APDES MST & HWE Welcome Guide

Welcome, Sister in Arms • Your story. Your choice. Your pace.

We See You -- And We're Grateful You're Here

First and foremost, thank you for being here. If you are holding this guide because something happened during military service, you do not have to explain everything today. You do not need the perfect words, and you do not need every record before you begin.

This guide is not a test. It is not a judgment. It is not a clinical evaluation. It is a starting place to help you understand your options, gather records, preserve your history, and move forward at your own pace.

What Does VA Mean by Military Sexual Trauma?

VA uses the term military sexual trauma (MST) for sexual assault or threatening sexual harassment experienced during military service. MST is an experience, not a diagnosis. A hostile or abusive workplace may overlap with MST, but not every hostile-workplace experience is MST.

You do not have to have reported the MST when it happened or have other proof that it occurred to receive MST-related VA care.

VA states that treatment for physical and mental health conditions related to MST is provided free of charge, and a VA disability rating is not required for MST-related care.

Your Choices Belong to You

- Seek MST-related care without first filing a disability claim
- Collect records privately without giving anyone your entire story
- Build a timeline slowly, using only the details you choose to write down
- Ask questions before deciding whether to pursue a claim or decision review
- Contact APDES by phone, video, or in person in Michigan if you choose

There are no right or wrong first steps. What matters is that the pace and choices remain yours.

Gathering Your Records -- Here's What to Collect

Records can help identify dates, duty locations, treatment, reporting documents, transfers, evaluations, investigations, and changes that occurred around the time of an experience. A missing record does not prove that an experience did not occur.

1. **Service & Personnel Records**
   DD214, complete OMPF, assignments, evaluations, awards, personnel actions, orders, rosters, duty-location records, transfer or reassignment records.

2. **Medical & Counseling Records**
   Service Treatment Records, military medical or mental-health records, VA medical records, Vet Center records, and civilian treatment or counseling records you choose to request.

3. **Reporting & Investigation Records**
   DD Form 2910 or replacement 2910-1 when applicable, DD Form 2910-2 when applicable, SAPR-related records, investigative records, IG/EO or harassment records, protective orders, or safety/transfer records.

4. **Your Own Records**
   Emails, texts, letters, calendars, journals, photographs, repair bills, property-damage records, contemporaneous notes, and other records you already possess.

5. **People Who Knew**
   Names of people you told at the time or people with firsthand knowledge of relevant events or changes. Preserve contact information if you have it.

6. **VA Benefits Records**
   C-file, prior applications, C&P; examinations, evidence submitted, rating decisions, denial letters, appeals, and decision-review documents.

Your Personal Records Collection Checklist

This checklist is for **you** to collect and organize your file. Checking a box does not mean you must share that record with APDES or anyone else.

1. Service & Personnel Records	Need [ ] Requested [ ] Received [ ] Stored [ ]
DD214, complete OMPF, assignments, evaluations, awards, personnel actions, orders, rosters, duty-location records, transfer or reassignment records.	
2. Medical & Counseling Records	Need [ ] Requested [ ] Received [ ] Stored [ ]
Service Treatment Records, military medical or mental-health records, VA medical records, Vet Center records, and civilian treatment or counseling records you choose to request.	
3. Reporting & Investigation Records	Need [ ] Requested [ ] Received [ ] Stored [ ]
DD Form 2910 or replacement 2910-1 when applicable, DD Form 2910-2 when applicable, SAPR-related records, investigative records, IG/EO or harassment records, protective orders, or safety/transfer records.	
4. Your Own Records	Need [ ] Requested [ ] Received [ ] Stored [ ]
Emails, texts, letters, calendars, journals, photographs, repair bills, property-damage records, contemporaneous notes, and other records you already possess.	
5. People Who Knew	Need [ ] Requested [ ] Received [ ] Stored [ ]
Names of people you told at the time or people with firsthand knowledge of relevant events or changes. Preserve contact information if you have it.	
6. VA Benefits Records	Need [ ] Requested [ ] Received [ ] Stored [ ]
C-file, prior applications, C&P; examinations, evidence submitted, rating decisions, denial letters, appeals, and decision-review documents.	

Build a Private Timeline

Use approximate dates if exact dates are unknown. Keep separate what you personally remember, what another person told you, and what a record documents. You do not need to write graphic details. A useful timeline can simply identify the unit, location, approximate date, people notified, medical visits, reports, transfers, personnel actions, and later effects.

Records still missing: _____
Where I requested them: _____
Next follow-up date: _____ Safely stored at: _____

Your Privacy Matters

Keep originals separate from working copies. Store electronic records securely. Before sharing records publicly, remove Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses, signatures, medical identifiers, and other private information.

If a Prior MST-Related Claim Was Denied

VA currently encourages veterans whose prior MST-related disability claims were denied to consider requesting a decision review. Keep the prior decision letter, evidence list, examination records, and copies of anything submitted with the earlier claim.

Connect With APDES Your Way

Phone • Video • In Person in Michigan

You do not have to tell your entire story to begin a conversation. You can start by saying that something happened during service and you want help understanding what records may exist or what information may be useful.

You choose what you share. You choose when you are ready.

Your Story Has Power

Sister in arms, what happened to you matters. What happened afterward matters. You are not required to carry the entire story alone, and you do not owe anyone details you are not ready to share.

Your experience. Your records. Your story. Your choice.

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This guide is informational and is not medical, legal, crisis, or individualized benefits advice. For immediate danger or crisis, contact appropriate emergency or crisis services.