

Sexual Assault: Resources for Families and Tips for Self-Care

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"TRIGGER WARNING. This blog post references rape, sexual assault and harassment, but also offers suggestions on how to reach out for help, resources for talking with children and self-care tips.

The topic of sexual misconduct – from unwanted advances to assault – has been “above the fold” news with troubling regularity in recent months. The latest headlines have focused on the political calculus, and I, like much of America, followed much of the news coverage closely. In particular, a video of two women confronting Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) in an elevator saying, “My assault doesn't matter to you,” really struck a nerve with me.

I am a survivor of sexual abuse. I am also the father of a five-year old. Like many survivors and parents, the past two weeks have been particularly difficult.

The bravery of the women who confronted Sen. Flake, and the testimony of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, prompted survivors to share experiences online about why they haven't spoken out about their own histories of abuse, assault or rape, using the hashtag [#WhyIDidntReport](#). Some wounds were fresh; others, like mine, were decades old or took place during childhood.

It was no surprise then, that the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), which runs the National Sex Assault Hotline, has reported a 338 percent increase in hotline traffic. The day after the hearing was the busiest day in the hotline's 24-year history, with more than 3,000 people calling to get help.

I was glad to hear that 2-1-1, the free 24/7 [confidential information and referral service](#), made sure its operators were able to help callers find local survivor support or mental health resources to help reduce the burden on RAINN and address the long wait times. (As a longtime United Way employee, it was gratifying to know that United Way – without getting involved in the politics of the day – was in a position to offer help through 2-1-1.)

RAINN has [excellent advice](#) on how to talk to your kids about sexual assault. When my daughter, Emily, was two years old, we bought [Your Body Belongs to You](#) to help her understand the importance of privacy and the difference between having a parent or trusted adult help her when she’s in the bathroom, a doctor doing an examination or a someone else touching her inappropriately. Occasionally she will bring out the book herself during story time and she makes references to it in casual conversation.

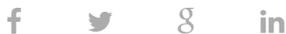
For parents, [Psychology Today](#) recently published tips on how to speak with loved ones about disclosure. For survivors, [Teen Vogue](#) published self-care tips, acknowledging that it’s hard to avoid triggers and be overwhelmed by the news.

For me, exercising self-care is probably the hardest, but a crucial piece of advice. Having a job that I find rewarding and being involved in other creative outlets have definitely worked for me. What’s really helped me, however, is finding community and support. I wouldn’t have been able to get through last week or share my story without it.

If you or someone you know is looking for local mental health resources or survivor support, call 2-1-1 or text your zip code to 898-211 today."

-- Story from United Way Worldwide's Neil Parekh

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