

Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Maine Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline

Answering Service Protocols and Operator Scripts

We are here for you.



1-800-871-7741

Free, Private, 24/7

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Introduction and Overview

The Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MECASA) is an organization dedicated to supporting services for survivors of sexual violence. One of the ways we do this is by maintaining a statewide 24-hour helpline. Through this service callers reach out over the phone for emotional support and other needs such as emergency medical care and resources. MECASA has contracted with Nationwide Answering Service to provide 24/7 answering service support to receive calls and forward them to trained advocates.

The helpline is the first point of contact for many survivors and family members looking for information, support, and referrals. MECASA expects the protocols and scripts outlined below to be followed as they are essential in providing an entry point to our services.

Answering service operators and staff assist with one part of a larger process. While you will never know where a caller's path leads after you connect them with an advocate, please know you are fulfilling a crucial role for survivors and families in Maine. If you have any questions please reach out to MECASA. We are happy to talk with you more and we deeply appreciate your contribution to our work.

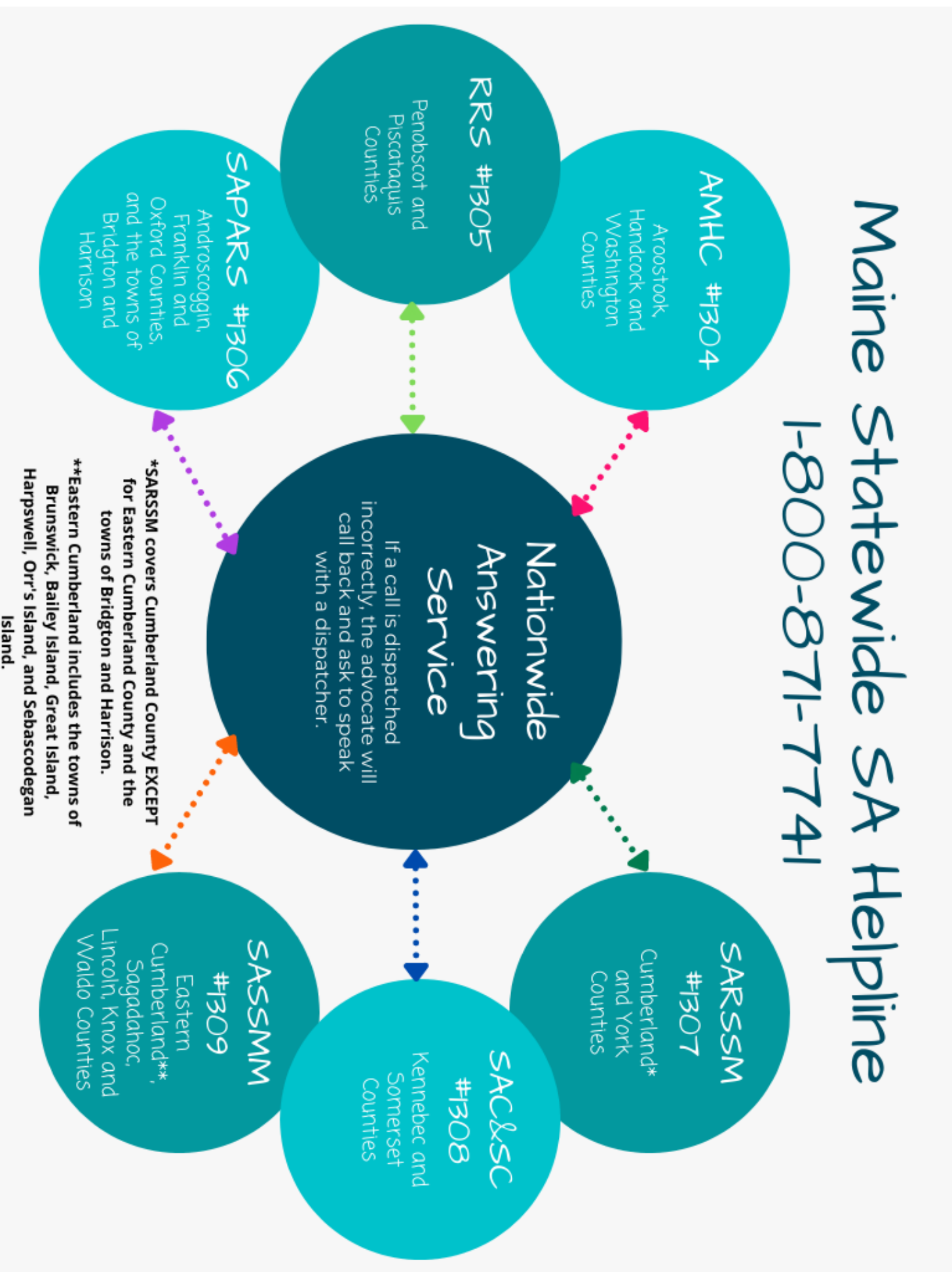
Sexual Assault Support Centers in Maine

MECASA serves the Sexual Assault Support Centers across Maine. They provide services to survivors in their local communities and receive calls from the helpline. Below is both a chart and a printable graphic to show the center, their Nationwide account number, and the areas of Maine they serve.

Nationwide Acct #	Center Name	Center Acronym	Services Area
#1304	Aroostook Mental Health Center	AMHC	Aroostook, Hancock, and Washington Counties
#1305	Rape Response Services	RRS	Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties
#1306	Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services	SAPARS	Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties AND the towns of Bridgton and Harrison in Cumberland County
#1307	Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine	SARSSM	York County and most of Cumberland County SARSSM DOES NOT serve Eastern Cumberland County and the towns of Bridgton and Harrison
#1308	Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Center	SAC&SC	Kennebec and Somerset Counties
