TIPS FOR PROVIDING CRISIS SUPPORT

TO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN DETENTION

* Relax, stay calm. Even if the youth is in crisis, you are not.
* Be patient and allow enough time for the survivor to speak. Resist the impulse to jump straight into problem solving and giving resources or directions. Problem solving doesn’t work until people have had a chance to tell their stories, express their feelings, and make sense of their experiences.
* Convey simple messages, as appropriate to your conversation:
  + “I’m so sorry this happened to you.”
  + “I believe you.”
  + “You didn’t deserve this. It wasn’t your fault.”
  + “You can heal from abuse. There are people who can help you.”
* Avoid using words like “paranoid” or “depressed” that may connote a diagnosis of a mental illness. Instead, use simple words that describe the feeling behind what you hear, like “scared” or “sad.”
* Gather information in a sensitive, supportive, affirming manner. You do not need to ask for specifics or step into an investigative role. If you ask a question, make sure your reason for asking is to help the survivor, not your own curiosity.
* Share information about sexual assault and the healing process to help the survivor put feelings and experiences into context.
* Focus on the survivor as a complete person. Understand that you only know what s/he tells you. Avoid assumptions about her/his experiences based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, ability/disability or level of education.
* When it is time to problem solve, explore options and offer resources without assuming that any particular option is the “right” one for the survivor. Make clear that your only concern is the survivor’s well-being and that you respect whatever decision s/he makes.
* Express your concern for her/his safety and take all threats, reports of threats or retaliation, and violence seriously. Directly assess and address any threats of or hints at suicide.
* Be clear around limits of confidentiality. Don’t make promises you can’t keep. Be clear about your boundaries and what you can provide.