



DoD Safe Helpline

Safe HelpRoom: Moderated Online Peer Support for the DoD Community*

Goal: Safe HelpRoom will allow military sexual assault survivors to connect with one another in a moderated and secure online environment at SafeHelpline.org.

Statement of Need:

- Safe Helpline users frequently request resources that will allow them to connect to peer support services
- Technology-enhanced interventions are effective in maintaining treatment gains¹
- Availability of un-monitored, inaccurate message boards/chat services pose risks to user's privacy, interfere with criminal prosecution, and emotional health²
- Survivors currently use social networking to disclose and connect to peers in an unsecure manner

Structure and Features for the Moderated Online Peer Support Services:

The Moderated Online Peer Support Service will host two, two-hour discussions each week (times TBD, based on Safe Helpline Online Helpline usage, but most likely in the evenings). Each discussion will have a specific, pre-designated topic. Prior to launch, RAINN will post a feedback card on SafeHelpline.org to assist us in determining what topics are the most requested by potential participants. Below is an overview of the service design as well as the roles (participant, moderator, and administrator) and their respective responsibilities and application features.

Service Design:

- All participants will be required to agree to a Terms of Service prior to entering the discussion³. The Terms of Service will note that by agreeing to these terms the participant is stating that they are 18 or older and an Active Duty Service Member.
- All participants will be required to agree to the ground rules prior to entering the discussion⁴. Ground rules may include:
 - o All participants must be respectful and abstain from using abusive or inappropriate language.

* Name of the service is temporary and subject to change.

¹ Stephanie Bauer, Markus Wolf, Severin Haug & Hans Kordy (2011): The effectiveness of internet chat groups in relapse prevention after inpatient psychotherapy, *Psychotherapy Research*, 21:2, 219

² Jerry Finn: Victimization Online: The Downside of Seeking Human Services for Women on the Internet,

³ <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/support-groups/MH00002>

⁴ <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/support-groups/MH00002>

- All participants must abstain from revealing personally identifying information about themselves, a perpetrator, or other individuals.
- All participants are asked to participate and post messages in the discussion.
- Participants will have access to FAQs on SafeHelpline.org
- All discussions will have an entry cut-off time (ex: 10 minutes after the discussion has started) to ensure the conversation will not be continuously interrupted. If a user is disconnected during the discussion due to a technical difficulty, they will be allowed to re-enter.

Peer Support Participant (participants limited to 10 per discussion):

- All participants will create a display name prior to entering the discussion (they will not be allowed to display their full name).
- Participants will have the option of saving their display name for future use by entering a 4-digit pin. They will not have to reveal any personally-identifying information when saving their display name.
- At the end of a session participants will have the option of entering their email address if they would like a transcript of the session to be emailed to their personal email account⁵.
- All participants will be able to complete a User Comment Card at the end of the support session.
- If a participant would like to direct a message towards a specific participant in the discussion, the chat will auto-fill their display name (Ex: “Jane1: JoeFromOH don’t worry things will get better.” The “JoeFromOH” will be auto-filled once they begin typing the display name.). This will make it easier for participants to offer support directly to one another.

Peer Support Moderator (1 LCSW staff per discussion):

- Moderators will kick-start the discussion and reinforce the designated discussion topic.
- Moderators can direct-message individual participants in a separate chat to discuss issues that would not necessarily be constructive for the group, allowing the group to continue to focus on the session topic (Ex: The moderator would be able to speak to an individual participant who is severely mentally ill and provide guidance and resources for their specific needs without diverting the group conversation).
- The moderator will provide resources and referrals when appropriate.
- The moderator will provide correct/factual information when appropriate.
- The moderator will have access to all Safe Helpline dashboard resources.

⁵ Robert C. Hsiung (2000): The Best of Both Worlds: An Online Self-Help Group Hosted by a Mental Health Professional, *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3:6, 2

- The moderator will be able to provide timing cues when the session is nearing completion (15, 10, 5 minute warnings).
- Moderators will be able to talk to administrators in a staff group chat that will run concurrent to the large group discussion.
- Moderators will have the ability to 'open or close the door' to allow additional participants based on participant feedback.

Peer Support Administrators (1 staff per discussion):

- Administrators will quickly review all participant postings prior to the posting being made visible to the large group. Administrators will check to ensure that all postings adhere to the agreed upon ground rules (No personally identifying information, no abusive language, etc.). Administrators will simply click a check mark to approve the post or an X to disapprove. When a comment is disapproved the administrator will have the ability to choose from a list of reasons of why the post was altered or disapproved. These reasons may include:
 - o Inappropriate/triggering language
 - o Abusive language
 - o Personally identifying information of the participant disclosed
 - o Personally identifying information of the perpetrator or other individual disclosed
- If a posting has some content that should be omitted, but otherwise adheres to the ground rules, the administrator can simply 'black out' that portion of the post and submit to the large group. The participant will receive a message saying why that information was blocked (Ex: revealed personally identifying information).
- Administrators will have the capability to remove a participant from the discussion if they are abusive or continue to disregard the ground rules.
- Administrators can block participants who have been removed from the discussion from rejoining.
- Administrators will have the ability to view a queue of posts waiting for approval.
- Administrators will be able to talk to the moderator in a staff group chat that will run concurrent to the large group discussion.

Potential Challenges in Providing Online Peer Support⁶:

- Concurrent conversations
- Abusive visitors
- Accessing inaccurate information from peers
- Loss of privacy
- Exposure to disinhibited communication
- Online harassment or stalking
- Participants that are severely mentally ill
- Too many participants discourages beneficial conversation

⁶ Jerry Finn: Online Self-Help/Mutual Aid Groups in Mental Health Practice

How the SHL Moderated Peer Discussion will address these concerns:

- Responses will be quickly reviewed in real-time by administrators to ensure abusive/inappropriate/overly graphic language is not shared publicly with the group
- The moderator will be able to gently correct any information that is inaccurate, ensuring that all participants receive correct information and resources
- No PII will be collected to enter the discussion and no PII will be shared during the chats (review staff will screen for this prior to posting)
- Because no personally identifying information will be provided during the discussions, group members will not be able to contact one another outside of the moderated discussion.
- The direct message feature will allow the moderator to contact participants who need additional support and information, avoiding interruption with the group.
- Peer support sessions will be limited to 10 participants to ensure positive and productive conversations.

Benefits⁷:

- Online peer support participants feel less lonely, isolated or judged
- Improving coping skills and sense of adjustment
- Reducing stress, depression and anxiety
- Getting practical advice or information about treatment options
- Removal of barriers due to time, cost, distance, scheduling, care-giving responsibilities when seeking support⁸

Reporting and Evaluation

- Reports will be available for each discussion. The reports will include the following:
 - o The total number of participants
 - o The total number of posts
 - o The total number of posts per participant
 - o Results from the user comment card
 - o End of discussion moderator report

⁷ <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/support-groups/MH00002>

⁸ Jerry Finn: Online Self-Help/Mutual Aid Groups in Mental Health Practice