#1309	Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine	SASSMM	Eastern Cumberland, Sagadahoc Lincoln, Knox and Waldo Counties. Eastern Cumberland includes the towns of Brunswick, Bailey Island, Great Island, Harpswell, Orr's Island, and Sebascodegan Island

Maine Statewide SA Helpline

1-800-871-7741



Terms

Centers: Sexual Assault Support Centers across Maine are referred to as centers, or the centers.

Advocates: Advocates are the people you will be calling to pass along calls from the helpline. Centers have staff and volunteer advocates who have gone through specialized training to learn the skills needed to effectively support survivors in person and on the helpline.

On Call: Centers individually create their schedules of shifts and advocate coverage, referred to as on-call shifts or on-call advocates. Each center schedules shifts, and staffs advocates differently, with different lengths of shifts and a different number of tiers. All centers schedule multiple tiers of on-call advocates to cover multiple helpline calls coming in at once or shortly after another, and to cover requests for accompaniment. It's important for answering service operators to contact on-call advocates in the order they are listed on the schedule unless otherwise instructed by the center.

How the Helpline Works

The centers are all separate organizations but are united under the same Statewide helpline. MECASA employs an answering service to receive all helpline calls and connect callers to a trained advocate. Below are the basic steps necessary to make that connection.

1. Callers dial the Statewide Helpline #1-800-871-7741.
2. Calls are forwarded to the Answering Service (AS).
3. AS operators answer the call and get basic information: first name, location, call back number.
4. AS operators hang up with the caller, review the caller information and identify the caller's location.
5. AS operators review the list of Maine sexual assault support centers and identify which one covers the caller's town or county.
6. AS operators locate the on-call schedule for the identified center and call the advocate on 1st tier to pass along the caller's information.
7. The advocate answers the phone and the AS operator shares the caller's information.
8. The advocate uses the caller's information to call the caller back.

Answering the Helpline: Step-by-Step Helpline Call Procedure

We are responsible for callers receiving high quality and professional support via our helpline. The following section provides detailed scripts for answering our helpline as well as guidance for specific situations that might arise.

STEP 1: ANSWER THE CALL AND GET THE CALLER INFORMATION

Please answer the phone by using the following scripts.

