

**Top 4 Destructive
But Well-Meaning
Things to Stop
Saying to Sexual
Violence Survivors
(and What to Do
Instead)**

Conversation starter for allies, groups,
organizations and survivors

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Thoughts From Evelyn:

I'm Evelyn Fielding, sexual violence survivor and coach for other survivors. I'm glad you downloaded this resource and welcome you to the new insights you'll get after reading and considering what I've put together.

Insights are lights that come on in your thinking, feeling and doing: new information comes to you and connects with what you already know. Insights can be sparks or candles, little lights that help you see your way. Or they can be fireworks or sunrises, big lights that seem amazing and wonderful and change the course of your life.

I designed this resource to be printed out and shared. It could be a good conversation starter among friends, in a small group, or as part of a series of resources about sexual violence.

Statistically, more than 25 percent of the entire population have been directly harmed by sexual violence. That leaves a lot of people who may not have experienced this trauma themselves but who can be allies and supporters for loved ones and strangers who have.

If you took the time and trouble to download this, I think you're interested in taking the next step in becoming a good ally. That's why [I created the Beyond Brave Community](#) and designed the **For Allies: Safe Person Training group**.

In the Beyond Brave Community, survivors of all ages, genders and geographies have conversations about how trauma has affected them and what they're doing about it now. Allies are invited to listen and learn so they can take action in the world to end the stigma and shame for survivors.

The For Allies: Safe Person Training strengthens skills and tools for allies, and goes well beyond what you can look up on the internet about how to advocate for sexual violence survivors. You will gain confidence to speak up as a bystander, knowledge to teach others, listening and talking skills, how to handle burnout before it happens, and so much more.

Please take a look at the Community and the training group. Then, print out this resource and start conversations wherever you are right now.

You are OK just as you are, and it's not a failure to want to change how you talk to survivors and how you talk about sexual violence. Change and growth are good things, and it's nice to have a little help along the way.

I hope to see you again soon!

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The Top 4 Destructive But Well-Meaning Things to Stop Saying to Sexual Violence Survivors (and What to Do Instead)

What you say: You are so brave / strong / amazing.

What you mean: You are trying to express respect and admiration and build our self-esteem.

What we may hear: You are brave / strong / amazing.

What happens for us: We often don't feel brave, even a long time after the bad things happen. Telling our stories makes us feel especially vulnerable.

How this changes the subject: We feel we disagree, if we're honest about our actual emotions, or say "Thank you" to avoid disagreement.

What you say: It gets better.

What you mean: You are trying to inspire hope that we'll heal and move on to a positive and powerful new life.

What we may hear: Move on.

What happens for us: We would like to believe that things get better, but they aren't better right now... and we feel broken, sad and overwhelmed.

How this changes the subject: We feel you want to tell us all the ways YOU think we should heal, if we would only try this or that.

What you say: What happened?

What you mean: You are trying to understand and put sexual violence into context so you know how to help.

What we may hear: Tell the intimate details of your story AGAIN and AGAIN.

What happens for us: We failed to stop bad things from happening to ourselves. Ruminating on the story brings no resolution.

How this changes the subject: We feel shifted away from the present moment, and must relive the past before we can have a real conversation.

What you say: The same thing happened to me / someone I know.

What you mean: You are trying to help us not feel alone.

What we may hear: Other people's stories are important, too!!

What happens for us: There are a LOT of sexual violence survivors. And we often still feel alone, afraid and ashamed.

How this changes the subject: We feel you want to tell your story, or the story of someone else you know or heard about or saw on TV.

The one thing you should say instead: What can I do for you today?

And what should you do?

1. Listen to the answer. Ask only clarifying questions if needed.
2. Consider whether you can actually do what the survivor tells you.
3. Be honest about whether you can help or not.
4. Ask permission before suggesting or making a referral. Sometimes your helpful ideas are not new.
5. Educate yourself about feminism, patriarchy, colonialism, how your culture and community handle sexual topics, how other cultures and communities handle sexual topics, and resources available for survivors.
6. And please, stop changing the subject when someone finds the courage to tell their story.