

Supporting a Teen on Their Journey

www.IAmJasmineStrong.com

These tips were compiled by survivor leaders and their advocates for the www.IAmJasmineStrong.com website. We are not therapists or social workers, however our collective lived experiences have given us some insight into how to best support the “Jasmine’s” in your life. **If you are an advocate or teen with lived experiences like Jasmine, please share YOUR tips and insights with us at Jasmine@IAmJasmineStrong.com.**

Do:

- Listen without judgement.
- Use affirming language! Believe them!
- Use power language, not labels.
- Let youth define their own stories.
- Help them access their power. Offer resources.
- Ask them how you can support.
- Hold them with love and patience.
- Respect their confidentiality. This is their story, not yours, to tell.

Don't:

- Ask them why they didn't leave.
- Tell them they need to change their ways because you feel they are at fault.
- Ask them for specific dates and times. Trauma causes memory loss.
- Refer to them as victims because that might make them feel powerless.
- Say you won't tell anyone and then tell people or post online.
- Be super into helping and listening and then ghost for any reason.

Listen Without Judgement

When you are speaking with teen in crisis, it is important to take any sense of judgement out of your conversation. Your role is to listen, affirm, and (if asked) help. Do not ask, “Why didn't you leave?” or say, “I can't believe you didn't report that sooner.” **You need to be there without judgement so that they will continue to open up to you.** You might be the first person they have told.

Using Affirming Language! Believe Them!

We all walk into conversations with our own set of beliefs and truths. When a teen reaches out to you, it's important to check yourself. Avoid statements such as, "This can't be true," "How could he let her do that to him?" or "There is no way she couldn't have just left." Instead, listen. Try statements that validates what they are going through such as, "I hear you," "You have experienced a lot. I'm very sorry you have had to deal with this." or "You deserve to heard and helped."

Use Power Language, Not Labels

Using power language is important. If a young person has come to you to talk or for help, they are rising up and taking back their power. That said, they might not yet feel that way. Try using language to highlight their power such as "I really respect you for sharing with me," or "You are really doing right by yourself by getting help." In speaking to the teen in your life, you may want to avoid giving them labels. They need to understand and claim their own identity. Support them in seeing their power, rather than victimization.

Let Youth Define Their Own Experience

This is their story, not yours. Really. You might be thinking "she is a victim of sex trafficking!" However, you need to listen to the language they use. Ask them how they define their experiences. Remember, what has happened to a teen is what has *happened to them, not who they are as a person*. Tell them that, too. "You are a strong person. I know you are hurting right now, but you are taking steps to heal and overcome. Even sharing with me is a step." Many teens who are survivors of sexual assault or sex trafficking might not identify themselves as victims of these horrible crimes. They may not refer to their exploiter as a pimp, exploiter, or abuser. They may believe that this is their boyfriend or girlfriend. In this moment, it is important they are given the choice to define their story and take back their power.

Help Them Access Their Power! Offer Resources

The teen in your life may need additional supports. This may include a place to stay, counseling, legal help, or even food or help getting an ID. They might also feel unsafe and need to talk with the police. Offer them a chance to learn more and get help, on their own terms. If you are an advocate, teacher, or parent, you may want to offer to make calls on their behalf or go with them to get resources. Offer this, but do not insist.

Resources to consider:

- [You can check out Jasmine's Bay Area resources here.](#)
- **The National Trafficking Hotline:** 1-888-3737-888 or text "Jasmine" to 233733 (BeFree)
- **Love Is Respect (a resource empower youth to prevent and end dating abuse) hotline:** 1-866-331-8454 or try their chat line on their website ([bright orange button on the top right of their website](#))

Ask Them How You Can Support

Sometimes, the most simple and clear thing that we can do is just to ask, “What can I do to help you right now?” Or, “Is there something you need right now that maybe I can help with?” Sometimes even just letting them know you’re going to get something to eat and asking if they want to come along can help them feel supported. Showing you care about their wellbeing is really important. It’s important not to promise something that you can’t do or deliver, so be honest and realistic.

Hold Them with Love and Patience

On average, someone in an abusive relationship makes about seven attempts to leave before they actually do. If a teen in your life is in an abusive relationship or in a trafficking situation, they may feel very conflicted. Often, traffickers (as well as abusive partners of any kind) might use tactics like gaslighting, threats of violence or social isolation, or blaming. They might tell their victim that no one will love them if they know what they have been doing. Or, they might say they will share sexual photos or texts online (which is called sextortion) if they end the relationship. The teen might even feel like there really isn’t anyone else who will take care of them (many teens who have experienced trafficking have also experienced homelessness and prior abuse) or love them so they are scared to leave. **Your job, as their friend, ally, or trusted adult, is to be there.** You are there to be their support network and show them that you care. By doing this, you are proving their abuser wrong. Someone else does care!

Confidentiality: This Is Their Story, Not Yours, To Tell

It’s important that you share honestly what you can and cannot keep confidential. If you are a mandated reporter, you should let the teen know what you are required to report and why. If you feel that you need to tell a trusted adult, you need to explain that honestly before he/she continues to share. Confidentiality is really important. So, being honest here is critical.

A note on mandated reporting

In the state of California (and nationwide), many adults are what are referred to as “mandated reporters” of child abuse or neglect. We want to be sure that any child being abused or neglected gets help. If you believe that a child has told you that they are in an abusive situation at home or being neglected, you must report this to relevant child welfare agencies. To learn more about your obligations or how to make a report, please visit this [link](#).

Some helpful language when speaking to a minor about mandated reporting:

“I truly care about your safety. I want to be honest with you that I need to report any situation where you are being abused or neglected at home or by a caregiver. So, if you tell me that you are in imminent danger of being harmed or harming another minor, I really have to report that to local child welfare services. You do not deserve abuse or neglect by anyone, especially a parent or guardian. Your safety matters to me.”