



DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTION, RESILIENCE AND READINESS

Prevention in Action: Leadership, SHARP and Readiness

By Mavia Hanson, Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness

Across the Army, prevention specialists work alongside Sexual Assault Response Coordinators and Victim Advocates to build a comprehensive approach to the prevention of sexual harassment and sexual assault that strengthens both immediate response and long-term cultural change. While SARCs and VAs provide confidential support to survivors, prevention professionals analyze trends, identify factors that hinder progress and assess what efforts have been made to counter those challenges. They then work with leaders to strengthen the overall climate of a unit. Operating as one integrated team, they focus on protecting Soldiers and enhancing unit readiness.

Together, these professionals combine front-line survivor support with data-driven analysis of climate and risk, giving leaders the information they need to make informed decisions that shape their formations.

Research shows that poor unit climate and lack of leadership engagement are key drivers of risk. Indicators that influence outcomes include leader presence and accountability, clear and enforced standards of behavior, cohesion and trust within units, and peer accountability.

“The Army has taken important steps in strengthening the SHARP program, including refining roles across prevention and response. These efforts are most effective when leaders actively integrate and reinforce them at the unit level,” said Jill Londagin, Army SHARP Director.

“Risk factors exist in every formation,” she said. “The difference is how they are addressed. When leaders engage early and consistently, it builds trust and reinforces standards across the unit.”

She continued: “Addressing issues early reinforces standards, modeling respect builds trust, taking action signals accountability, and supporting SHARP resources strengthens confidence in the system. Consistent leadership engagement creates an environment where prevention efforts can succeed and Soldiers feel supported.”

The Transformational Role of Prevention Specialists

“Prevention is where we can change the trajectory of a unit,” said April Marinakes, SHARP Prevention Specialist at Aberdeen Proving Ground. “It allows us to identify patterns early and give leaders the tools to address risk before it impacts Soldiers and the mission.”

She added, “As a SHARP Prevention Specialist, I finally have the space to focus on climate, data and long-term strategies instead of being pulled into crisis response.”

Despite improvements to the SHARP program, misconceptions about the role of prevention still exist across the force.

“One of the biggest misconceptions is that SHARP is only about reporting. Another is that prevention is just mandatory training,” Marinakes said. “The reality is that prevention focuses on shaping culture and addressing the conditions that allow harmful behaviors to develop.”

She continued: "I see SARCs and VAs as my closest partners. They're the ones who sit with survivors in their hardest moments, and I take that seriously. We talk often about what they are seeing, what Soldiers are struggling with and where the climate feels off. SARCs and VAs help me understand the human impact behind the data, and I help them by reducing the conditions that lead to harm. Together we create a full picture of what the unit needs."

Marinakes emphasized that prevention is about shaping culture—not checking a box.

"People underestimate how much Soldiers want a respectful environment," she said. "They just don't always know how to influence it. When a unit has a strong climate, communication, trust, morale and mission focus improve. I've seen units lose key leaders, derail training cycles and fracture teams because of one incident."

A single incident of harmful behavior can disrupt a formation, damage trust and affect mission readiness.

"Preventing those incidents protects both individuals and the unit as a whole, which is why prevention work matters," Marinakes said.

Soldiers Have a Voice: Shaping Climate in Their Units

While leadership is critical, Marinakes emphasized that every Soldier plays a role in creating a respectful environment.

"You don't need rank to influence culture. Speak up early, check on your battle buddies and challenge disrespect even when it feels uncomfortable," she said. "Peer influence is one of the most powerful tools in shaping a unit's climate."

Leaders should encourage Soldiers to strengthen their units through everyday actions such as:

- Addressing disrespect, even when it's minor or framed as a joke.
- Checking on battle buddies who may be experiencing stress, isolation or harassment.
- Modeling Army Values—integrity, duty, respect and personal courage—in the barracks, workplace and field.
- Speaking up or intervening when witnessing behavior that could harm others or the unit.
- Supporting peers who report concerns or seek help from SHARP resources.

These small actions can significantly influence a unit's culture and reinforce the Army's expectations for dignity, respect and accountability.

"Your voice carries weight, especially among your peers," Marinakes said. "Culture shifts when everyday Soldiers decide they're not going to let harmful behavior slide."

For those who may be hesitant to reach out for support, Marinakes wants Soldiers to understand that SHARP resources exist to provide guidance without pressure.

"You're not alone, and you're not committing to anything by asking questions. Talking to a SARC or VA does not force a report. It provides a safe space to explore options and receive support," she said. "Reaching out is an act of strength. You deserve support, dignity and care."



Connect, Don't Disconnect: Improving Our Offline Relationships Through AI and Technology

Through collaboration, education and leadership engagement, SHARP professionals continue working across the force to build climates where Soldiers feel respected, supported and ready to accomplish the mission.

If you or someone you know needs help, contact your [installation SHARP office](#) or the DoD Safe Helpline at 877-995-5247 or safehelpline.org/.