



# Frequently Asked Questions

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

### ***1) What is DoD Safe Helpline?***

DoD Safe Helpline is a new crisis support service for adult Service members of the DoD community affected by sexual assault. Safe Helpline provides live, one-on-one expert advice and information worldwide. Available 24/7, users can “click, call or text” for anonymous and confidential support.

### ***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 Department believes these three additional confidential avenues of reporting will be a valuable resource for victims of sexual assault because they can seek resources and crisis support anonymously, which could lead to victims reporting the sexual assault and obtaining needed care.

### ***3) What are the goals of Safe Helpline?***

The first goal of Safe Helpline is to provide additional channels where adult Service members of the DoD community can seek one-on-one sexual assault assistance and crisis support securely and anonymously. The second goal is to increase the likelihood of victims reporting. Research tells us when victims receive needed care they begin to have confidence in the system which increases the likelihood they will report the assault to law enforcement.

### ***4) What are the three services Safe Helpline provides and how can they be accessed?***

Users have three ways -- “Click, call or text” -- to get 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. 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 202-470-5546 outside of the U.S. allows users to receive automated contact information for the SARC at their installation or base.

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

Safe Helpline is available to adult Active Duty, Reserve and National Guard members consistent with DoD SAPR policy and Coast Guard Service members.

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

**6) Who is involved in operating Safe Helpline?**

Safe Helpline is owned by the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) and is operated by the non-profit Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, through a contractual agreement with SAPRO. This service is independent of DoD and all information shared by visitors is anonymous and confidential.

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

RAINN staff supporting Safe Helpline has been trained on the unique needs of those living and working in the DoD community. RAINN staff is also knowledgeable on resources available to the DoD community on and off bases and installations around the world.

**8) 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.

**9) Are there any instances where information shared during a Safe Helpline contact will 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), 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](http://www.SafeHelpline.org)) before using the Safe Helpline services.

### ***10) 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 the online chat session.
- ▶ Transcripts of the online 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 function of Safe Helpline uses anonymous routing methods to obscure the connection between the user and the online hotline staff member through the use of unique codes.

### ***11) 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.

### ***12) 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 of 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.

***13) 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.

***14) 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.

***15) 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 actually try to get the SARC/On-call VA on the phone, if at all possible, 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.

***16) 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.