Being a Co-Survivor

**Supporting a Loved One through Gender-Based Violence**

When talking about gender-based violence, even the terminology alone can feel overwhelming. Let’s start with the basics.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): gender-based violence is an umbrella term that can include sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation. You can read how [Loyola defines those terms in the Comprehensive Policy](https://www.luc.edu/equity/policyprocedure/comprehensivepolicy/sexualmisconductpolicy/).

Survivor: someone who has experience Gender-Based Violence. This term is often preferred to the word *victim*, but not always. Take your loved ones lead and use the terminology they are comfortable with or using for themselves.

Co-Survivor: that’s you! A co-survivor is the term we use at LUC to refer to someone who is supporting the survivor of gender-based violence. Co-survivors can include family, friends, or other important people in a survivor’s life. Co-survivors provide emotional support and often resources or tangible support (like rides, a place to stay, etc.) to their loved ones in the aftermath of gender-based violence.

Being a co-survivor can be hard. You often see the emotional and physical impacts of trauma that your loved one is experiencing and that can bring up your own feelings. Supporting your loved one while also caring for yourself can be hard to balance. You may need to seek out your own support. It isn’t selfish; it’s making sure you are taken care of so that you can be the help you want to be.

**How to Support your Loved One**

Things you can say:

“I am here for you no matter what you decide to do.”

Show your intention to be a reliable and nonjudgmental ally. Your love and support shouldn’t be contingent on your friend or loved one making certain choices – even if you disagree with their course of actions, show your continued support.

“Thank you for sharing this with me. That must have been hard.”

Sharing this experience is not easy to do. Recognize and acknowledge this huge step your loved one has taken.

“You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to.”

Reassure your loved one that they only need to share what they feel comfortable sharing. Overtime they may share more; don’t force them to talk. Give them power over their narrative.

“I’m sorry this happened.”

Acknowledge how the experience has affected their life. Communicate empathy with phrases like “This must be really tough for you.”

“You didn’t do anything to deserve this.”

Survivors may blame themselves, especially if the perpetrator is someone they know personally. Remind them, maybe more than once, that they are not to blame.

“I believe you.”

Coming forward and sharing their story can be very difficult. They may feel ashamed, concerned they won’t be believed or worried they’ll be blamed. Leave any “why” questions to experts or advocates, your job is to support this person.

Things you can do:

Avoid judgement:

Healing can look different for everyone. Avoid telling survivors what they should/shouldn’t do, especially their decision to report or not. Even if you don’t agree with the survivor, it is their decision to make. There is no set timeline for their healing, and it’s okay if the process looks different than you want it to.

Know your resources:

Familiarize yourself with options in your area that you or the survivor can use if needed and offer them if the survivor is open to them. There are resources at the end of this packet for you to familiarize yourself with. You can also always call The Line at 773-494-3810 [to speak with an advocate.](https://www.luc.edu/coalition/gethelp/idontknowwhattodo/advocacyservices/)

Care for yourself:

Being a co-survivor is challenging. Be sure to seek help if you need it and watch for signs of vicarious trauma. There are resources for you, too.

*Adapted from RAINN*

**Signs of Vicarious Trauma (or secondhand trauma)**

When we experience overwhelming volumes of information—especially information that holds an emotional charge—our bodies, minds, and spirit adapt to help us cope. At times, the way we cope may help in the moment but may have long-term results. While there are signs you or a person you know may be dealing with vicarious trauma, everyone copes differently. If you notice any of your own experiences in the following list, the [Wellness Center is a great resource for Mental Health services.](https://www.luc.edu/wellness/mentalhealth/)

Exhaustion and physical ailments

* Constant tiredness, even after resting
* Physical body tension
* Headaches, back pain, and wrist pain
* Difficulty falling asleep or excessive sleeping
* Falling sick when you have time to rest, such as on a vacation

