



Advocacy and Reporting for Victims/Survivors of Sexual Violence in the Military Community

This resource guide is to help provide an understanding of the United States military systems for advocates who may work with victims/survivors in the military community. The resources, needs, and options for those currently in the military look different than those who are not in Service. It can be particularly important to have an awareness of sexual assault reporting options within military structures, as they vary greatly from other processes.

Types of Advocates and Response Programs within the Military

Types of Advocates Available

Two types of advocates exist within the military: Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs), and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Victim Advocates (VAs). They can provide support and guidance in systems navigation to victims/survivors.

- **Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs)**

SARCs provide one-on-one support to victims/survivors and are responsible for the overall management of victim/survivor support within military contexts.

- **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Victim Advocates (SAPR VAs)**
SAPR VAs are trained civilian employees or command volunteers who provide one-on-one support to victims/survivors in the military, in part by offering the provision of information and explaining reporting procedures; making referrals for community and military assistance; providing emotional support; and accompanying victims/survivors through medical, investigative, and legal procedures.

Victims/survivors can also choose to work with community-based advocates and receive any other services available to them. This may be necessary due to a lack of resources on some active duty installations.

Response and Prevention Programs in the Military

Each of the Services has a Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program or a Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) program. These programs are tasked with promoting military readiness by working towards the elimination of sexual assault, and ensuring excellence in victim advocacy and prevention efforts. **These programs do not address cases surrounding intimate partner sexual violence, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment**, which are handled instead by the Family Advocacy Program and the Office of Diversity Management and Opportunity (ODMEO). Information about each Services' specific SAPR and SHARP programs can be found at these links:

- [Army SHARP \(\[www.sexualassault.army.mil\]\(http://www.sexualassault.army.mil\)\)](http://www.sexualassault.army.mil)
- [Marines SAPR \(\[bit.ly/Marines SAPR\]\(http://bit.ly/Marines_SAPR\)\)](http://bit.ly/Marines_SAPR)
- [Navy SAPR \(\[bit.ly/Navy SAPR\]\(http://bit.ly/Navy_SAPR\)\)](http://bit.ly/Navy_SAPR)
- [Air Force SAPR \(\[bit.ly/AirForce SAPR\]\(http://bit.ly/AirForce_SAPR\)\)](http://bit.ly/AirForce_SAPR)
- [National Guard SAPR \(\[bit.ly/NationalGuard SAPR\]\(http://bit.ly/NationalGuard_SAPR\)\)](http://bit.ly/NationalGuard_SAPR)
- [Coast Guard SAPR \(\[bit.ly/CoastGuard SAPR\]\(http://bit.ly/CoastGuard_SAPR\)\)](http://bit.ly/CoastGuard_SAPR)
- [DoD SAPR \(\[sapr.mil\]\(http://sapr.mil\)\)](http://sapr.mil)

Resources for Victims/Survivors of Intimate Partner Sexual Assault and Child Sexual Assault

The Department of Defense also provides resources for intimate partner sexual assault and child sexual assault through the [Family Advocacy Program \(bit.ly/DoD_FamilyAdvocacyProgram\)](#) (FAP). FAP works to prevent domestic abuse, ensure the safety of victims/survivors, assist military families in overcoming the effects of violence, and change destructive behavior patterns. Within FAP, Victim Advocates can support victims/survivors with assistance in the reporting process, finding shelter and other supports, locating legal services, providing referrals to counseling, finding child care, connecting the victim/survivor with services in the civilian community, getting a Military Protective Order, and preparing a safety plan.

Reporting Process: Restricted vs. Unrestricted Reporting

Within the military, any report made involving a sexual assault is considered either an Unrestricted or a Restricted Report. This distinction can affect how much privacy and control a victim/survivor may have in the process.

Restricted Report

In a Restricted Report, confidentiality can be maintained for a victim/survivor, and an investigation is not started. At the same time, a medical sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE), and other treatment and support can be provided. This ensures time for the victim/survivor to focus on themselves, their healing, and their safety plan before reported information goes up a chain of command and leads to an investigation. While a victim/survivor can choose to make a report unrestricted at any time, they are not required to. For more information on Restricted Reporting, go to [this link \(bit.ly/DoD_RestrictedReporting\)](#).

Unrestricted Report

An Unrestricted Report will go through the military chain of command, and privacy is not guaranteed concerning any information surrounding the assault. An investigation should begin immediately. Victims/Survivors may choose to not participate in the investigation. Victims/Survivors will be able to request additional protective and support measures like Expedited Transfers or

Military Protective Orders. More information about Unrestricted Reports can be [found here](https://bit.ly/DoD_UnrestrictedReporting). (bit.ly/DoD_UnrestrictedReporting).

Who the victim/survivor reports their assault to can automatically determine whether the report is Restricted or Unrestricted:

- If a victim/survivor reports their assault to a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Victim Advocate, or healthcare professional, they have the option of Restricted Reporting. A victim/survivor can choose to inform the person they are working with that they would like a Restricted Report to become an Unrestricted Report at any time.
- If a victim/survivor in the military reports their assault to law enforcement or anyone in their chain of command, the report is an Unrestricted Report. The victim/survivor's privacy is not guaranteed for any information surrounding the assault.
- Special Victim's Counsel/Victim's Legal Counsel, legal assistance attorneys or chaplains can be spoken to confidentially about sexual assault without triggering a report, command notification, or an investigation. None of these individuals can take an official report (Restricted or Unrestricted) of sexual assault, however.

