

# Enhanced Services to Transitioning Service Members

*Sexual Assault Support for the DoD Community*

## What is a Transitioning Service Member?

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.

## Why is an Expansion of Services Needed to TSMs?

The Department of Defense (DoD) anticipates a substantial increase in the number of Service members transitioning out of the military in the coming years. Data from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) universal screening programs indicate about 1 in 5 women and 1 in 100 men seen in the Veterans Health Administration respond “yes” when screened for Military Sexual Trauma (MST).<sup>1</sup> Women veterans with histories of MST report more problems readjusting after discharge, more mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, and substance abuse disorders), and more physical problems across all organ systems.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, women who indicate they experience MST are nearly 9 times more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those who did not experience MST, and men are 3 times more likely to develop PTSD than those who do not.<sup>3</sup> VA studies show that veterans were more likely to develop PTSD associated with heavy combat exposure.<sup>4</sup>

## What are the Benefits of Enhancing Services?

TSMs seeking assistance following a sexual assault may be either unaware of or overwhelmed by the options and resources available to them upon leaving the military. TSMs seeking benefits related to an assault often are dealing with much more than paperwork. They may face concerns over confidentiality, privacy, and stigma. Safe Helpline offers an anonymous, confidential service that provides a safe space to discuss what options are best suited to their needs. 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 them to reach out to those resources for long-term support upon leaving the military. 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.

## What Resources will Safe Helpline Provide to TSMs?

Safe Helpline staff are specially trained to focus on the unique challenges faced by TSMs, which will allow them to provide appropriate resources to TSMs who are victims of sexual assault. A veteran-specific resource dashboard includes benefits, resources, and referrals available 24/7. Additionally, TSMs will be able to text their location to be connected with VA resources.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, Patient Care Services, Office of Mental Health Services. (2010). Military sexual trauma screening report fiscal year 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Skinner et al., (2000), Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 15 and, Frayne et al., (1999), Journal of Women’s Health and Gender-based Medicine, 8

<sup>3</sup> Kimerling, et al., (2007), American Journal of Public Health, 12

<sup>4</sup> Kang, H., Dalager, N., Mahan, C., & Ishii, E. (2005). The role of sexual assault in the risk of PTSD among Gulf War Veterans. Annals of Epidemiology, 15(3): 191-195.

## How Do You Use Safe Helpline?

Users have – multiple ways to get confidential support.

- ▶ **CLICK:** Logging on to [www.SafeHelpline.org](http://www.SafeHelpline.org) allows users to receive live, one-on-one confidential help with a trained professional through a secure instant-messaging format. 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 also transfer callers directly to installation-based Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs)/On-call SAPR Victim Advocates, Military OneSource, civilian rape crisis centers, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, or Veterans Benefits Administration Coordinators. The “warm hand-off” process personally connects the user with a resource representative for further assistance.
- ▶ **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 automated contact information for the SARC; medical, legal, spiritual, and military police personnel; and VA personnel at their installation or base.
- ▶ **Mobile App:** The Safe Helpline Mobile Application (App) is designed specifically for military sexual assault survivors. It enables users to connect with live sexual assault response professionals via phone or anonymous online chat from their mobile devices. Download it from the app stores, links can be found at:  
<http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/victim-assistance/helpline-materials>.
- ▶ **Safe HelpRoom:** In Spring 2013, DoD SAPRO launched a ground-breaking online service called the “Safe HelpRoom.” Safe HelpRoom allows military sexual assault survivors to connect with one another in a moderated and secure online environment at [SafeHelpline.org](http://SafeHelpline.org).
- ▶ **SafeHelpline.org:** Visitors may access the Safe Helpline website and search for their nearest resource as well as access valuable information about understanding the effects of sexual assault.
- ▶ **Complaint Feature:** Visitors may choose to provide feedback to SAPRO directly through a confidential and anonymous feedback form on [www.SafeHelpline.org](http://www.SafeHelpline.org).

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*Current as of November 2013*