

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

A Guide to Effective Allyship for Survivors

Acknowledge

Acknowledge that they survived something terrible; “This must be really tough for you”; “I’m sorry this happened”

Acknowledge that what they experienced can’t be easy to discuss; “It took a lot of courage to tell me about this”; “I’m so glad you are sharing this with me”

Validate

Survivors may blame themselves for what happened. They should hear more than once that what happened to them was not their fault, and that no matter what they did (or didn’t do) - they are not to blame for what happened. “This shouldn’t have happened to you”; “It’s not your fault; “You didn’t do anything to deserve this.”

Normalize

Oftentimes, survivors are afraid to disclose the abuse because they are afraid of being judged about what happened to them. They may worry that people won’t understand - or that people might feel uncomfortable with the details of the abuse- it’s important to remind them that they are not alone, and that what they experienced, while difficult, is not uncommon. Try to control your facial expressions, and avoid extreme reactions (i.e. shock, disbelief, anger etc.) - instead, normalize their experience and confirm that you believe and care about them. “You are not alone.” “I care about you and am here to listen or help in any way I can.”

Outreach

Support exists, and there are professionals that are trained in advocacy and response. You don’t have to have all of the answers - but it can be helpful to be knowledgeable on helpful resources. You can always offer to dial into the National Sexual Assault Hotline with them. “I know of a great hotline that can provide you with the support you deserve from trained professionals - would you like for me to call them with you?”