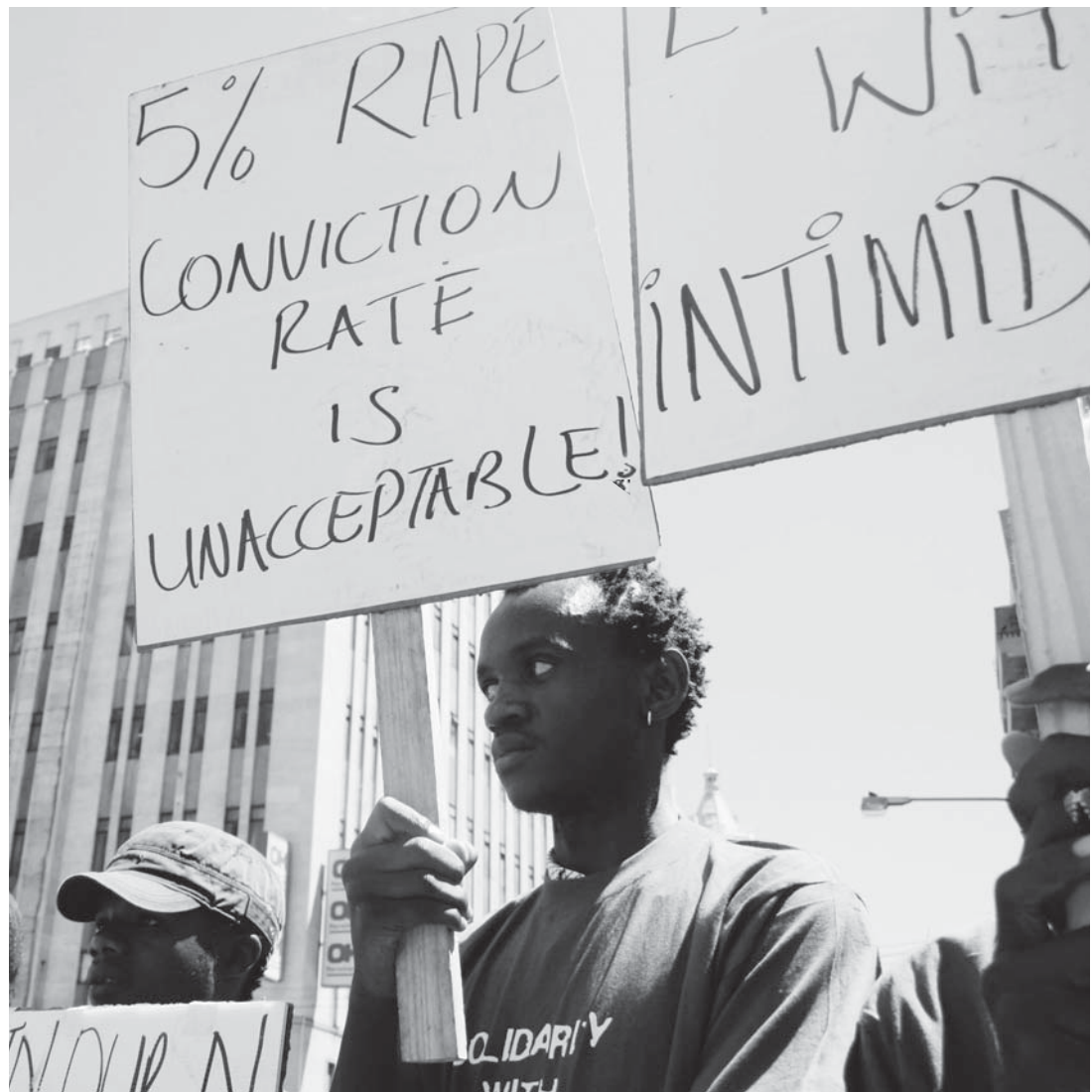




someone you know has survived domestic or sexual violence

What can you do, as a man, to support her?



