

How to be supportive of Victims/Survivors in your congregation

A victim of sexual abuse may feel angry, confused, and helpless. There are several things you can do to help in the healing process and provide the support they may need.

- **Believe** the victim/survivor unconditionally. Accept what you hear without judgment.
- **Reinforce** to the victim/survivor **that it is not his or her fault**. Sexual abuse is NEVER the victim/survivor's fault. It is important not to ask "why" questions, such as "Why didn't you come forward sooner?" that suggest that he or she is to blame for the abuse.
- Understand that you cannot control how the victim/survivor feels or "fix" the problem. Everyone reacts differently to sexual abuse and heals at his or her own pace. It is important that you not assume you know how he or she is feeling—almost any reaction is possible.
- **Be a good listener**. Let the victim/survivor know you are there for him or her when he or she is ready to talk. When and if the victim/survivor does want to talk about the abuse, do not push for information. Let him or her tell you what he or she is comfortable sharing in his or her own time. Encourage them to get support, share resources.
- **Be Patient**; remember there is no timetable for recovering from trauma.
- **Do not suggest that the victim/survivor "move on"** with his or her life and forget about the abuse. The victim/survivor needs the opportunity to work through the trauma of the abuse and begin the healing process.
- Remember to **take care of yourself**—seek support if you need it. Good self-care enables you to better care for others.