



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
**SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION  
AND RESPONSE OFFICE**



## **DOD CONTINUES SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT SERVICES AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

*AUGUST 19, 2020*

The Department of Defense (DOD) announced that help for sexual assault survivors has not diminished during the National Emergency declared due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once DOD put Force Health Protection measures in place, victim assistance professionals quickly shifted to telephone support, ensuring survivors received uninterrupted timely, professional, and quality assistance.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all of our lives. However, one thing that hasn’t changed is our commitment to helping our warriors and their families who may be seeking assistance with an experience of sexual assault,” said Dr. Nate Galbreath, acting director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO). “We want to assure everyone in the DOD community that we are still here to support them on their healing journey.”

### **Continued Support**

#### *First Responders*

Service members and adult dependents who have been victims of sexual assault still have access to the services of a sexual assault response coordinator (SARC) or sexual assault prevention and response (SAPR) victim advocates who can help them report the assault, and hold their alleged offenders appropriately accountable.

When any Service member or adult dependent reports a sexual assault, the SARC addresses the victim’s immediate safety needs, connects the victim to recovery-oriented resources, and assigns a SAPR victim advocate.

The SAPR victim advocate provides advocacy and assistance throughout the medical, investigative, and legal processes, as appropriate. Upon determining eligibility, SAPR victim advocates will inform the victim of his or her option to make a Restricted or Unrestricted report. Those making a Restricted Report may also consider providing information to the [Catch a Serial Offender \(CATCH\)](#) program.

Special Victims Counsel (Army and Air Force) and Victims Legal Counsel (Navy and Marine Corps), chaplains, and healthcare providers also continue to be available. To find out how to connect with these providers, contact your local SARC and SAPR victim advocates through the DoD Safe Helpline at <https://www.safehelpline.org/nearme> or 877-995-5247.

#### *DOD Safe Helpline*

The DOD Safe Helpline is a hotline dedicated to members of the DOD community affected by sexual assault. Safe Helpline offers completely anonymous, confidential, 24/7 support available online at [www.safehelpline.org](http://www.safehelpline.org) or by calling 877-995-5247. In addition, the Safe Helpline Mobile App provides access to one-on-one support, peer-to-peer support, information, resources and access to self-care exercises 24/7, worldwide, on a mobile device. Safe Helpline personnel can

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provide crisis intervention support and – with their robust and verified database of resources across the nation -- refer members to care resources within their local community or to the closest SARC or SAPR victim advocate.

### **What is New**

#### *Electronic Forms*

If SAPR personnel are unable to meet with a Service member in person due to COVID-19 restrictions, the SARC or SAPR victim advocate can explain the DD Form 2910, or “Victim Preference Statement,” and get the member’s verbal approval over the phone, as well as accept electronic signatures.

#### *Up-to-Date Knowledge of SAFE Possibilities*

In an effort to mitigate any impacts the pandemic has had on the administration of Sexual Assault Forensic Examinations (SAFEs), SARCs and SAPR victim advocates worked with their SAFE providers to update response procedures. Individuals seeking a SAFE should telephone their installation SARC/SAPR victim advocate in advance for instructions on where and how to present for medical care. Service members experiencing injury, requiring immediate medical attention, should not delay in seeking assistance at an emergency room.

#### *More Frequent Check-Ins*

Travel Restrictions and Stay at Home Orders necessary to limit the spread of the pandemic may exacerbate stress for some, including Service members who now may be unable to move to their new duty stations. SARCs and SAPR victim advocates can check in with members more frequently (particularly if the member requests) or reinitiate contact with them (as circumstances indicate) to identify any safety issues or concerns.

#### *Up-to-Date Info on Resource Access Amid COVID*

As travel restrictions and Stay at Home orders begin to ease, installation commanders will have the authority to adjust restrictions based on local Health Protection Condition Levels. It is important to contact a local SARC/SAPR victim advocate to obtain the most current information. To find out how to connect with your local SARC and SAPR victim advocates, please contact the DoD Safe Helpline at <https://www.safehelpline.org/nearme> or 877-995-5247.