

April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

The Department of Defense (DoD) recognizes April as Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month (SAAPM) to raise awareness in both civilian and military communities about sexual violence and how to prevent it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men have experienced sexual violence involving unwanted physical contact during their lifetimes, and our Airmen are no exception¹. Anyone can experience trauma from sexual assault, regardless of gender. An Airman can experience invisible wounds, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as a result of the sexual trauma, even many years later.

The Air Force is committed to eliminating sexual assault and fostering a culture of dignity and respect for every Airman. Therefore, commanders must promote an atmosphere where mutual respect and trust, professional values, and team commitment are reinforced to create an environment where sexual assault is not tolerated, condoned, or ignored.

By the Numbers

Over the past few years, the Air Force has experienced an increase in sexual assault reporting. The Air Force received a record 1,480 reports of sexual assault involving Airmen as either victims or subjects in FY17 – the largest number of reports of sexual assault received by the Air Force in the history of its Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program.

This upward trend in reporting may be evidence of a higher level of trust in the system than in past years². However, there is still much progress to be made. The Air Force estimates that about two-thirds of past-year sexual assaults of active duty Airmen remain unreported. Still, Airmen who have experienced sexual assault or sexual harassment report confidence in their chain of command to support and protect them.



Source: [U.S. Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response \(SAPR\) program](#)

How Leaders Can Prevent Sexual Assault

Leaders play a pivotal role in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment by modeling and encouraging positive behaviors. Leaders have a responsibility to establish a command climate where safety is promoted and should take the following actions to prevent military sexual assault:

- Educate and train your Airmen routinely on the definition of sexual assault and the Air Force policy regarding sexual assault
- Demonstrate through your words and actions that sexual assault is unacceptable and does not align with the Air Force Core Values or Airman's Creed
- Ensure Airmen feel comfortable reporting sexual assault by communicating your intention to protect victims of sexual assault and reinforcing the Air Force's zero tolerance policy
- Know your role and responsibilities when a sexual assault occurs among your Wingmen and remember that your priority is to care for the victim
- Consider the risk of sexual assault, and provide informed safety briefings during high-risk periods, such as holidays and deployments
- Ensure Airmen are informed that victims, witnesses, bystanders, and first responders will be protected from retaliation, ostracism, maltreatment, and reprisal related to a report of sexual assault

Leaders can also support their fellow Airmen by continuously promoting available resources for victims of sexual assault, such as [Safe Helpline](#).

Safe Helpline is the Department of Defense's (DoD) sole hotline for service members affected by sexual assault. Safe Helpline is a completely anonymous, confidential, 24/7, specialized service—providing help and information anytime, anywhere. A Safe Helpline user can access one-on-one support, peer-to-peer support, information, resources, and self-care exercises 24/7 to aid in their recovery from DoD and civilian resources.

Resources



The [Air Force Sexual Assault Prevention and Response \(SAPR\)](#) program's mission is to educate, advocate and collaborate to respond to and stop sexual assault and its harmful effects on the Air Force.



Make the Connection is a [one-stop resource](#) where Veterans and their families and friends can hear fellow Veterans and their families share their experiences with military sexual trauma, as well as access the support and resources they need.



1in6 helps men who have had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences live healthier, happier lives.

Its mission includes serving family members, friends, partners, and service providers by providing information and [support resources](#).



RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN operates the Safe Helpline for DoD and provides [resources](#) for sexual assault response and survivors.

¹ Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Preventing Sexual Violence. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/fastfact.html>

² Source: Department of Defense. FY17 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military. Enclosure 3: Department of the Air Force. Retrieved from: https://www.sapr.mil/public/docs/reports/FY17_Annual/Enclosure_3_Department_of_the_Air_Force.pdf