

Things Not to Say to a Survivor

There are things that will “trigger” or upset a survivor. Most people don’t have a clue what to say or do. We’re still your friends, family, wives, moms, students, husbands, teachers, doctors, brothers and loved ones. There’s no need to back off or be scared of us. For the most part these suggestions are pretty easy to avoid, as you will see in a minute.

Please don’t...

1. Ask if we liked it. No one likes being physically overpowered.
2. Tell us “it’s just sex”. Rape is a crime of power, control, and extreme violence where sex is used as a weapon against someone weaker. It is not sex.
3. Tell us how we could have avoided it. Believe me, if we could have prevented it we would have.
4. Make fun of us. We have faced an attacker who sometimes is willing to kill and have survived. What’s there to make fun of?
5. Tell us it would never happen to you and why. We didn’t think we would become statistics either.
6. There’s no need to avoid us. We’re still the same person you’ve come to care about or learned to care about. We’ve just been unspeakably hurt. We’re not contagious.
7. Please don’t treat us like we have the plague. Chances are we don’t. Do you?
8. God isn’t punishing us for some misdeed by allowing this to happen. God helps us heal. He doesn’t send someone to hurt His people.
9. Don’t tell us it was God’s will we were raped. Do tell us it was God’s will that we survived!
10. Don’t disbelieve us. According to survey respondents being disbelieved is a survivor’s greatest fear.
11. Don’t tell us that survivors make up tales for attention. According to The National Coalition Against Sexual Assault false rape reports only happen 2% of the time. That’s a 98% chance that no matter how strange it sounds to you the rape isn’t being fabricated.
12. Don’t tell me not to talk about it. Yes it upsets me to talk about it but that is the only way that I can sort through it.

13. Don't say, "It happened on a date, that's common". When you say that, it belittles me and my feelings about the assault. It's not common because it happened to me and I'm not a statistic.

14. Don't say "other people have it worse off than you". I'm not "other people". I'm me.

15. Don't feel you need to retaliate against our attacker. We know the perpetrator is capable of violence. Please don't make us worry about you being hurt. We'll feel more secure knowing you'll remain in one piece.

16. Don't blame us for what happened. It's not our fault.

17. Don't tell us to "get over it". We would if we could and we are trying our best. Support us as we struggle to find our way again.

18. Don't tell us to put what happened out of our minds. It's not that simple.

19. Don't tell us "it's no big deal". Rape is an enormous challenge to heal from. It haunts even our dreams.

20. If we disagree about safety issues in the future please realize that what may sound strange to you may help us feel safe.

21. Don't say something like, "Well, it's been six months (a year, 5 years etc.) and ask if we're "over it" yet. Chances are that we may not be ready to go back to life as it was. We may never be ready and may have to create a new life for ourselves as we learn to be safe again.

22. Don't tell us we are weak because it impacts our life. We are stronger than words can describe.

23. Don't ask us what you are supposed to do to get past what happened to us. We aren't sure what we're going to do.

24. Don't ask us if we did this on purpose. We didn't do anything except survive.

25. Don't ask us if we couldn't have done something differently during the attack. We made the best choices we could to survive. We got away without being killed didn't we? That's proof our instincts were right. Please help us learn to realize that ourselves.

26. Don't tell us that it's not rape because we knew the attacker. Numerous studies tell us that our perpetrators are more likely to be known to us than unknown.

27. If you give us a hug and we pull away please know that chances are we're not rejecting you. We may have a hard time being able to respond right now.

28. If we do pull away from you please don't get mad. Tell us you care. Chances are you'll get that hug after all!

29. If you're together and the survivor has a flashback, try not to be mad at the survivor. We hate the darned things too! Flashbacks are always rough. It's difficult to know what to do. It's got to be difficult to watch. Any anger should go to the one who caused the rape and not the survivor who has to put her life together.

30. Don't be afraid to talk to us if we're upset. Knowing you are there may be just what we need.

31. If we become suicidal please don't take that as a sign of weakness. Take that as a sign we're overwhelmed, trying to cope, and need help.

32. Don't pretend rape doesn't happen to people you know. It does. Thank you for reading this to learn about it.

33. Don't get the idea rape just happens to "those" kinds of people. This crime happens to as many as 1 woman in 4 crossing ethnic, racial, economic and social boundaries.

34. Don't be afraid of a person who was raped. I promise as a survivor, the rape will affect you but won't rub off on you. The person you love is still the same person as before.

35. Don't deny your feelings after finding out a friend was raped. Call a rape crisis center's hotline and find out what support is available for you.

36. Do not tell us we should take it as a compliment. Rape isn't about lust or attractiveness, it's an act of power and force.

37. Do not tell us "Oh yeah, I know a bunch of girls who've been raped" as if it were no big deal. We realize we aren't the only ones but by saying that it belittles how it hurts by making it just another number.