- a. *"Maine sexual assault helpline answering service. Can I have your first name, number, and the county you're calling from?"*
 - i. If you suspect the caller is from a hospital, police station or another facility please ask. If they are, ask for the name of the facility so that you can pass along this information to the on-call advocate.

- b. *“Thank you, I’m going to give your information to an advocate who will call you back in 5-15 minutes. Can you receive a call back from a blocked or restricted number?”*
- i. If the caller is unable to receive a call back from a blocked or restricted number, please refer to the information below.
 - ii. Do not refer to callers as sir, ma’am, or any other gender specific term. It can be harmful to assume certain voices belong to specific genders. Refer to all callers by their name or “they” unless they have specifically told you their gender pronouns.

Some callers may not want to provide the information you ask for or may push you to act outside of the protocol. In some situations, it may be important for you to explain why the questions are being asked and provide kind yet clear information to callers. Below are examples of alternative scripts including information on how you will need to respond.

Step #1 Script Alternatives:

There may be callers who begin talking to you as if you are their advocate. Please interrupt them to politely explain your role and how you can connect them to a trained advocate. You may say something like:

“I’m sorry to interrupt you but I am a phone operator, and my job is to take down your information and pass it along to a trained advocate who can support you. I just need your name, number, and the county you are calling from.”

If a caller is hesitant to provide information, such as their name or location, you may say something like:

“I’m required to get a first name, but you could give me a fake name and I can still connect you with an advocate. I just need a name, your location, and a call back number so I can have an advocate call you back.”

“I’m asking for your location so I can connect you with someone in your local area. If you would rather not talk to someone in your local area I can still connect you with an advocate.”

If a caller insists on being connected with a specific person, you may say something like:

“I cannot connect you with a specific advocate. Are you working with a specific center? Do you know which one?”

“I need to connect you to the advocate on-call. I am unable to pass along your call to a specific advocate.”

Blocked or Restricted Numbers

Some callers have their phone numbers set to block calls from restricted numbers. In order for a caller to get connected with an advocate they will need to turn off that blocking feature. Below are directions for helping a caller unblock their number on landlines and smart phones.

Landlines:

- Pick up your phone and dial *87. Stay on the phone and wait until you hear a confirmation message. Your phone should now be able to receive restricted calls moving forward.

- To turn call blocking back on, dial *77, then wait until you hear a confirmation message. Moving forward a restricted number won't be able to call you. Any call you get from a restricted number will receive an automated message prompting them to unblock their number and try again.

iPhones:

- Tap on the "Settings" app, scroll to "Phone", scroll to "Silence Unknown Callers" turn off, scroll to "Call Blocking & Identification", turn off "Silence Junk Callers"

Android:

- The process varies slightly across different android phones, but the general protocol is the same: From the Home screen, tap the Phone icon. Tap more. Tap Settings. Tap Call blocking. To allow for blocked/restricted numbers to call you, move the slide under "block anonymous calls" to OFF.

Some callers may not know their phone number is set up to block calls from restricted numbers. Although this is rare, it can lead to situations where the advocate cannot get ahold of the caller. The advocate may call you back and ask to double check the number to be sure they dialed it correctly. If the number is correct you will need to help get the advocate and the caller connected. The advocate is not able to unblock their number. Please follow the steps below:

1. The AS operator calls the caller back to inform them an advocate tried to call but was unable to get through because of a block on the caller's phone.
2. The AS operator walks the caller through the above steps on how to change this setting on their phone.
3. Once the setting is changed, the AS operator lets the caller know the advocate will call again.
4. The AS operator calls the advocate back to let them know they should be able to get through to the caller now.

