



DoD Safe Helpline *Sexual Assault Support for the DoD Community*

Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) Guidance

Background

In May 2010, the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) awarded a contract to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) to provide an anonymous online and telephone hotline, and texting capabilities to allow the DoD community to seek anonymous one-on-one crisis support securely. **This service is titled DoD Safe Helpline.**

Challenges and Solutions

Sexual assault poses a serious challenge to military readiness as the potential costs and consequences of sexual assault are extremely high. Too often cases of sexual assault among military members go unreported, or are reported years after the incident occurs. Scared that their chain of command will become involved, or that their unit will treat them differently, victims of sexual assault often decide against seeking the care they so desperately need and deserve. Not receiving proper care may lead to serious mental and even physical trauma, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Department believes that the additional confidential avenues that Safe Helpline provides for reporting issues of sexual assault will be a valuable resource as victims can seek crisis support anonymously. This could lead to victims reporting the sexual assault and obtaining needed care.

Once “live” (expected April 2011) users will have three ways – “Click, call and text” -- 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), civilian rape crisis centers or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
- **TEXT:** Texting their location to 55-247 in the U.S and 202-470-5546 outside the U.S. allows users to receive automated contact information for the SARC at their installation.

Background on RAINN

The non-profit 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 “Warm Hand-Off” Procedure

When users visit the Safe Helpline online or telephone hotlines, staff and volunteers offer a variety of up-to-date service referrals for resources on and off a military base or installation. The Safe Helpline service referral database was populated with input from each Military Service, the National Guard Bureau, the Coast Guard, Military OneSource, and Military HomeFront, and will be updated frequently

to ensure accuracy and provides information on SARCs, legal, medical, mental health, and spiritual military resources. The referral database also houses information for local civilian resources for Safe Helpline users seeking information and crisis support away from the military response system.

As part of the service referral option, Safe Helpline users will be offered a “warm hand-off” option to SARCs/On-call Victim Advocates (VAs) and civilian support personnel listed within the database. The “warm hand-off” process includes a Safe Helpline staff member or volunteer contacting a SARC/On-call VA or civilian resource, depending on the preference of the user. Once the staff member or volunteer has successfully contacted a resource representative, the user will be “handed-off” to that representative for further assistance and the Safe Helpline staff member or volunteer will disconnect from the conversation. If the contact is not available at the time of the “warm hand-off”, the Safe Helpline staff member or volunteer will give the contact information to the user to follow-up with the contact at a later time.

How SARCs Can Help

SARCs will play a vital role in making the Safe Helpline a success. Below are a few of the ways SARCs could help:

- Maintain a working phone numbers that are accessible to Safe Helpline users and Safe Helpline staff and volunteers to support the 24/7 response capability.
 - Note: The demand for SARC services may increase as a result of the “warm hand-off” service referral option.
- Track the number of referrals to Safe Helpline as well as the number of warm-handoff transfers received from Safe Helpline.
 - Note: SAPR Program Managers will provide additional guidance on how to collect this information.
- Be advocates for Safe Helpline and actively communicate its services and benefits to military leadership, command, and Service members. You could:
- Use communication materials which will be provided to your base or installation Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) to collaborate on outreach efforts.
 - Note: Service PAOs have been briefed on the upcoming launch of Safe Helpline and will be provided several communication pieces which could be helpful to SARCs.
- Access www.SAPR.mil (once Safe Helpline is officially launched) to download the communication materials for reproduction and distribution.
- Think of circumstances and locations on your base or installation in which information surrounding Safe Helpline can be displayed or included in already existing events or activities.
 - Examples:
 - 1.) Have Safe Helpline resources available at Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) events or activities on your base or installation.
 - 2.) Display Safe Helpline posters in your SARC office and/or in various high visibility locations throughout your base or installation.
 - 3.) Ask your base or installation library or community center for permission to provide Safe Helpline brochures within their facility.