



TIPS FOR HOW TO INTERACT WITH SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE, FAMILIAL CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING, OR SATANIC RITUAL ABUSE

BACKGROUND

These tips come from me as a survivor of all the above and my observations while on my healing journey. Some should be helpful for you in your role as a supporter. Mary Jo Ross

- Because every person is different and so is their experience, there are no black-and-white answers to help you support someone in their journey to survive and then thrive. It's essential to sit back, breathe, and listen.
- Depending on the survivor, you may hear lots of details or very few. Some may overshare (and not realize they are overloading you), or others may take a long time to gain enough trust in you to share any details.
- Any sexually based actions or innuendos are inappropriate.
- Remember that they've been told repeatedly that their families, children, pets, or close loved ones, will be hurt or killed if they ever talk about the abuse. They may also have been severely beaten and drugged if they've tried to tell anyone.
- Be aware that they've repeatedly been told they asked for all the abuse, they wanted it, and that it is their fault. It usually takes being an adult and having children of their own to realize that nothing they could have done would make them deserve the abuse.
- Keep in mind that many have been drugged as part of being controlled. Yes, they may be addicts, but their habits were started or maintained by the abuser. The addictions can also be a way for them to try and avoid pain.
- Don't take their emotions personally. Their feelings may be quite volatile but short-lived. If they have D.I.D. (Dissociative Identity Disorder), they may be cycling through different personalities, which may be a protector part/personality acting out to protect their person. Staying calm and speaking softly should help show you aren't a threat and will help de-escalate, at least in some situations.
- Do not pay the survivor for anything because that puts you in a cycle of abuse.
- It takes time for them to trust, feel safe and find some self-confidence before maintaining eye contact.
- Keep in mind that they may not be able to see God as being loving and forgiving because He did not intervene and protect them during the abuse. Introducing God as loving and forgiving may plant a seed. It may not be helpful if they don't believe in God or have another spiritual practice.



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- If you need to pray for the perpetrators, feel free to do so. Do NOT expect prayer to heal or fix a pedophile or sex trafficker.
- Realize that when you talk about one or more types of abuse to others besides the survivor and support team, others may be horrified and try and shame you for talking about it. Many years ago, the word “cancer” was not to be discussed.

WORDS

- Tell them, “I believe you.” and “You are brave to share what happened to you.”
- Tell them you are sorry the abuse happened and want to understand and help them.
- Remind them **it was not their fault.**
- Ask permission before touching them.
- If you need to walk up behind them, verbally inform them beforehand.
- It’s okay to empathize or sympathize, but DO NOT SAY, “I know how you feel,” even if you think you do. It is a significant insult.
- If it seems appropriate, and you want to do so, ask if you can pray with them or for them. Respect their wishes. You can always pray silently or at a different time away from them.

ACTIONS

- If possible, stay at their level when speaking with or listening to them, even if you must sit on the floor or stand up.
- If you don’t feel safe as a supporter, go where you do and take care of yourself. Notify someone about what is happening (therapist, counselor, 911, The Demand Project, National Centers for Missing and Exploited Children, etc.)
- Keep calm. You may be very sad or outraged. Some tears are okay. It can be a trigger if you let yourself get caught up in anger and show it.
- If you are very emotional, remember you are there for them. DO NOT expect them to help you deal with your emotions.



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- Realize suicidal ideation is normal for someone dealing with and escaping abuse, and it is seen as an option to get rid of their pain and prevent more in the future. Ask directly if you think they might be considering it.
- If they have a suicide plan and can tell you what it is, believe it and do what you need to keep them safe and alive. Call 911, take them to a hospital, or call a crisis team or hotline.
- If you feel they are dangerous to you or someone else, you need to act on it, not just walk away. You may have to leave the room to make a phone call. Follow the same procedure as for suicidal survivors.

TRAUMA

- You may have experienced trauma and abuse. Please realize your experience doesn't match anyone else's. People handle trauma differently.
- Realize you may be triggered and have memories or emotions about things that happened to you. Respect that and care for yourself, including finding a therapist or support group if appropriate.
- If you are triggered by something you are told, it's okay to leave the room, but tell the survivor why ("I am sick to my stomach, etc.") so they don't take it personally.

RESOURCES

- Many local, state, and national organizations can help support you while you deal with the issues involving the survivor. You can reach out to them for resources or referrals.
- **National Resources for Sexual Assault Survivors and their Loved Ones** from RAINN.org is comprehensive.
<https://www.rainn.org/national-resources-sexual-assault-survivors-and-their-loved-ones>
- If you don't have a local resource or don't know how to find one, The Demand Project is based in Tulsa, OK, but has connections to help all over the United States. Please go to their website, <https://www.thedemandproject.org>, or call them at 539.525.0191.