



April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month

The Air Force's most important resource is their Airmen, as protecting their people protects the mission. Sexual assault and sexual harassment are pervasive problems in the military. April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, bringing awareness to sexual harassment, assault, abuse, and providing resources, all of which reinforces our zero tolerance stance on these issues. The Department of the Air Force is strongly committed to empowering and engaging Airmen to help eliminate sexual assault.

Anyone can experience trauma from sexual assault. 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 lifetime, and our Airmen are no exception.¹ An Airman who experiences this type of trauma may develop [invisible wounds](#), such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or anxiety, even many years later.

Sexual assault remains a concern in the military. While the estimated prevalence of sexual assault remained unchanged for men from 2016-2018, it increased for active duty women, particularly those ages 17 to 24. In 2018, about 4.3% of active duty female Airmen reported experiencing a sexual assault, up from 2.8% of female Airmen in 2016.²

As an Air Force family, we must take care of each other. Airmen who have experienced or are currently living with invisible wounds due to sexual trauma may struggle with feelings of fear, shame, or embarrassment, discouraging them from seeking support. Although everyone experiences sexual trauma differently, common signs and symptoms may include:

- **Avoidance of trauma-related reminders**
- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Irritable, frustrated, angry**

Sexual assault can lead to the development of PTSD or other invisible wounds. If left untreated, invisible wounds can have a negative impact on an Airman's personal and professional life, including severe anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-injury, or suicidal ideations. It is vital for Airmen to understand and identify signs and symptoms of invisible wounds in themselves and in their peers to ensure a strong and resilient Air Force.

Leaders Play a Pivotal Role in Sexual Assault Prevention

The Air Force's [Sexual Assault Prevention and Response \(SAPR\) Program](#) reinforces its commitment to eliminate incidents of sexual assault through training, education, survivor advocacy, response, and reporting.³ The Air Force also has several other programs to help leaders handle these sensitive matters, support survivors, and hold offenders appropriately accountable. Use the following guidance to drive a culture that helps eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment:

- **Educate and train your Airmen on the definition of sexual assault and harassment**
- **Model and encourage positive behaviors to support the prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment and encourage Air and Space professionals to safely intervene when poor or offensive behavior occurs**
- **Create a healthy workplace culture that does not tolerate sexual assault and harassment**
- **Provide training to reinforce retaliation is unacceptable**

Support your Airmen by continuously promoting available resources for survivors of sexual assault:

- **The DoD's 2019 [CATCH a Serial Offender Program](#) allows service members making a restricted report the opportunity to anonymously disclose information about suspects and incidents to help the DoD identify serial offenders**

¹ CDC. Violence Prevention. 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html>

² DoD. Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military. 2019.

https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/DoD_Annual_Report_on_Sexual_Assault_in_the_Military.pdf

³ Air Force Materiel Command. SAPR. 2020. <https://www.afmc.af.mil/About-Us/Featured-Topics/SAPR/>

Resources



The [Air Force Sexual Assault and Prevention 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.



The [Family Advocacy Program \(FAP\)](#) mission is to prevent and intervene in cases of domestic abuse, to include intimate partner sexual assault and sexual abuse of minor children.



[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 to support services they need.

RAINN

[Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#) is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN operates the **Safe Helpline for DoD, 877-995-5247**, and provides other resources for sexual assault response and survivors.