied by the concerns of the person struggling to survive.

If, because of any of the aforementioned situations (especially if you yourself are a survivor), you find yourself unable to put away your own process to support this individual, be honest about this. Don't attempt to support someone when it is not something that you are actually capable of. Continue to heal yourself and work to help the person that you love find others who are more able to help at the moment.

One way to monitor this is to take care with what you say and how you behave. Think about what you are doing and why you are doing it before doing it. Think about why you want to say what you want to say. Make sure that it is not about some need that you have, no matter how justified you think it is.



Please know that this is just a list of ideas, suggestions. Every person responds to sexual assault in a different way, and our relationships vary from person to person. In general, many of these tips will be helpful. But if you find that these tips are not working out well, talk to someone who might be able to support you, and figure out how to continue to support the survivor in any way that they<sup>1</sup> need it. And of course, communication with the survivor themselves is key; ask them what they want or need.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the pronoun “they” is used instead of “he/she” and the possessive “their” instead of “his/her” in recognition of the fact that not all people identify themselves strictly as either women or men. Transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, intersex people, and most all of us really, live lives outside of the narrow scope of what our society says a “man” and “woman” are supposed to be.



## PRINCIPLE 1: HEALTH & SAFETY FIRST

Make sure that the person you are supporting is not in any serious danger. If they are, figure out how you can help them get out of it. Protecting their lives is your first concern.

Once safety is ensured (at least for that particular moment), try to find out if they have any physical needs that must be attended to.

**Rape is a physically traumatic act of violence. It is not sex,** and the body does not always respond to it like it responds to sex. Make sure that there are no imminent health complications.

Because of a principle that we will discuss next, there may be nothing that you can do to either ensure safety or physical well-being. If this is the case, continue to figure out how you can be supportive and encourage the survivor to get themselves to a place of safety.

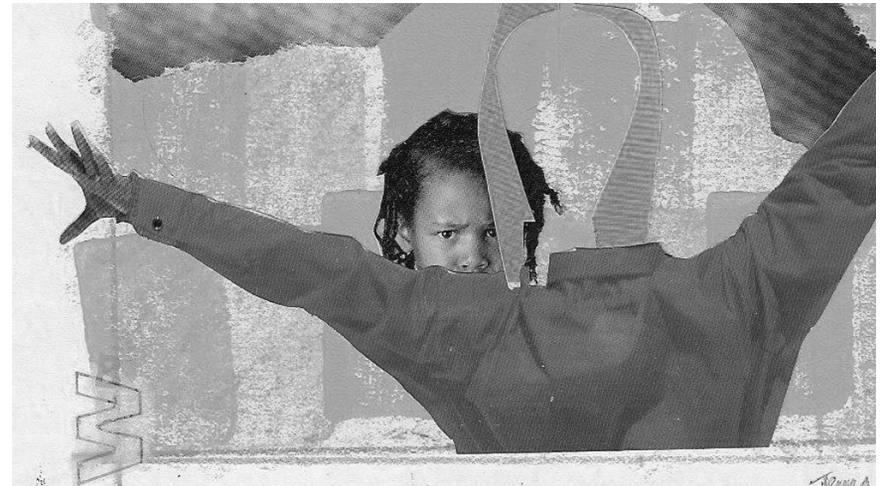


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## PRINCIPLE 7: STAY COMMITTED & STAY FLEXIBLE

Recovering from a sexual assault will not happen in a day. This means that there will be ups and downs, good periods, and tough periods. A survivor may experience many of these changes in a single day. Your consistency through these transitions is key.

The recovery of every single person is unique. Don't give up on someone if it looks like things aren't going to turn around right away. Try something else. The positive impact that you can/will have is more than you will know, so stick around and adjust the style of support you provide when it becomes clear that you need to.



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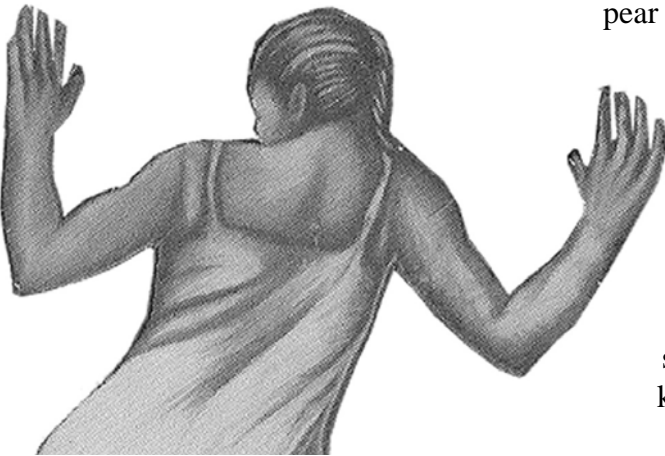
## PRINCIPLE 6: KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS

You cannot **save** anyone. A survivor can only recover to the level that they are capable of achieving at a particular time. If a person that you love has been assaulted, realize that, in a way, you have been assaulted too. You cannot be everything and anything at all times. Make sure that you are finding some support for yourself. Many people even suggest seeing a counselor or going to group therapy for yourself as you support someone through an assault recovery.

