DOD Adds Peer Support Chat Sessions for Sexual Assault Victims

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 30, 2013 – In response to a need for peer support services identified by users of the Defense Department’s Safe Helpline for sexual assault victims, Pentagon officials have launched the Safe HelpRoom, a new service that allows victims to participate in group chat sessions to connect with and support one another in a moderated and secure online environment.

The Safe HelpRoom is available at http://SafeHelpline.org, officials said, noting that the moderator can provide referrals as necessary and will ensure that chat postings adhere to all ground rules.

"Survivors of sexual assault have told us that being able to discuss their concerns with peers can provide a level of support not available through other means," said Jessica L. Wright, acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. "Safe HelpRoom is a groundbreaking development in the department’s commitment to support military victims of sexual assault."

Safe HelpRoom sessions will begin immediately and are available twice weekly in two-hour sessions. The session schedule can be found at http://SafeHelpline.org, along with polls to determine session topics to address specific concerns.

"Safe HelpRoom was designed with unique safeguards to ensure a safe and welcoming place for survivors to connect," said Army Maj. Gen. Gary S. Patton, SAPRO director. "Safe HelpRoom is the first of its kind to require participants to commit to a series of
'ground rules' of acceptable behavior before entering a session. Additionally, each participant comment is reviewed to ensure it complies with the ground rules prior to posting for the group to see. Safe HelpRoom provides a secure and private environment for positive and supportive discussions."

When users visit Safe Helpline, the staff provides one-on-one tailored assistance and offers a variety of up-to-date service referrals for resources on and off military bases and installations, officials said in a statement announcing Safe HelpRoom's launch. Service referrals include information for sexual assault response coordinators, along with legal, medical, mental health, and spiritual military resources.

The referral database also houses information for local civilian and Veterans Affairs Department resources for helpline users seeking information and crisis support away from the military response system, they added.

**Related Sites:**

[DOD Safe Helpline](#)

[Defense Department Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office](#)

[Special Report: Sexual Assault Prevention and Response](#)

[DOD News Release](#)