WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Avoid blaming yourself. Remember that sexual violence is never the victim's fault. You were not assaulted because of personal characteristics or behavior; you were assaulted because someone made the decision to act violently and temporarily take your power away from you.

Talk to someone you trust. Experiencing sexual violence is not something you have to go through alone. There are people on campus and in the community who are trained to help you cope with the experience and examine all of your options. Counselors at the Bradley University Center for Wellness and Counseling and Advocates at the Center for Prevention of Abuse can talk to you confidentially about your options and can also help you heal from your experience. They can talk to you about your experience and what to expect if you decide to go to the hospital, talk to the police, or pursue University charges against the perpetrator.

Give yourself time to heal. Experiencing sexual violence is very traumatic. It is perfectly normal to feel a range of emotions from sadness to depression to anger, resentment, confusion and sometimes indifference. Emotional response is different for each victim. Do not expect your emotions or other effects of the violence to disappear overnight. Healing from sexual violence is a process similar to healing from other types of trauma. Some people start to heal soon after the violent incident, other people feel as though they are recovering from sexual violence for decades, and still others feel find in the immediate aftermath of the violence and do not recognize that they need to recover until years later.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF SOMEONE TELLS ME THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Dealing with sexual assault, abuse or harassment is not only difficult for a victim; it is also difficult for the people that the victim turns to for support. Here are some ways to help:

- Make sure the student is in a safe and secure environment.
- If you have been identified as a “Responsible Employee” of Bradley University be sure the victim knows of your obligation to report any details they share with you. If they want to talk to someone confidentially, call the Center for Counseling at 677-2700 or the Center for Prevention of Abuse at 1-800-559-7233.
- Ask the person “How may I help?” Let them determine next steps.
- Listen. Do not be judgmental. Validate her/his feelings of fear and anger. Reminder her/him that sexual assault is never the victim's fault.
- If you are uncomfortable listening, help the person find someone who can listen. Bradley University and the Center for Prevention of Abuse both have
- Counselors available 24/7.
  - Believe the victim. One reason sexual violence is under-reported is because victims experience a tremendous amount of blame and disbelief when they tell people about the experience. Often, a large portion of this victim blame comes from friends, family, and partners that are well-meaning and generally supportive, but make victim-blaming comments unintentionally. Questioning a victim about how s/he tried to resist the violence (“Did you fight back? Did you say no?”) or her/his actions leading up to the violence (“What were you wearing? Had you been drinking?”) can come off as blaming even when you are just trying to get the facts straight.
  - If the incident was very recent, encourage the victim to try to preserve all physical evidence and to seek medical treatment.
  - Encourage the victim to discuss the matter with Anne Hollis, the Director of Student Support Services (309) 677-3658. The student will be made aware of options for pursuing charges against the offender(s) through the criminal courts and the university disciplinary system. At the victim’s request, the Director may make special provisions for temporary alternate campus housing during the period of investigation and adjudication. Other support may also be provided upon request.
  - Take care of yourself. Being a supporter can be stressful and draining, you may need to seek support yourself. Counselors and trained advocates can also assist supporters by providing counseling and responding to any questions or concerns.