



Nancy Hightshoe Seminars

LifeSkills

By Nancy Hightshoe

Supporting a Loved One, Friend or Colleague Who Has Been the Victim of a Sexual Assault

Due to the rate of sexual assault in today's society, it is likely that each of us will find ourselves talking with and supporting a loved one, friend or colleague who has been a victim. Following are suggestions which will make this easier for you and more helpful for the victim.

Some statistics which may help to put the issue in perspective:

- 1 woman in 3 will be assaulted;
- 1 girl in 4 and 1 boy in 6 will be victims of a felony assault.

Teenaged girls are the most abducted group and, unfortunately, many times an assault occurs as the crime unfolds.

The support of family and friends is crucial to the victim's healing. Frequently, to get the process started or to help that process over the rough spots, experienced professional help saves time and emotional pain.

I offer **LifeSkills Coaching**, a six-session, one-on-one coaching series that allows victims to heal and thrive. They learn to move past the fear, move past the pain, and move toward their complete and fulfilling future.

To avoid becoming too cumbersome, I'll use the feminine pronoun for the victim, but please keep in mind that these suggestions are just as valuable for male victims.

TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU SUPPORT A VICTIM

With my background in law enforcement, I definitely encourage reporting the assault to the police. Let me explain why reporting is important.



"The Lady Was A Cop"

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Nancy Hightshoe is an accomplished speaker, coach and consultant. She is an expert in:

- Professional and Personal Effectiveness
- Safety, Security and Survival.

Nancy's Background:

- Business and Life Strategies Coach
- Police Officer, Detective and Entrepreneur

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CONTROL: One of the most traumatizing aspects of an assault is that the victim has absolutely no control, and she feels this lack of control acutely. Trained investigators and medical personnel give her back some of that lost control. During investigations, I engaged her as much as possible in the process. As a detective, I needed the information only she could give me. Working in partnership, we built strong cases as, sentence by sentence, she recalled the facts of the case and started to take back control.

Depression is anger turned inward. Recalling the specific clues which built the case, her mind was diverted from an emotional response to the assault and focused on his description, what he said, what evidence he might have left behind, anything she sensed about his work, family, education, whether he smoked, etc. The more detailed she became, the stronger our case was. And the more in control she felt.

The difference in a victim's face, body language, her entire demeanor and emotional outlook from the time she first reported a crime until the time after she had identified the suspect in a line-up and we had gotten warrants - was worth months of counseling.

CLEANSING: We have all had the flu. You know how you feel just before you toss your cookies. You are miserable. After you've been sick (unpleasant though that is), you have a whole new lease on life.

Most police departments have units specializing in serious assaults. Talking with a competent, empathetic investigator gives her the opportunity to get it all out of her system: all the fear, the actions she wishes she had done differently, all those emotions and thoughts that would have festered had she not spoken up.

I always told my victims that, if you are here talking with me, you handled the situation just fine.

Yes, the prosecution is a tough road. However, there is a lot to be said for the boost to the mental health of the victim when her assailant receives 50 or 80 years in prison.

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- Has spoken throughout the United States and in 17 foreign countries

- On-camera expert for St. Louis NBC affiliate

- Represented a Fortune 100 corporation as their media spokesperson

- Master's Degree in Human Relations and in The Administration of Justice; Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

- Designed one of the first Personal Assault Investigative Units in the country

- Cleared 85% of her felony assault crimes cases (national average is 49%)

- Recognized POST-certified continuing education instructor (Police Officers Standards and Training)

- Named to the *World Who's Who of Women*

Nancy's Commitment and Philosophy

My background in personal courage

- both as a police detective and entrepreneur

- is reflected in all my presentations.

Understand, she is a long way from healed, but she has a good, solid start on her journey.

I always contacted Victim Services so she had an advocate who would nurture her through the process. One of the biggest challenges that face law enforcement is the victim deciding that it is too difficult to go through the trial. I never had a victim drop prosecution. Much of the credit goes to those victim advocates!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Assault is a highly recidivist crime. She has touched more lives than she will ever know by taking an assailant off the streets.

THOUGHTS FOR THE VICTIM

GENERALIZATION: Be aware, your mind may form one (or more) associative links. If the assailant drove a green car, your gut may tighten every time you see a green car. If it happened when you were on a business trip, for a while it may take an act of courage and will power to go on business trips. Forming these associative links is normal.

These can recede naturally over time or by working them through with an experienced professional.

