

The Pennsylvania National Guard SAPR Times

SHARP in the News

LGBTQ Survivors of Sexual Violence

RAINN, rainn.org

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Edited by Freda Rushing

Sexual violence affects people of every gender identity, and sexual orientation. People who identify as part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities also experience sexual violence and may face different or additional challenges in accessing legal, medical, law enforcement or other resources than other populations.

Effects of sexual violence

LGBTQ survivors of sexual violence, may face many of the same emotions and challenges as other survivors, but also might encounter additional hurdles. Below are some common reactions to experiencing sexual violence that both LGBTQ survivors and others may experience.

- **Disbelief that sexual violence affects LGBTQ people.** You may encounter people who mistakenly believe that this doesn't happen to LGBTQ people, which may make it harder to feel that your story is believed.
- **Telling someone might be harder if you are not out yet.** If you have not yet come out to friends or family about your gender identity or sexual orientation, you may feel less able to disclose sexual assault to them.

Ways you can support LGBTQ survivors

RESOURCES

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs:

A coalition of programs that document and advocate for victims of anti-LGBT violence/harassment, domestic violence, sexual assault, police misconduct and other forms of victimization. Site has a list of local anti-violence programs and publications. **Hotline: 212-714-1141, LGBT National Hotline:**

Refers over 15,000 resources across the country that support LGBTQ individuals. **Hotline: 888.THE.GLNH (843-4564),** pen pal, weekly LGBTQ chatroom for youth.

Sometimes it's hard to know what to do when someone you care about tells you they have experienced sexual violence. The reaction of the first person a survivor discloses to can affect if they choose to tell others or seek additional resources.

- **Listen.** Many people in crisis feel as though no one understands them and that they are not taken seriously. Show them they matter by giving your undivided attention. It is hard for many survivors to disclose an assault, especially if they are not out yet and by disclosing would have to come out at the same time, so drop what you are doing and be there for them.
- **Validate their feelings.** Avoid making overly positive statements like "It will get better" or trying to manage their emotions, like "Snap out of it" or "You shouldn't feel so bad." Make statements like "I believe you" or "That sounds like a really hard thing to go through."
- **Use inclusive language that affirms the survivor's gender identity and sexual orientation.** Rather than assuming someone's gender identity or sexual orientation, use neutral language like "partner" or "date" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend." Try not to assume what someone's gender identity or preferred pronouns are; it's a better idea to let them tell you, or you can ask what they prefer. You can always use "they" instead of "he/she" if you are unsure.

Supportive things to say to a survivor

- **"I believe you" and "It took a lot of courage to tell me about this."** It can be extremely difficult for survivors to come forward and share their story. Be careful not to interpret calmness as a sign that the event did not occur everyone responds to traumatic events differently.
- **"It's not your fault" and "You didn't do anything to deserve this."** Survivors may blame themselves, Remind the survivor, maybe even more than once, that they are not to blame.
- **"You are not alone" and "I care about you and am here to listen or help in any way I can."** Let the survivor know that you are there for them and willing to listen to their story if they are comfortable sharing it and that you do not judge them for what happened.
- **"I'm sorry this happened" and "This shouldn't have happened to you."** Acknowledge that the experience has affected their life.



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RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

Charity Harmon, PA NG SAPR Program Manager



Provide a little background about yourself and your career path to becoming a Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC). In August 2012, during back-to-back NTC rotations with 10th MTN Division HQ while serving as the Asst S3 Air, I was approached by the DCG-S, handed HQDA EXORD 221-12 2012, and asked to consider becoming the SHARP Program Manager. With a staff consisting of three compassionate NCOs (SFC Regina Swint, SFC Chylciale Washington, and SFC Jennifer Gessner) we embarked on building the 10th MTN SHARP Program from scratch. Over the next three years we took in 300 cases, developed a left seat/right seat training, hired Federal employees to train SHARP Foundation Courses, and established credentialed Victim Advocates at the Company level (more than 850 personnel serving 20,000 service-members and 100,000 dependents, DA civilians, and contractors within the military community). On my fourth deployment I was part of the 2014 Reduction in Force, fortunately I was able to continue serving with the PA National Guard. I joined the PA SAPR Team in 2020 and enjoy working with and for the wonderfully selfless volunteers that serve the program. **Personal thoughts when it comes to Sexual Assault Prevention? SPEAK UP!** You never know the power and influence you have on preventing sexual assault. Your action (or lack of action) is a powerful message to

predators. It tells them exactly what you will and will not tolerate in your organization. Watch for predators to use grooming behaviors like inappropriate jokes, touching, fraternization, power & control, and alcohol abuse. If you don't feel comfortable speaking up, your leadership has your back! Go to them, or a SAPR VA, or call me! The TAG and DAG Army and Air and all the command teams that work for the PA NG care very much about eradicating harmful behaviors from our organizations. If someone trusts you with their story, take the time to listen, give them your undivided attention, and then gently encourage them to speak with a SAPR VA, they are the foremost experts on current resources, options, and can guide the victim through a very stressful and formative experience. Again, how you react sends a powerful message. **What is the most challenging aspect of the job?** Competing requirements. What we do in the SAPR Office is so important on almost every front. Learning what priorities take precedent can be stressful. That is why being kind to each other is so important. You never know what someone else is going through. **What do you do in your spare time/Self-Care?** I manage a farm of seven beautiful Shire Draft Horses. I enjoy sharing them at community events and state fairs, stop by and pet a Shire at Farm Show (JAN) or Keystone International Livestock Exposition (OCT). **How long have you been D-SAACP credential/what level?** Level III, I recently realized that I was eligible for a Level Up, if you have been serving the SAPR (or SHARP) program for more than five years, you are most likely eligible too! **Why did you decide to become a Victim Advocate?** I enjoy helping clients understand the resources available to help them. The military has a process to fix almost anything, knowing how to access that process is our job as a Victim Advocate. **What is the most rewarding aspect of the position you have experienced so far?** The people. I truly am blessed to work with such compassionate, intelligent, and empathic folks. **Contact:** charity.harmon2.civ@army.mil; 717-861-6427

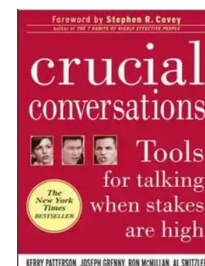
Three Ways to Build a Culture of Trust

Follow through with commitments. When you uphold your commitments, the team learns that what you say is the truth and that you have others' best interests in mind.

Communicate appropriately. Share information so everyone has a common understanding and the same expectations. Maintain confidentiality when necessary, especially when others share personal information.

Be respectful. Treat others with courtesy. Show that you are listening – for example, by putting down your phone when having an in-person conversation. Conflict is inevitable; approach it in a healthy way. If you are a leader, help set the conditions for people to speak up and address issues.

What are you reading?



PA NG Sexual Assault Hotline: 866-922-6275

DoD SAFE Help Line App

Want to receive the monthly PA NG SAPR Newsletter!
Email charity.harmon2.civ@army.mil