

▶ [Back to previous view](#)

How to Help a Friend

- If your friend is a victim of crime....
- Things that can help
- Mandated Reporting
- This might affect you too

If your friend is a victim of crime....

Sometimes it's hard to know what to do or say if a friend has been a victim of crime. Understand that your friend is probably dealing with many different emotions and might not know how to talk about it either.

Reading this is a great start to helping your friend. This might not answer all your questions, but it should help you understand how your friend is feeling and good things to say and do, as well as things to avoid. For more information about helping your friend, contact our Helpline at **1-800-FYI-CALL** or gethelp@ncvc.org or talk to a trusted adult.

People react to the trauma caused by crime in lots of ways. You might see your friend doing or saying things you're not used to. If your friend is changing in ways that worry you, talk to a trusted adult or our Helpline about how to address it.

Some changes you might see are:

- New eating or sleeping habits
- Being angry all the time
- Taking lots of risks
- Doing badly in school
- Skipping school
- Feeling hopeless and helpless
- Having lots of headaches or stomach aches
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Mood swings
- Clinginess
- Nervousness
- Depression
- Using drugs or alcohol

Things that can help...

- Let your friend know you care.
- Try to stay calm. Remember that your friend will be aware of your reactions.
- Don't judge your friend.
- Just listen – Let your friend vent and don't try to have answers for everything.

- Tell your friend that you are sorry that it happened.
- Ask your friend to talk about how he or she reacted to the event.
- Understand that your friend might have mood swings.
- Give your friend time to heal. Don't expect your friend to "snap out of it" quickly.
- Help find other people who can help—other friends, teachers, coaches, and family who can support your friend.
- Don't confront the person who hurt your friend. Though you might want to fix the situation or get back at them, this could make things worse, for you and your friend.

Good things to say

- Nothing you did (or didn't do) makes you deserve this.
- I'm glad you told me.
- How can I/we help you feel safer?
- I'm proud of you.
- This happens to other people. Would it help to talk to someone who counsels those people?
- I'm sorry this happened.
- I believe you.
- I'll support your decisions.

Things not to say

- This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't (had)...
- I told you not to: go to that party, date that person, hang out with those people
- Just forget it ever happened.
- Get over it.
- This is private. Don't tell anyone what happened.
- Try not to think about it.
- I want to kill the person who hurt you.

Mandated Reporting

If you choose to talk to someone else about your friend, you should know that some adults are mandated reporters. This means they are legally required to report neglect or abuse to someone else, like the police or child protective services. Some examples of mandated reporters are teachers, counselors, doctors, social workers, coaches, and activity leaders. If you want help deciding who to talk to, call our confidential Helpline at **1-800-FYI-CALL**.

This might affect you too

Sometimes the family and friends of victims also feel the impact of the crime, and experience emotional and physical reactions. This is called secondary victimization.

If you have experienced crime or other traumatic events in the past, your friend's experience might bring up memories and feelings of that time. Talk to a counselor, teacher, victim services provider, or other trusted adult to see what kind of help is available for you.

If you are having difficulty finding help, call the National Center for Victims of Crime Helpline at **1-800-FYI-CALL** for free, confidential assistance, information, and referrals to local resources. You

can also e-mail us at gethelp@ncvc.org.

The National Center website contains information bulletins on different types of crime and the laws in each state. For information on different crimes, see our *GET HELP* Series bulletins. For more information about the laws in your state, visit our Public Policy department.

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