

Frequently Asked Questions

DoD Safe Helpline
Sexual Assault Support for the DoD Community

1) What is DoD Safe Helpline?

DoD Safe Helpline is a crisis support service for members of the DoD community affected by sexual assault. Safe Helpline provides live, one-on-one expert advice and information to the worldwide DoD community. Available globally 24/7, users can “click, call or text” for anonymous and confidential support. Additionally, users can download the Safe Helpline Mobile App to contact Safe Helpline staff, search for resources, or use the self-care plans and exercises. The Safe HelpRoom is another way for military survivors of sexual assault to get support. This group chat room allows military sexual assault survivors to connect in a moderated and secure online environment at SafeHelpline.org.

2) Why is Safe Helpline needed?

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.

3) What are the services Safe Helpline provides and how can they be accessed?

Users have multiple ways to get support.

- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **CALL:** Calling the telephone hotline (877-995-5247) allows users to speak with trained Safe Helpline staff for personalized advice and support. Safe Helpline staff can also transfer callers to installation-based Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs)/On-call Victim Advocates (VAs), civilian rape crisis centers or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
- ▶ **TEXT:** Texting their location to 55-247 inside the U.S. or (001) 202-470-5546 outside of the U.S. allows users to receive automated contact information for the SARC at their installation or base.
- ▶ **SAFE HELPROOM:** In April 2013, DoD SAPRO launched a ground-breaking online service called the “Safe HelpRoom.” Safe HelpRoom is a group chat service that allows sexual assault survivors in the military to connect with and support one another in a moderated and secure online environment at SafeHelpline.org.
- ▶ **MOBILE APP:** The Safe Helpline Mobile App was designed specifically for military sexual assault survivors, provides an easy way for international callers to access Safe Helpline by telephone, and provides self-care plans and exercises for users. Find more information at: http://www.sapr.mil/media/pdf/safehelpline/DoD_Safe_Helpline_MobileApp_InfoPaper.pdf

4) Who can use and access the services provided by Safe Helpline?

Safe Helpline is 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.

Safe Helpline adheres to state mandatory reporting laws concerning persons under the age of 18 and the elderly.

5) What will the Safe HelpRoom provide that's different from what Safe Helpline has provided to visitors already?

Safe HelpRoom expands the level of victim assistance that Safe Helpline can provide to military survivors of sexual assault. Based upon frequent requests from users of Safe Helpline, Safe HelpRoom was developed as a ground-breaking online service that allows military sexual assault survivors to connect in small groups in a moderated and secure online environment at SafeHelpline.org.

6) What are the benefits of a sexual assault victim participating in Safe HelpRoom?

Everyone recovers from trauma in different ways. Benefits of a secure moderated peer discussion forum include participants feeling less lonely, isolated or judged; improving coping skills and sense of adjustment; reducing stress, depression and anxiety; receiving practical advice or information about treatment options; and removal of barriers due to time, cost, distance, scheduling, care-giving responsibilities when seeking support.

7) How will victims of sexual assault be protected in Safe HelpRoom?

Safe HelpRoom sessions are moderated by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), and the posts are quickly reviewed by a Peer Support Administrator prior to publishing for fellow participants to see. The Administrator may determine that some messages are not appropriate for the group to see, and determine not to publish. Additionally, all participants will be required to agree to a Terms of Service prior to entering the discussion, and asked to review a set of "Ground Rules" for engagement, among other safeguards designed especially for Safe HelpRoom.

8) How can a get the Safe Helpline Mobile App?

The Safe Helpline Mobile App can be found at the Apple and Android app stores. For a link to those stores, go to: <http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/safehelpline>.

9) Who is involved in operating Safe Helpline?

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. This service is independent of DoD and all information shared by visitors is anonymous and confidential.

10) What will those supporting Safe Helpline know about the DoD?

Safe Helpline staff are trained on the unique needs of those living and working in the DoD community. They are knowledgeable on resources available to the DoD community on and off bases and installations around the world.

¹ 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.

11) What are Safe Helpline's hours of operation?

Safe Helpline trained personnel can assist with issues of sexual assault 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week.

12) Are there any instances where information discussed during a Safe Helpline contact could be shared with a third party?

Every precaution possible has been taken to protect users' privacy. Safe Helpline does not ask for any information that can be used to identify a user, such as their name, address, etc. Nor will online sessions or telephone calls be recorded or stored. Further, personally identifying information provided during a Safe Helpline session will not be shared with the DoD or chain of command.

