DoD Safe Helpline

Local Safe HelpRoom Info Paper

2018

Local, online, anonymous, peer support, group chats for sexual assault survivors on your base.

What is Safe HelpRoom?

Safe HelpRoom is a secure, anonymous, moderated community forum where survivors of sexual assault can support each other in a safe, online environment. For more than four years, Safe HelpRoom has been helping sexual assault survivors connect with each other 24/7, from anywhere in the world at safehelproom.org.

To help support the work of local SAPR Programs, the new program, Local Safe HelpRoom, will allow D-SAACP certified SARCs or SAPR VAs to host their own local Safe HelpRoom group chats. Once trained, local hosts will be able to offer tailored assistance for their community with an individual topic, convenient time, specific group, and discussion structure that best fits the needs of the local population.

To learn more about why we started Safe HelpRoom, and how we keep it safe and secure, visit the Safe HelpRoom webpage (safehelproom.org).

Benefits of Safe HelpRoom

Group chat services have increasingly become a resource for individuals seeking help to process their experience with sexual violence since the introduction of the Internet to our everyday lives.[1] The anonymity, ease of access, and convenience of these services creates unprecedented opportunities for individuals to seek out support.[2] These online spaces facilitate connections between similarly affected individuals without the barriers of distance or scheduling.[3] Anonymous group chats, such as the Safe HelpRoom, can reduce the stigma that victims of crime, such as sexual violence, experience when reaching out for in-person support.

Some examples of groups who may benefit from coming together in this environment include:
- Survivors who have filed Restricted Reports but still want to connect with others that may have gone through a similar experience without jeopardizing the confidentiality of their report.
- Survivors who are not yet comfortable accessing support in person.
- Survivors who are OCONUS or located in rural or isolated bases that may not have access to in-person group discussions or a network of support in their area.
- Spouses or family members of survivors looking for information about how to support a loved one without risking exposure.

[1] Barak, A, Britt K., & Proudfoot. "Defining internet-supported therapeutic interventions." *Annals of Behavioral Medicine 38*.1 (2009): 4-17.
[2] Naslund, J. A., Aschbrenner, K. A., Marsch, L. A., & Bartels, S. J. (2016). The future of mental health care: peer-to-peer support and social media. *Epidemiology and psychiatric sciences, 25(02),* 113-122.
[3] Barak, A, Boniel-Nissim M., & Suler, J. "Fostering empowerment in online support groups." *Computers in Human Behavior* 24.5 (2008): 1867-1883.

- SAPR VAs looking to support each other and connect with their SARC.

How can locally operated Safe HelpRoom group chats help you support survivors in your community?

Local Safe HelpRoom chats will allow you to host group chats to meet the needs of your community. It provides the flexibility of scheduling meetings for times that are most convenient for those in your area, and allows you to select topics that are most relevant to Service members who have experienced sexual assault in your community. The Safe HelpRoom platform provides an environment for survivors in the DoD to safely and anonymously receive peer-to-peer support from the comfort of their home while removing common barriers to accessing in-person care, including time, cost, distance, and scheduling.

Also, because Safe HelpRoom is completely anonymous, it can allow you to connect with survivors who have not yet reached out for assistance at your unit, installation, base, or community. This may provide the opportunity to gain new insights about the survivors you support, and how to tailor future initiatives that increase reporting and meet survivor needs.

Who can host a local Safe HelpRoom group chat?

To host your own Safe HelpRoom group chat, you must be certified through the DoD Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program (D-SAACP). The D-SAACP certification ensures that all potential moderators have already received necessary training on working with victims of sexual assault, ethics, military policies, etc.

How will the local Safe HelpRoom group chat work?

As a local SARC or SAPR VA, you will be provided with your own Safe HelpRoom space. This space is available to you 24/7 to host discussions and customize them to meet the specific needs of your population. When not in use, you will have the opportunity to "close the door" of your space to ensure that no one is able to enter.

Some Options include:

- Hosting a one-time group chat on a special topic
- Hosting re-occurring, regularly scheduled sessions, similar to in-person group settings
- Offering group chats at different times
- Featuring group chats on topics of interest to your local population based on current events

As the moderator, you will moderate and review the content of the group chat to help the conversation flow and protect the anonymity of the users. You will also help answer questions and provide information on available resources.

Participants will be able to access your HelpRoom through the unique link that you provide. After agreeing to the Terms of Service and Ground Rules for using the Safe HelpRoom, they will receive an automatically generated name prior to entering your room to maintain anonymity.

How can I get started?
Follow the instructions below to register on the Local Safe HelpRoom moderator platform to host safe, secure, anonymous Safe HelpRoom group chats for your base or installation.

To help you get started and ensure the success of your group chats, Safe Helpline has created a number of tools and outreach materials. See below a step-by-step guide to get you started.

1. Click here to begin the Local Safe HelpRoom moderator registration process.
2. Select "Register" below the login fields.
3. Complete the form and select "Submit."
    a. You will be asked to include your D-SAACP certification number. It is important that only SARCs and SAPR VAs that have a current D-SAACP certification number host their own Safe HelpRoom group chats.
4. You will receive an email asking you to confirm your email address. Please follow the directions in the email. The registration process cannot move forward until you have confirmed your email address. If you do not receive an email within 24 hours, please email lshr@safehelpline.org.
5. Once your email is confirmed, we will confirm your D-SAACP certification status with DoD SAPRO. Please email lshr@safehelpline.org if you have not received an email with a status update within two weeks.
6. Once your D-SAACP status is approved, you will be able to access the Local Safe HelpRoom Management Portal and access the Local Safe HelpRoom Online Training.
7. Once you have completed the online training, you will gain full access to your Safe HelpRoom space. We highly recommend testing the platform on whatever computer you plan to host discussions. This will ensure that everything is in working order before you invite survivors to join your discussion.
8. You will find everything else you need in the Management Portal, including your moderator link, participant link, contact information, a printable moderator guide, and easy to use outreach materials.
    a. Moderator Link: How you access your Safe HelpRoom as a moderator.
    b. Participant Link: How your participants are able to access your Safe HelpRoom.
9. If you have any questions or need any additional support during the process, email lshr@safehelpline.org.