**ACTION SHEET:
SURVIVORS**

As a male partner, spouse, relative, friend or colleague of a woman who has survived sexual or domestic violence, you may feel it's easier to stay silent. You might be worried that you're going to say the wrong thing or upset her further. **DON'T** keep quiet! There are many different ways that you can support her both emotionally and practically, as well as taking action in your community. Here are a few ideas...

How to support her emotionally...

Listen and try to understand. You may not know what it feels like to be a woman but you know how helpful it is when someone listens and supports you through difficult times. Learn about abuse and how it affects victims/survivors – there are many resources to read that will give you information on how she might be feeling, and what you can do to help.

Believe what she is telling you. It will have taken a lot of courage for her to have told you what she has experienced or is continuing to experience. And respect her privacy: don't tell anyone else unless she has agreed to it.

Don't judge or blame her. No matter the circumstances, no one ever has the right to abuse or rape, and no one deserves to be raped. Don't ask her questions about why she thinks it happened. You don't want her to feel that you are implying that the violence is her fault.

Allow her to express her emotions and, if she wants to cry, give her the space to do so. If she doesn't cry, don't take this as a sign that she wasn't raped; different people respond to rape in different ways. She could be dealing with delayed shock, or feelings of denial. If she experiences depression for a long time or seems suicidal, encourage her to see someone.

Give her time and try not to say things like 'try to forget what happened.' Particularly if she has been raped, she is not going to feel better immediately and may have good and bad days. If she's feeling scared at night, encourage her to have a friend stay with her until she falls asleep. You can also offer to accompany her to places if she isn't feeling safe.


Make sure she knows you are open to talking about the issue and want to listen to how she is feeling. At the time, she may feel that all men are potential perpetrators of violence. This is perfectly normal given what she has been through. Help her see that she can rely on you and other men in her life for support.

Let her take control of her own healing: it's important that victims of violence recover a sense of control over their lives. You can't tell her what to do, but you can support her in what she does and offer her information, an ear and a shoulder!

Get support: You might feel anger, frustration, sadness and pain because someone you care about has been hurt – get help so that you can deal with these feelings with someone equipped to help you, like a counsellor or a social worker. Speak to her about how you have been affected by what has happened to her. This is important so that she understands that you care. But don't burden her with too much as she may then feel guilty and reluctant to share more.

Reach an understanding about sex: If you are a lover, husband or boyfriend of someone who was raped, is it okay to be sexually intimate again? The answer to this question varies from person to person – but it is very important to be patient, and find ways to show you love her that aren't sexual. If you aren't sure how





she feels, talk about it. Sometimes a particular touch or smell can initiate flashbacks to the rape. Flashbacks are very scary and extremely upsetting. Try not to take it personally; it's not about you. She might 'freeze up' during sex, so be aware of how she is responding, and stop if you are unsure. If your sexual attraction to your partner has been affected because of the rape, talk to someone about your feelings.

How to support her practically...

Decide on a course of action together and help her to seek different kinds of professional help. She might want to see a counsellor, get tested for HIV, or she might want to go to a women's shelter or advice centre, especially if she was abused by someone that she knows.

Help her to take action against the violence she has experienced. In South Africa, there are laws in place which can be used to promote action and accountability. The South African Constitution and the Domestic Violence Act make it clear that women have a right to live their lives healthily and free of violence. Read up on the issue, and take advantage of these laws!

Demand justice for survivors: Demand that the government meet its obligations to safety and security. The South African Constitution and other laws make it very clear that the government has an obligation to ensure safety for all - and to arrest, prosecute and convict perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence. To date, the police and the criminal justice system often fail victims of violence. Accompany survivors to court and help them to access their human rights. Put pressure on the police and the courts so that they take decisive action.

