



DoD Safe Helpline

Sexual Assault Support for the DoD Community
Current as of April 2013

Introduction

Victim care is a key component of the Department of Defense (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Policy. As part of victim care, in April 2011 the Department launched DoD Safe Helpline as a crisis support service for members of the DoD community who are victims of sexual assault. The services provided by Safe Helpline are available to adult Service members in the Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Component consistent with DoD SAPR Policy, as well as Coast Guard and Transitioning Service Members¹. Available 24/7 worldwide, users can “click, call or text” for anonymous and confidential support.

Goals

Underreporting poses a serious challenge to military readiness as the potential costs and consequences of sexual assault are extremely high. The Safe Helpline provides additional channels for adult Service members of the DoD community to seek one-on-one sexual assault assistance and crisis support tailored to their individual needs securely and anonymously. Research indicates when sexual assault victims receive needed care, system confidence builds, which increases the likelihood victims will report the crime to law enforcement.

Services

Users can access confidential support anonymously from anywhere in the world:

- ▶ **CLICK:** Logging on to www.SafeHelpline.org allows users to receive live, one-on-one confidential help with a trained professional through a secure instant-messaging format. The website also provides vital information about recovering from and reporting sexual assault. This service can also be accessed via a format for mobile phones.
- ▶ **CALL:** Calling 877-995-5247 allows users to speak with trained Safe Helpline staff for personalized advice and support. Safe Helpline staff can transfer callers directly to installation-based Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs) / On-call SAPR Victim Advocates, civilian rape crisis centers, Military OneSource, Veterans Benefits Administration Coordinators, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The “warm hand-off” process personally connects the user with a resource representative for further assistance. Staff will transfer the caller to any resource at the location of the caller’s choice. For example, a caller may want to speak to the SARC at the location where their unit is based, not where they are currently located. If the contact is unavailable at the time of the “warm hand-off,” the Safe Helpline staff will offer contact information to the caller to follow-up with support personnel at a later time.



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- ▶ **TEXT:** Texting a location or zip code to 55-247 in the U.S. and (001) 202-470-5546 outside the U.S. allows users to receive contact information for the sexual assault response coordinator; medical, legal, spiritual, and military police personnel; and civilian rape crises centers and Department of Veterans Affairs resources.
- ▶ **Transitioning Service Members (TSMs) Resources:** Information and resources tailored to the needs of Transitioning Service Members (TSMs) are available on SafeHelpline.org. TSMs are defined as Service members separating or retiring from the U.S. Armed Forces and who are within 12 months of separation or within 24 months of retirement. Through leveraging Safe Helpline's existing infrastructure, the Department is able to present clear and easily accessible information on counseling, benefits determinations, transitions, and employment, which may enable TSMs to reach out to those resources for long-term support upon leaving the military. Safe Helpline staff can also transfer callers directly to Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) coordinators. By bridging the gap from DoD to the VA for sexual assault victims, we provide a continuum of care to the Service member as they transition to veteran status.
- ▶ **Mobile App:** The award-winningⁱⁱ Safe Helpline Mobile Application (App) was designed specifically for military sexual assault survivors. The app enables users to connect with live sexual assault response professionals via phone or anonymous online chat from their mobile devices. Users can also navigate transition-related resources (e.g., disability assistance, medical benefits, housing help, and employment assistance, or search for resources near their base or installation). Users can manage the short-and long-term effects of sexual assault and the app contains the option for users to record their current emotional state and create tailored self-care plans that can be stored for future reference and accessed without an internet connection. The Safe Helpline Mobile App is free and available for download from Apple and Android app stores. Find more information at:
http://www.sapr.mil/public/docs/safehelpline/DoD_Safe_Helpline_MobileApp_InfoPaper.pdf
- ▶ **SafeHelpline.org:** Visitors to SafeHelpline.org can search the Safe Helpline database to find useful resources at their own convenience. Using a base name, installation name, or zip code, the online database will instantly return contact information for military, civilian and Department of Veteran Affairs' resources.
- ▶ **Safe HelpRoom:** In April 2013, DoD SAPRO launched a ground-breaking online service entitled "Safe HelpRoom." Safe HelpRoom is a group chat service

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that allows military sexual assault survivors to connect with one another in a moderated and secure online environment at SafeHelpline.org. This new feature was created in response to Safe Helpline users who frequently requested peer support. Survivors of trauma often note that speaking with peers can lead to improved coping skills, a greater sense of adjustment and reduced stress, depression and anxiety. Additional benefits include survivors feeling less lonely, isolated or judged. Research suggests that survivors appreciate receiving practical advice or information about treatment options from peers. Finally, the convenience of an online forum can mean the removal of barriers due to time, cost, distance, scheduling and care-giving responsibilities when seeking support.

- ▶ **Complaint Feature:** Visitors may choose to provide feedback to the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) directly through a confidential and anonymous feedback form on SafeHelpline.org. Feedback information may include comments, suggestions and complaints about the services provided on the installation/base or provided by any DoD personnel. SAPRO serves as the single point of authority, accountability, and oversight for the DoD SAPR program and monitors compliance on prevention and response actions taken by the Services on behalf of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness.

Development

DoD SAPRO collaborated with the Military Services, Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Guard Bureau, Coast Guard, Family Advocacy Program, Military OneSource, Veterans Affairs, and many others to develop the Safe Helpline.

For technical development, SAPRO worked closely with stakeholders to develop a training curriculum for staff, terms of services for staff and users, computer safety procedures, and a privacy policy. SAPRO documented mandatory reporting laws, capability flow charts, and complain and “warm hand-off” protocols. SAPRO also procured www.SafeHelpline.org/ .com/ .net addresses, integrated the commercial telephone line and Defense Switched Network (DSN) capabilities into one number, and procured the Short Message Service (SMS) texting codes to be used both in the continental United States (CONUS) and outside of the continental United States (OCONUS). SAPRO tested all of Safe Helpline’s services throughout the DoD in key CONUS and OCONUS locations prior to launch.

In support of communication development, SAPRO conducted discussion groups with the target audience of 18-24 year old Service members to create the Safe Helpline



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brand identity, key messaging, website interface and content. SAPRO created a number of communication tools and tactics to support the launch of Safe Helpline in collaboration with the Military Service Public Affairs Officers (PAOs). Additionally, in 2012, SAPRO conducted website “usability” testing, resulting in improved website functionality and architecture.

Service Operator

Safe Helpline is administered by the Department of Defense via a contract with the non-profit Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). RAINN was founded in 1994 and is the nation’s largest anti-sexual assault organization. RAINN hosts the only secure, live, web-based National Sexual Assault Online Hotline with anonymous chat capability, which enables victims of sexual assault to reach out to receive help via an instant-messaging type format. RAINN also operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline, which provides help to victims telephonically through a toll-free number. Safe Helpline staff are trained on the unique needs of those living and working in the DoD community and are knowledgeable on military and civilian resources worldwide, crises intervention and the neurobiology of trauma.

ⁱ A Transitioning Service Member (TSM) is an individual separating or retiring from the U.S. Armed Forces. TSMs are considered as those Service members who are within 12 months of separation or within 24 months of retirement.

ⁱⁱ The Safe Helpline mobile app is the winner of the 2013 President’s Award for Innovation from the American Telemedicine Association (ATA) for being the most “novel use of technology leading to innovative health applications and social services support.”