Emotional shifts

* Hypersensitive to emotionally-charged material
* Feeling disconnected from your emotions and/or your body
* Feeling like no matter how much you give, it will never be enough
* Feeling helpless or hopeless about the future
* Increased levels of anger, irritability, resentment, or cynicism

Thought patterns

* Difficulty in seeing multiple perspectives or new solutions
* Jumping to conclusions, rigid thinking, or difficulty being thoughtful and deliberate
* Minimizing the suffering of others in comparison to the most severe incidents or situations

Behavioral shifts

* Absenteeism and attrition
* Avoidance of work, relationships, and/or responsibilities
* Dread of activities that used to be positive or neutral

Relationship changes

* No separation of personal and professional time
* Difficulty relating to others’ day-to-day experiences without comparing them to your loved one or yourself
* Hypervigilant and concerned about the safety of those you care about

*Adapted from the Joyful Heart Foundation*

**Loyola Advocacy Services**

The Wellness Center has trained advocates that offer support and advocacy to students who have been impacted gender-based violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and intimate partner violence or domestic violence. We are available to answer any questions that you may have. Confidential, nonjudgmental services include:

* Information about what resources exist on- and off-campus for counseling, support, and legal advocacy
* Education about medical options and procedures, including evidence collection
* Assistance in reporting assault to Campus Safety, if the survivor chooses
* Information about reporting and support in navigating Loyola's resolution process, if the survivors is interested
* Assistance in creating a safety plan
* Referrals to counseling and other supportive campus and community services

**The primary way to connect with an advocate is to call The Line at Loyola at 773-494-3810**. The Line is open Monday-Friday, 8:30am-5:00pm and 24 hours on the weekend when classes are in session. You can also call The Line to schedule an in-person advocacy appointment.

Visit [Loyola’s advocacy services webpage for more information](https://www.luc.edu/coalition/gethelp/idontknowwhattodo/advocacyservices/). If The Line is closed and you would like to speak to someone right away, please call the Chicago Rape Crisis Hotline at 888-293-2080.



**Co-Survivor Resources**

**Where to start:**

[**What does it mean to be a co-survivor (or secondary survivor)?**](https://www.ccasa.org/supporting-secondary-survivors/)

**What to do:**

[**Helping your Friend/Roommate**](https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-someone-else/help-a-friend/)

**Helping your Child**

[Tips for Parents](https://knowyourix.org/for-friends-and-fami/tips-parents-guardians-family-members/)

[Supporting a Child Experiencing Dating Violence](https://www.loveisrespect.org/supporting-others-dating-abuse/supporting-your-child/)

**Helping your Significant Other/Partner**

[How to Support a Partner who was Sexually Assaulted](https://www.caase.org/support-a-partner-who-was-sexually-assaulted/)

**Dating/Domestic Violence Co-survivors**

[How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/presence-mind/201510/how-help-someone-in-abusive-relationship)

[Why do People Stay in Abusive Relationships?](https://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/Why_Do_People_Stay_In_Abusive_Relationships.pdf)

[What to say (and not say) to a friend in an abusive relationship](https://www.self.com/story/help-friend-abusive-relationship)

**Sexual Assault**

[Impact of Sexual Assault](https://www.ourresilience.org/what-you-need-to-know/effects-of-sexual-violence/)

[Sexual Assault Myths and Facts](https://www.ourresilience.org/what-you-need-to-know/myths-and-facts/)

[What to say to a Sexual Assault Survivor](https://www.rainn.org/articles/tips-talking-survivors-sexual-assault)

**Coping and Self Care for You:**

[Coping with Secondary Trauma](http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/learn/vicarious-trauma/identifying-vicarious-trauma/signs-vicarious-trauma)

[Tips for Your Own Self Care](https://www.rainn.org/articles/self-care-friends-and-family)

[Get Support at the Wellness Center](https://www.luc.edu/wellness/)

[Free Trauma Therapy for Survivors and Co-Survivors in Chicago](https://www.ourresilience.org/programs-services/trauma-therapy/)