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF: It takes time to heal. Do what brings you comfort.

One day when a friend dropped by my home, her first question was: "What's wrong?" This perplexed me since I was looking and acting normally. "What makes you think there is something wrong?" I asked. "Because whenever you're upset, you make chocolate chip cookies!"

Upon reflection, I realized that when I was a little girl, my Grandmother and I always made chocolate chip cookies together. When you are six years old and in a warm kitchen filled the fragrance of freshly baked cookies with that wise woman who loves you, lets you play with her makeup and jewelry and is always ready to have fun, how could anyone feel safer or more content?

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My philosophy of personal responsibility and purpose resonates throughout all of my programs.

Each seminar participant comes away with new skills and ideas on how to approach every challenge with creativity, resourcefulness and tenacity

- all qualities even more essential for success in today's world.

Future issues of *Life Skills* will include a wide range of topics from Nancy Hightshoe Seminars.

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So, when you were a young one, what made you happy? It may be those same things today. What makes you feel Safe? And Comforted? And Loved?

Do those things!

FOR FAMILIES, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES

A GUIDE: Reflect back on the thoughts above. Use them as a guide. Help her feel comforted, safe, secure.

THE HEALING PROCESS is often three steps forward, two steps back. Be patient. She may look fine and is perhaps even acting pretty close to normal. Possibly her attitude is that she is going to soldier on right through this.

Genuine healing takes time. If she had a broken leg, the people in her life would not hurry the healing process.

No one would tell her to: Just get over it. With a broken leg, the injury and pain are so obvious. With an assault, the pain is much less so.

There is a horseback-riding maxim: Don't rush your fences.

If you have ever watched Olympic jumping, you've seen those riders who rushed the fence and usually took the jump without the accompaniment of a horse! You have also observed those who took the long view, measured their strides, knew when to pull back and when to forge ahead.

Like jumping fences, supporting a friend or loved one is very intuitive.

GETTING IT RIGHT: You won't always, but commit to doing your very best.

THE DETAILS OF THE ASSAULT: Do not press. You do not need to know. Much as you may love that person, remember she has the right to the dignity of keeping some of the details of the incident between herself and those in law enforcement.

If she wants to talk about it with you, fine. If not, let it go. Do not let your imagination fill in the blanks.

Focus on the future. Concentrate your energy on the words, actions and emotions that will support the healing for her and for those who are touched by the crime.

If she does want to talk and it is simply too painful for you to hear the details, arrange for her to talk with someone who can listen.

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I encourage you to consider short-term coaching with an individual who has specific training. Even years after an assault, there are often issues that have never been addressed. You could choose a volunteer victims advocate or a professional like myself. Training and experience really do make a difference!

WHAT TO SAY: Just say the simple, from your heart truths:

- I am so sorry this happened to you.
- I wish I could take away your pain.
- I love you.
- You are here with us. You did the right thing.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: I know you know this, but I am going to mention it anyway. Don't say:

- I know how you feel. (Even if you, too, were a victim, for each individual the experience is unique.)

Don't say:

- You are all right. After all, it could have been worse. (That it could have been worse is exactly what she is upset and scared about!)

HANDLING YOUR FEELINGS: This is a tough situation. Do not hesitate to get support - from family or friends, your pastor, minister, rabbi, whoever your spiritual advisor is. Many companies have an EAP (Employee Assistance Program) which can offer you support.

MALE VICTIMS

Too often we forget that men and boys are also victimized. The above suggestions will be a helpful guide as you support a man or boy who has been a victim.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR THE MEN IN THE LIFE OF A VICTIM **(husband, father, brother, son, friend, colleague):**

I have met some of the most extraordinary men in hospital emergency rooms. They are loving, wise, committed and supportive.

Often, I have found that these special men are victimized by feelings of guilt. You want to be the protector of those you care about. Please realize that, in this instance, it was not possible.

Instead of dwelling on the fact that you couldn't prevent the assault, your role needs to be helping the victim through the healing process.

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A FINAL REMINDER

Do not suffer in silence. Don't let the pain last any longer than absolutely necessary. Many of us find having a wise counselor or coach on call as valuable as having a competent attorney, doctor or other professional.

There are many excellent sources of counseling or coaching available through work, faith communities, schools or by referral from friends or colleagues. A wise and experienced counselor can support the victim and his or her family through the healing process as quickly and with as little pain as possible.

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