Encourage (carefully) the person that you are struggling with to broaden their support network. Many people find a great deal of value in one-on-one counseling, peer support groups, and a variety of other support media. It will be rare that one person will know how to adequately support another person through this lifelong healing process on their own.

You will make mistakes in the process.  
Don't beat yourself up or disappear because you are not perfect. You won't be. Act with sensitivity and integrity, don't walk on eggshells.

Take care of yourself.  
You are no good to a survivor if you are killing yourself.



## PRINCIPLE 2: RESTORE CHOICE

Rape is about power and the theft of choice. A rapist has taken away perhaps the most fundamental right that any human being has, and one that all women, people of color, trans people, and children have stolen from them on a regular basis: the right to control one's own body. The impacts of this theft of choice can last a lifetime.

In order for you to be a healing agent in this person's life, you must immediately allow them to make choices for themselves. Does she want to sit? How about stand? Would he rather talk at his place? Yours? Soda? Orange Juice? Water? Even the smallest of choices must immediately be theirs to make. This is giving back some of the power that the rapist has taken away.

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survivor.**

The same principle is true for large choices. Do you want to go to the hospital to be checked out? Do you want to call the police? These decisions can be especially difficult, so be patient and help the person that you are supporting find out exactly what is involved with making these decisions. Hospital visits and police reports can often be just as violating as the assault itself, and may not ever be a safe option for people of color and trans people. Many agencies that respond to rape survivors (including police, hospitals, and domestic violence/sexual assault resource centers) are, at best, unprepared to

deal with the lived realities of people of color, LGBTQ people, and trans people. At worst, they make the situation worse with violence and humiliation. Your job as an ally is to help them figure out what the implications of the choices that they are making are. But still, they must have the power to make any decision that they want to, even if they choose to not report to the police or go to the hospital and you think that they should.

Be careful about very broad, open-ended questions (ex. "What do you want to do?"). You may have to offer or suggest some choices that allow them to figure out how to get some of their own power back. Even the act of making simple choices may be difficult. You have to understand this. Offer suggestions, but be careful. Sometimes they can be very empowering to be able to choose from...sometimes they can be very disempowering.

These choices, of course, also include those concerning physical affection/comfort. Don't assume that a hug is appropriate. Don't assume that being physically close is helpful. *Ask, and follow their lead.*



## PRINCIPLE 5: NO MORE VIOLENCE

This principle is particularly aimed at men in situations where a friend, family member or lover of theirs has been assaulted by another man.

Is kicking a rapist's ass going to make the rape not have happened? Will his pain make the survivor's go away? Does the survivor need to be trying to chill out another out-of-control, violent man? Probably not.

Since non-trans men commit the overwhelming majority (some say over 99%) of sexual assaults, men who are supporting a survivor need to be especially conscious of the impact of male violence. It is male violence that causes rape, not what ends it. Your actions must be those of ending male violence.



We cannot speak for the responses that survivors, women in particular, may make to rape. If women, as a majority of survivors, decide to collectively respond in a way that involves violence or asking male

supporters to participate in violence, that is something for women and survivors to work out for themselves. For men who are supporting a survivor, however, it is **absolutely essential** that you put aside your desires for masculine retribution and interrupt the cycle of male violence.

This rape, no matter how much you think it does, has nothing to do with you. This is not another man damaging property that belongs to you; he is not challenging your manhood. It is not your responsibility, or right, to come in vigilante-style and take matters into your own hands. This is a particularly male perspective, and there is no room for your ego here.



## PRINCIPLE 4: SHUT UP & FOLLOW THE LEAD

Unless you've been through a sexual assault, and even if you have, you're bound to not understand the majority of what the person you are supporting is going through. Because of this, if you start talking a whole lot in your conversations, you are bound to say something unhelpful. This sounds harsh, but it is an unfortunate truth. By being silent and allowing your friend to talk, you are preventing yourself from adding things to a conversation that don't need to be there.

More importantly, by being silent, you are opening up a space for the survivor to reclaim their voice. Rape is silencing, so allowing a space for a survivor to use their voice is a powerful way to support them. Now, they have the control and can talk **and be listened to** if they want to. The rapist didn't listen. You can.