[This SAPR chart](https://bit.ly/SAPR_chart) (bit.ly/SAPR_chart) further explains the two reporting processes that can occur within a military context (note that these processes may vary by Service or installation).

Military-Specific Factors

Differences between civilian and military culture, rules, and settings can influence a victim/survivor's options and healing process after an assault.

Military Social Norms

- Military culture encourages reporting and ensuring the commander is ultimately aware of everything occurring. This may differ from other workplace norms.
- The military is often a tight-knit community, where the importance of obeying orders is a strong social norm. This may make it more difficult for victims/survivors to minimize contact with or stay safe from a perpetrator.
- Historically, the military has been a hyper-masculine environment where feelings of “helplessness and powerlessness” are not acceptable. Although progress is being seen in this area, this can add to existing social barriers that prevent victims/survivors from reporting their assaults, or seeking support and services.

Military Rules and Policies

- In civilian cases, if a victim/survivor engages in illegal activity that led to their assault, they will likely not be charged with that crime. This is especially true with issues like drug or alcohol usage. This is **not necessarily** true for military personnel, however. For example, if a victim/survivor should not have been drinking at the time of the assault according to military protocol, they may face specific consequences for this action if it is reported with their sexual assault. Movement is being made in this area, however, and commanders are given wider latitude in how to proceed in these cases.
- Victim/survivor privacy may be difficult to maintain, especially in Unrestricted Reporting.
- The local SARC and SAPR VA are likely well-publicized, which may make it difficult for a victim/survivor to maintain privacy while seeking out advocacy services. Although maintaining confidentiality is a priority for SAPR and SHARP programs, victims/survivors may fear talking to an advocate will violate their privacy.

Additional Considerations

- Victims'/survivors' reactions to assault can be intensified by the stress and trauma of combat.
- The phrase [Military Sexual Trauma \(*bit.ly/VA_MilitarySexualTrauma*\)](https://bit.ly/VA_MilitarySexualTrauma) (MST) has been used throughout the military community and by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Military Sexual Trauma refers to sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that happened while a Veteran was in the military.
- If a victim/survivor is or goes into theater (a deployed environment) civilian resources, such as rape crisis centers, may not be available; military resources may be scarce; and safe locations may be limited.

Additional Resources and Information

When working with victims/survivors in the military community, it can be essential to keep these factors and other resources in mind. To learn more about sexual assault in the military, see [Make the Connection's webpage \(*bit.ly/MSTEfects*\)](https://bit.ly/MSTEfects) on the effects of military sexual trauma, treatment options, self-help tools, and other resources; and [Safe Helpline's website \(*bit.ly/SafeHelpline_UnderstandingSA*\)](https://bit.ly/SafeHelpline_UnderstandingSA) for more information on reporting options, resources, issues surrounding sexual assault in the military, and the effects of sexual assault.

To find military and civilian sexual assault service providers and/or resources use Safe Helpline (a Department of Defense hotline):

- [Online Helpline \(*safehelpline.org/online*\)](https://safehelpline.org/online)
Provides one-on-one, anonymous, and secure support through Safe Helpline's secure online chat portal.

- **Telephone Helpline** (safehelpline.org/telephone)
Accessed by calling 877-995-5247 (both in the U.S. and worldwide via DSN). With the Telephone Helpline individuals can speak directly with a Safe Helpline staff member, available 24/7. Victims/survivors can also communicate through text messages by sending the base/installation name, zip code, state, or country; the type of resource that is being looked for; and what Service an individual is with to 55-247 (inside the U.S.), or 001-202-470-5546 (outside the U.S.). Text STOP to cancel.
- **Safe Helpline App** (safehelpline.org/app)
Designed specifically for military sexual assault victims/survivors to assist with managing the long-term effects of sexual assault. Users can create a self-care plan and access self-care exercises as well as other Safe Helpline services.
- **Safe HelpRoom** (safehelpline.org/safe-helproom)
A group chat service that allows victims/survivors to connect with and support other victims/survivors – regardless of time zone or distance. The chat service is free, online, moderated, secure, and available 24/7. Special sessions for men are available.
- **Self-paced educational programs** (safehelpline.org/education)
Visit the link to learn more about issues related to sexual assault, Safe Helpline's services, and how to support a friend or loved one.

Additional Safe Helpline resources include:

When working with [Transitioning Service Members](#) (safehelpline.org/tsm_overview) (those who are separating from the military due to retirement, their service obligation ending, or a medical, voluntary, or involuntary discharge) and Veterans, it may be beneficial to consider the above information alongside resources offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Department of Veterans Affairs offers [mental health support and other resources](#) (bit.ly/VA_MilitarySexualTrauma), including free, confidential [Military Sexual Trauma Counseling](#) (bit.ly/Mil_SexualTraumaCounseling) and Military Sexual Trauma Coordinators, on site at every VA medical center and specially trained to help with the effects of military sexual trauma.

References

- Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. (2018). Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military. http://www.sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY17_Annual/FY17_Annual_Report_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Strengthening Military-Civilian Community Partnerships to Respond to Sexual Assault. (2008). Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.