Help her to access available services: She doesn't have to suffer alone, or in silence. There are services – women's centres and places of safety she can contact in case of emergency, organisations that can give her legal advice and telephone counselling lines (eg. Rape Crisis, People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), NICRO Women's Support Centre...see the Directory of Service Providers in this Kit). She may want you to go with her to visit these sources of support.

Support her to lay charges if she chooses to: Remember, domestic violence is a crime. She has the right to lay a charge of assault against her partner. Ask her if she would like you to accompany her to the police station to lay the charge.

Help her to secure safety: If she continues to be at risk from the perpetrator, help her to create a safe environment for herself. She has the right to apply for a Protection Order under the Domestic Violence Act. She can request this from a Magistrate's court near to where she or her abuser lives. This order stipulates what the abuser may NOT do. If the abuser commits an act of abuse, the protection order means the abuser can be arrested. The protection order is free and can also help the woman to access medical treatment and find shelter.

Hold the perpetrator accountable: Talk with your friend to see whether she wants you or one of her other friends or family to talk to the perpetrator. Respect her decision if she says no. But also tell her that she can always change her mind.

Be careful and safe: It is not uncommon for perpetrators to lash out against people who get involved. Be prepared for him to become violent and accuse you of getting involved in issues that are not your business. Be ready to resolve the conflict peacefully even if it means walking away. If he does admit to violent behaviour and is willing to talk about it, tell him about organisations that can support him (see the Directory of Service Providers in this Kit). Warning signs NOT to intervene are: he has a gun, he has a criminal record for violence, he accuses her of having affairs, or he has threatened her with death before. Even if he doesn't suffer from irrational jealousy, intervening must not be taken lightly.

In the case of rape:

PEP: Following a rape, it is critical that women access both the emergency contraceptive and a 28-day course of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV infection, within 72 hours. Learn about these treatments and their possible side effects. This will help you understand what she is going through and how you might best support her to take PEP.

Insist the police take immediate action: She has the right to report the rape to the police at any time and lay a charge. Discuss reporting the rape to the police, and if she agrees, accompany her to the police station. She could still be in a state of shock, so may welcome your company when making her statement. If she wants another friend there instead of you, respect her wishes and help her get in touch with that person. At the police station, she should also be taken for a medico-legal examination by the District Surgeon. She has the right to provide her statement in a private place and to have someone there when she makes it.

Familiarise yourself with the court processes: If she does report the rape, she will have to go through a number of different procedures, particularly if the case goes to court. Take some time to learn about and understand these processes and support her through them.

How to take broader action:

Despite our progressive constitution and our strong laws against domestic and sexual violence, the police and criminal justice system continue to fail women. Many police and court officers are compassionate and committed but are underpaid and overworked and don't get the training they need. Other police and justice department officials continue to treat women with contempt, sometimes even raping women and colluding with others to conceal the evidence.

To date most men have not been active in demanding that our Government take decisive action. It is critical that we participate in marches and rallies demanding that women and men all enjoy our constitutional right to safety and security.

Demand swift passage of the Sexual Offences Bill. This bill was first put before Parliament in 1998 and it's now been stuck in parliament for nearly a decade. Women's rights advocates are calling for a bill that defines rape more accurately and that protects women from unfair questioning and treatment in court. The bill needs to be passed immediately.

For information on where to get support, see the Directory of Service Providers in the One Man Can Action Kit, or see our website

www.genderjustice.org.za/onemancan

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Portions of this were adapted from the following sources:

- Men Can Stop Rape
www.mencanstoprape.org/usr_doc/Supporting_Survivors.pdf
- Rape Crisis, South Africa
www.rapecrisis.org.za/media/rapeguidelines/friends-support.doc
- People Opposing Women Abuse
www.powa.co.za/Display.asp?ID=19
- Family Violence Prevention Fund
toolkit.endabuse.org/GetToWork/WhatMenAndBoys/TakingAction

Additional information was gathered through research with survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Cape Town, undertaken by the Sonke Gender Justice Network.