Culturally, we don't value silence enough. Silence can be a very empowering phenomenon for survivors of sexual assault, and all other people who face violence in our culture.

Finally, do not judge the expressions that break the silence. They may need to rage; they may need to cry; they may need to write; they may need to clean the house. They may need to do *anything* other than think or talk about what they have been through. There is a limitless range of responses, and they all need to be honored and supported. Except in cases of threats of suicide or other self-destructive behaviors, any emotion that the survivor expresses must be supported and validated.

## PRINCIPLE 3: BELIEVE!

Being believed is reportedly the #1 factor in a healthy recovery for a survivor of sexual assault. In a strong majority of cases, the rapist will not believe the survivor, the hospital won't believe them, the police won't believe them, and their friends and family won't believe them. **You have to.**

Even with a believing supporter, many survivors spend their lifetimes struggling with themselves about what they might have done to prevent what someone else did to them. It is your job to assure them that they did whatever they needed to do to survive. Our culture will not affirm this, and in doing so, will not believe them.



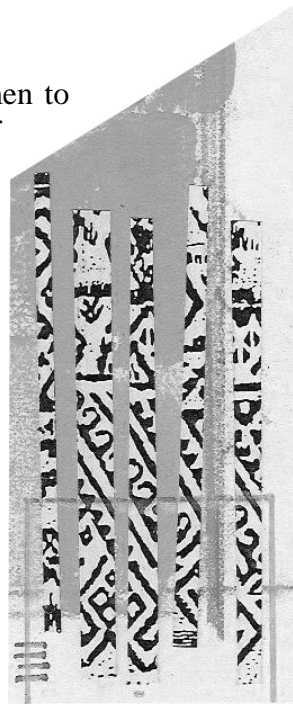
For a woman who is assaulted, she is subjected to the sexist notions that our society has about women and sexuality. If a woman is sexually active, then she is a "slut." If people continue to see rape as sex, then survivors will subsequently be branded as "sluts." You've heard it before. "She deserves what she got." "What was she in his room for anyway? She must've wanted it." "What was she expecting, going out dressed like that?" There is nothing that a woman can do that would justify a man raping her.

This deserves repeating: **there is nothing that a woman, man, trans person, or child could do that would justify someone raping them.**

Because of racist stereotypes, women of color are often subjected to this dynamic in a particularly profound way. The bodies of women of color are seen as exotic, inherently sexual, and even dangerous territories that must be controlled. When men rape women of color, the “she must’ve wanted it” stories reverberate loudly, even within communities of color (in fact, most rapes happen within racial groups, not across them). This must be challenged.

For a man who is assaulted, he is subjected to the sexist and homophobic notions that our society has about men and sexuality. Since a man is always supposed to be dominant, a man who is raped must not be a “real” man. His pain is something to be ashamed of, because he will be branded “gay” or “feminine,” and our culture tells us that both of these identities are unacceptable for men. Men who survive rapes in prison deal with this plus our society’s perspective that he has “gotten what he deserved.” All of this will contribute to his silence

Our homophobic culture teaches straight men to hate being confronted with the sexuality of gay/bi/queer men because it triggers their own fears that they themselves are gay or not “real” men. These fears lead to the homophobic rape of gay/bi/queer men and women and the transphobic rape of people who are discovered to be trans and/or are assumed to be gay/bi/queer because they aren’t easily categorized as “men” or “women.” Rape is rape, and its survivors must be believed in and supported. Trans survivors are often confronted with a double burden of proof when reporting a sexual assault. Not only do they have to prove what happened, but who they say they are. Legal docu-



ments often don’t reflect a trans person’s preferred name or gender. This leads to more silence and vulnerability when dealing with police, hospitals, and support agencies. Never question a trans survivor’s gender identity.

Because of the homophobia mentioned above, there is a great deal of silence about sexual assault that occurs within LGBTQ communities. Like communities of color, these communities are under assault from outside at all times. LGBTQ people, people of color, and especially LGBTQ people of color who speak out may be further silenced by pressure from inside their own communities, in order to keep from “airing dirty laundry” or protecting one another from outside threats. Both the external and internal pressures that create this silence and disbelief must be challenged.

*There is nothing a survivor could have done that would make the violence done to them be okay in any way.*

There is also a great deal of cultural myth built up around the false reporting of sexual assault and rape. Historically, and currently, false reporting was/is used as a racist tactic to justify the lynching of men of color (especially Black men) throughout the U.S. We must study, understand, and take seriously this phenomenon. However, according to most law enforcement agencies today, the percentage of false reports of rape either compares to, or is less

than, the percentages for all other crimes. This myth is a tactic to further silence women (especially women of color), gay/bi/queer men, trans people, and all other survivors.

Your belief in a survivor is essential.