



Secondary Survivors

Who are secondary survivors?

When someone experiences trauma, their experience affects others who are close to them. As the victim/survivor endures the pain of the trauma, those who care about them often want to help and provide support. However, this does not come without a potential cost to the caregiver. That is, hearing about what happened, trying to provide emotional support for the victim/survivor, and being the friend or family member that is leaned upon takes an emotional toll on the one giving support. These caregivers may experience a degree of trauma vicariously and are commonly referred to as “*secondary survivors*”.

Understand...

While your priority may be to help the victim/survivor, remember that you also need to take care of yourself. Working through your own feelings and reactions will not only help you but will also help the victim/survivor. Experience informs that victims/survivors who receive emotional support from those they are closest to will heal sooner.

Consider...

Secondary survivors often report feeling very angry. Work to understand your anger. Feeling anger toward the offender is a very normal reaction to the violence; however, expressing intent to harm the offender only adds to the victim/survivor’s anxiety.

Those close to a victim/survivor of trauma commonly experience feelings of guilt for their perceived failure to protect their loved one. Realize that just as much as it isn’t the victim/survivor’s fault, it is also not your fault.

Some secondary survivors attempt to support the victim/survivor by overprotecting them. You and the one you care about need some space and time to figure things out. It’s okay to have some alone time.

Secondary survivors sometimes hope to help the victim/survivor by distracting them from what has happened. Some distraction can be helpful, but remember, the trauma will not disappear. Over time, all will need to deal with the aftermath from the traumatic experience.

Spouses, partners, and significant others must listen to the victim/survivor for cues on levels of intimacy. The victim/survivor may feel uncomfortable, afraid, or have flashbacks from the assault. ***Be patient and understanding.***

Secondary survivors must monitor their ability to be a support person for the victim/survivor, as well as be honest with their capabilities. Recognizing one’s own emotional distress is important. If needed, consider seeking help with processing your own feelings while you render help for the victim/survivor.

Giving Support

If you are supporting someone who has experienced trauma, it is important to:

- Respect the victim/survivor's need to talk and avoid pushing them to talk before they are ready.
- Allow them to express their full range of feelings without fear of condemnation or criticism.
- Be aware of comments that try to distract them or discount what they are feeling.
- If you are unsure how to respond, express your concern and ask how you can best support them.
- Avoid prying or pressing for details about the assault. You don't need every detail to provide support.
- Avoid comments or questions that imply blame.
- Be willing to assist them with finding information about medical and legal concerns, as well as about available resources.
- Assist the victim/survivor in feeling safe. This is not only about physical safety but is also about emotional safety as well.
- If children are involved, they may know or sense that something has happened. It is important that they have someone to talk to about their feelings.
- Recognize your own limitations and encourage the victim/survivor to seek help with someone trained in victim advocacy or counseling.
- Offer to help connect the victim/survivor with available resources.

Campus Resources

SRVC	479-575-4000
Advocacy email	survivor@uark.edu
Education programs email	respect@uark.edu
CAPS 24 HR Crisis Line	479-575-5276
(Counseling & Psychological Services)	
Pat Walker Health Center	479-575-4451
(University Health Services)	
U of A Cares	479-575-5004
University Police	479-575-2222
Title IX	479-575-7111
	titleIX@uark.edu
Student Accountability	479-575-5170
	judicial@uark.edu
Reports for Any Concern	report.uark.edu

In the event of an emergency, call 911

CONFIDENTIAL

Campus Resource Options

If you want to speak on campus with someone **confidentially** about sexual or relationship violence, you may do so with a victim advocate at the SRVC or a mental health counselor. Faculty and staff are required by university policy to report incidents of sexual or relationship violence to the Title IX coordinator for the University to investigate. An advocate is available through the SRVC and may be reached by emailing survivor@uark.edu or calling 479-575-4000.

For more information, visit srvc.uark.edu

Forensic Evidence Collection ("a Rape Kit") is available by appointment at the NWA Center for Sexual Assault, 1670 W. Sunset, Suite B, Springdale, AR 72762. Call 1-800-794-4175 to arrange for an appointment or contact the campus SRVC for assistance with this.