

Supporting Survivors

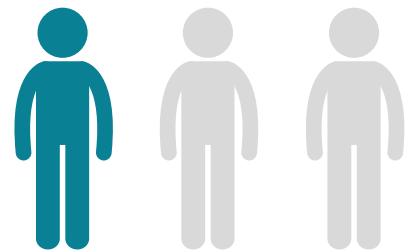


There are over **2.7 million survivors of contact sexual violence living in New Jersey**, meaning that approximately **1 in 3 New Jerseyans** have experienced contact sexual violence at some point in their lives.¹ These statistics reveal that many of us likely know someone who is a survivor of sexual violence, whether it be a friend, family member, co-worker, or community member. Though sexual violence is so pervasive and affects individuals and communities across all demographics, survivors may choose not to disclose their experience due to social stigma or fear of not being believed. We all have a role in dismantling these harmful norms so that we can prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place and support survivors who've been impacted.

It's important to note that **healing isn't one-size-fits-all, and there's no "right" way for a survivor to navigate their experience.** If someone you know discloses that they've been impacted by sexual violence, a crucial first step is to create a supportive space for them as they process their feelings and emotions, and possibly their plan for next steps, if they choose to report and/or seek care.

YOU CAN HELP CREATE A SUPPORTIVE SPACE FOR SURVIVORS BY:

- Believing that the survivor is never to blame for an assault.
- Saying "I believe you" when a survivor shares the experience with you.
- Empowering the survivor to have full autonomy over their healing journey.
- Believing that we each have a role in creating safer communities.



1 in 3 New Jerseyans have experienced contact sexual violence at some point in their lives

(CDC, 2023)

HOW TO RESPOND TO A DISCLOSURE

- **Listen.** You don't have to be an expert in sexual violence services to support a survivor. Simply providing a listening ear and creating a space where survivors feel comfortable disclosing their experience and processing their emotions with you can be incredibly meaningful.
- **Ask how you can help.** Rather than assuming what a survivor needs, ask them. If they're unsure, be patient and let them know you're there to support them in whatever way they feel comfortable.
- **Provide resources.** A survivor may not know where to turn for help, or even what kind of help exists. Offer to research available resources and, if the survivor accepts, provide them with a variety of options as some resources may be more appealing than others. Also, keep in mind that *too many* options can be overwhelming, so offering to narrow down the list or go through options together may be helpful.
- **Respect boundaries.** Truly listening also means respecting a survivor's healing journey. If they say that they don't want to talk about it or decline resources you offer, it's important to respect their wishes and continue supporting them in the ways they feel comfortable. Boundaries may shift as the survivor continues navigating their feelings and emotions, so remember to check in regularly about how they're feeling.
- **Learn about the impacts of trauma.** Trauma can manifest in many ways and can often have long-lasting impacts. Learning more can help you identify areas of support you may be able to offer a survivor, whether it's immediately following a traumatic experience or long after.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Receiving a disclosure, especially from a loved one, can feel overwhelming and may even cause you to experience vicarious trauma. Remember that it's OK to respect your own boundaries throughout someone else's healing process. An important part of supporting others is prioritizing self-care and your well-being so you don't begin to experience negative impacts.



If you or a loved one have been impacted by sexual violence and are in need of support, you can call the 24-hour Statewide Hotline at [1-800-601-7200](tel:1-800-601-7200) or go to njcasa.org/find-help for information about your local sexual violence program and available resources.

REFERENCES

¹ Smith, S. G., Khatiwada, S., Richardson, L., Basile, K. C., Friar, N. W., Chen, J., Zhang Kudon, H., & Leemis, R. W. (2023). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 state report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVS-2016-2017-State-Report-508.pdf>

© New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault 2024. The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide advocacy and capacity building organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers, the Rutgers University - New Brunswick Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance, and a cohort of culturally specific organizations.

njcoalition
against sexual assault