That said, there are a limited number of circumstances in which certain information may be disclosed, including:

- ▶ If we fear a user is in danger of committing suicide, under the age of 18, or otherwise required by law, Safe Helpline staff may have to provide personal information to authorities.
- ▶ Although precautions have been taken to protect users' confidentiality, it is possible a court of law will not keep it private, and may require Safe Helpline to reveal information provided during a Safe Helpline session.
- ▶ If, during a Safe Helpline telephone call a user decides to transfer to a local resource (e.g. Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, On-call Victim Advocate (VA), Veterans Benefits Coordinator, civilian sexual assault service provider or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), Safe Helpline staff may ask for the user's first name and telephone number.
- ▶ Subject to the individual mandatory reporting laws of each state, Safe Helpline staff will report reasonable suspicions of child abuse, elder abuse, or abuse of a vulnerable or disabled person disclosed during a Safe Helpline call or session.

For more details, read the privacy policy and terms of service on the online hotline homepage (www.SafeHelpline.org) before using Safe Helpline services.

13) What has been done to ensure that an online user's information is kept anonymous, confidential and cannot be traced?

Safe Helpline is built on an innovative communications infrastructure from the ground up that integrates security and anonymity at every level. Several features have been built in to provide this unique support, including:

- ▶ The online function of Safe Helpline does not capture the IP address of users, which means that no records will ever be kept of online one-on-one and group chat sessions.
- ▶ Transcripts of online one-on-one and group chat sessions are never saved, so once the user closes the chat window, that text is not retrievable.
- ▶ All data is encrypted to ensure the online chat text cannot be intercepted and read while in transition.
- ▶ The online functions of Safe Helpline use anonymous routing methods to obscure the connection between the user and the online helpline staff member through the use of unique codes.

14) Can calls or texts made to Safe Helpline be traced and/or appear on telephone statements?

If a user's cell phone provider usually includes the numbers called or sent through text messages on telephone bills, then the telephone number and text number sent to Safe Helpline will appear. Most cell phone companies also keep copies of text messages for a period of time. Additionally, phone numbers may appear on cell and landline bills tracked by employers.

15) What can users do to protect their confidentiality when contacting Safe Helpline?

Prior to entering into an online chat session, users are provided detailed instructions on additional steps they can take to ensure they are operating under the highest security measures and can clear private data from their computers after ending their online chat session.

Several innovative technologies were utilized to help protect users. Nonetheless, no internet transmissions are 100% secure.

Users should carefully review the "User Safety Procedures" on the website to determine what more they can do. Such concerns become especially important if:

- ▶ A shared computer is being used;
- ▶ There is suspicion someone is monitoring the computer being used; or
- ▶ A DoD computer is being used.

Many measures have been taken to ensure online security, but there is no guarantee that internet transmissions are 100% secure. If there is any doubt that the computer being used is not safe and private, the user should find a safer computer or call Safe Helpline at (877) 995-5247.

16) Will users be asked for identifying information?

Safe Helpline staff will not ask for any information that can be used to identify a specific user, such as name or address. Should a user choose to offer any of that information, Safe Helpline will not later provide it to DoD or the user's chain of command. For the Safe Helpline text service, users will need to text their general location and Service affiliation in order to receive SARC contact information.

17) What kind of user data will be captured by Safe Helpline?

Safe Helpline will not store any unique personal information. However, to aid in understanding usage patterns, Safe Helpline staff will note if users voluntarily provide non-identifying characteristics such as their Military Service or age range. This data will be aggregated and provided to the DoD to assist in program evaluation.

18) To whom will sexual assault victims be referred should they ask a Safe Helpline representative for further assistance?

If users want to access resources within DoD, they will be connected with the local Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC)/On-call Victim Advocate (VA) or other military resources of their choosing. The Safe Helpline staff will attempt to get the SARC/On-call VA on the phone to allow for a "warm" hand-off. Should users not want to access DoD resources, they will be connected to one of 1,100 affiliated civilian sexual assault service providers.

19) What happens if an individual not associated with the DoD contacts Safe Helpline?

Individuals outside of the DoD community who contact Safe Helpline to receive sexual assault related services will be transferred to RAINN's National Sexual Assault Hotline.

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