

SUPPORTING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING INJUSTICE

It's important to know that there is no normal or one way to react when you find out someone you care about has survived injustice. Regardless of what you're feeling, these emotions can be intense and difficult to deal with. Learning how to manage these feelings can help you support the friend in your life and can help you feel less overwhelmed.

IMPORTANT NOTE AROUND ISSUES OF SAFETY

If someone confides in you and is in immediate danger, you may need to break their confidence and get them immediate help. If they have (currently) a plan to kill themselves or that someone threatened their lives; feel free to tell the friend this secret is not worth losing them. Then call a staff member while not leaving them alone. Although your friend may be mad and even not want to talk to you for breaking confidence, is their anger, or losing them forever, worth keeping silent?

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO REACT? WHAT MIGHT THEY EXPERIENCE?

There is no "right" reaction to hearing that someone you care about has experienced injustice. It is common to experience some of the following emotions:

ANXIETY.

You might feel anxious about responding the "right" way or worried about how this event will impact your relationship with the survivor. These can be the most powerful and helpful words for a survivor to hear.

HELPLESSNESS.

The injustice already happened. You don't know what to do or how to best support. This feeling of helplessness is common and human. Know many times the person just wants an open ear not solutions or a lawyer. If they wanted that they probably would have sought that out. They need a friend. If you are very concerned about your friend consult with Student Counseling Services (SCS) or a campus staff member.

CONFUSION.

You might feel confused by what you're hearing. You might not understand how it could happen or why it has happened. Sadly, injustice is more common than we'd like to think.

COMPASSION.

Many times when we hear about an injustice committed against someone else no matter what type (*interpersonal, academic, discrimination, legal, etc.*) we feel compassion. A sense of caring and wanting to do something or know more comes over us. This can easily go into asking many questions or pity. Asking many questions can affect the person, bringing up unwanted memories or emotions; can even remind them of law enforcement or doctors' interviews. Allow them to share what they are comfortable with, if you want to learn more about these issues there are safer and healthier ways to learn. Compassion and pity are similar but can feel very different. Pity can suggest a power dynamic, hinting that the person listening is "more" for not having experienced the injustice. Feel free to let the person know which you are trying to convey.

DISBELIEF.

When you first hear about the events you might be surprised or shocked, and you might have trouble believing this injustice happened. After a shocking experience, it's common for even those directly affected and those around them to experience denial. It's important to focus on believing their experience and perception of the events and acknowledging their experience.

REMEMBERTO:

Listen without judgment, assumptions, or interruptions.

Let them know that you believe what they are saying and take them seriously

Know your limits and do not place yourself in physical danger – the best way to help is to connect your friend to a mental health professional. Reach out to a campus staff member or campus police.

GUILT.

You may feel guilty that you could not prevent this from happening. Or that the person didn't feel comfortable telling you about the injustice right way. You may feel guilty that something so terrible happened to someone else and not to you. It can be helpful to refocus your energy on making the individual most triggered feel supported as they move forward.

ANGER.

You might feel anger for a number of reasons: towards yourself for not being able to protect them, towards the individual(s) for telling you about something that is hard to hear, or because they waited a period of time before telling you; or towards others for acting in a way that hurt this person. It can be difficult to keep anger from affecting the way you communicate. Let yourself acknowledge this emotion and find another outlet to express it. Also if your anger is overwhelming it may be time for self-care.

EMPATHY.

Compassionate empathy and emotional empathy can both happen when hearing about injustice. Emotional empathy is feeling the emotions that another person may be feeling. Compassionate empathy is understanding a person's difficulty and being moved to help. Either way hearing someone's experience can even remind us of a similar injustice you may have experienced. It is worth mentally noting it and following up with self-care when appropriate.

SADNESS.

When you learn that an injustice happened to someone you care about, it's normal to feel sad, hopeless, worried, or powerless. You might feel sad for the survivor or mourn how this has changed their life. If you know the perpetrator, you might feel sad for how this has changed your life as well. Self-care strategies and coping skills can help you move through these feelings.

AFTER TELLING YOU ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE

There's no timetable when it comes to processing injustices. If someone trusted you enough to disclose the event(s), consider the following ways to show your continued support.

CHECK IN PERIODICALLY.

- The event may have happened a long time ago, but that doesn't mean the pain is gone.
- Check in with the survivor to remind them you still care about their well-being and believe their story and they deserve support.

HONOR THEIR WISHES.

- They may decline to process verbally or for you to text/ check-in on them. Please honor those requests.
- Ask them how you can and if they want any support/ referrals from you.

AVOID JUDGMENT.

- It can be difficult to watch someone struggling with the aftermath of injustices for an extended period of time.
- Avoid phrases that suggest they're taking too long to recover such as, "You've been acting like this for a while now," or "How much longer will you feel this way?"

REMEMBER THAT THE PROCESS IS FLUID.

- Everyone has bad days.
- Don't interpret flashbacks, bad days, or silent spells as "setbacks." It's all part of the process.

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

- You're a strong supporter, but that doesn't mean you're equipped to manage someone else's health.
- Become familiar with resources on and off campus. **CycloneHealth.org** is a great place to start.

*Adapted from multiple sources including multiple sections of RAINN.org (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), and ULifeline.org (Online resource for college mental health)

CRISIS RESOURCES

- For life-threatening emergencies, please call **911**
- Campus police at **(515) 294-4428**
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(800) 273-8255
- Text the 24 hours Crisis Text line
Text ISU to 741741

STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLNESS

STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES
515-294-5056

THIELEN STUDENT HEALTH CENTER
515-294-5801

STUDENT WELLNESS
515-294-1099

RECREATION SERVICES
515-294-4980