Callers Who Cannot Receive a Call Back

Some callers may not be able to receive a call back from an advocate particularly if they are calling from a state facility such as a jail or prison, if a caller is experiencing an emergency, or if a caller is in a situation where it is unsafe for them to receive a call back. If a caller informs you they cannot receive a call back from an advocate they will need to be patched through directly to the advocate. This should only be done when absolutely necessary. If a caller would prefer to be directly patched through but is able to receive a call back and is not in a situation where it's unsafe to get a call back, please do not patch them through and follow the regular protocols. If a caller NEEDS to be patched through directly to an advocate, please do the following:

1. Ask the caller if they can stay on hold for a few minutes while you call the advocate
2. Once the caller agrees to this option place them on hold
3. Call the advocate on another line
4. Give the advocate the information about the caller
5. Ask the advocate if they can accept a patched call
6. Connect the caller and the advocate
7. Once you have confirmed both advocate and caller are connected, hang up on your phone

Wrong Numbers

There may be times when the advocate calls you back to say they were unable to get through or that they had the wrong phone number. Please recite the number back to the advocate to check if the number they called was the one you wrote down. If the advocate confirms that you both have the same number, reference the caller ID, and compare the number you wrote down to the one on the caller ID. If the two numbers are similar and off by only one digit, pass along the caller ID number to the advocate. If the caller ID number is completely

different than the number given, do not pass along that number. The caller may have given you a different number for safety reasons and advocates do not want to call people back on numbers that may be unsafe.

STEP 2: CONTACTING THE ADVOCATE ON CALL

Review the statewide schedule and locate the center that covers the county or town the caller is calling from. If the caller does not provide a county or is calling from outside of Maine, connect them to Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services (SAPARS, #1306), the default center for all unknown caller locations.

Once the center has been identified, review the on-call schedule, check the date, time, and advocate information listed on the schedule for 1st tier.

Dial the phone number of the on-call 1st tier advocate and give them the caller information. If the advocate does not answer, leave a message in their voicemail to let them know you have caller information from the Helpline to pass on to them. Do not leave any information about the caller on the voicemail. For example,

- *“Hello Amanda, this is the helpline answering service calling to let you know there is a caller who needs to speak with an advocate, please give us a call back at (insert your call back phone number here) as soon as you get this message.”*

Wait 2 minutes for the 1st tier on-call advocate to call you back and then call again. If there is still no answer you do not need to leave another message. Hang up and wait for another 2 minutes. After another 2 minutes (4 total minutes), make a third and final call to the 1st tier on-call advocate. If they don't pick up call the advocate on the next tier.

Continue this 2-minutes, 3 calls process moving through the on-call tiers until you get a call back from an advocate. If you have moved through all the on-call tiers and have not been able to get ahold of an advocate please call the emergency contact(s) for the center listed on their schedule. Please do not make assumptions as to why an advocate is not picking up, even if you have just dispatched another call to them. Follow the 2-minutes, 3 call protocol every time regardless of the situation

STEP 3: GIVING CALLER INFORMATION TO THE ON-CALL ADVOCATE

When an advocate answers your call, please introduce yourself and pass along the relevant information. For example,

- *“Hello this is (name) calling from the Helpline. I have a call for you. Are you ready to write down the information? The caller's name is (name) and their phone number is (#). Would you like me to repeat that? Thank you have a good day/night.”*

When passing along a message to an advocate never assume the gender of the caller. As stated in STEP 1, it can be harmful to assume certain voices belong to specific genders. Refer to all callers by their name, as “they”, or as “the caller.”

Answering Calls Where the Caller Has Limited English Proficiency

Limited English Proficiency (L.E.P.) is defined as anyone who has a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English; a person can speak some English but still have L.E.P. MECASA has ethical and compliance obligations to provide meaningful access for callers in all languages. You play a key role in making the connection for all callers, particularly for those with L.E.P.

If the caller lacks the ability to communicate in English, please immediately contact the Language Line to secure an interpreter to communicate with the caller. If the caller speaks no English at all, call the Language Line and press 0. Upon establishing communication, the caller should be connected to their local center as per the above protocols.

Let the caller know that when the advocate calls them back they will be provided a free phone interpreter and it may take a few extra minutes to get that interpreter in place. When dispatching the call, inform the advocate that the caller needs interpretation services and in what language. The advocate will then follow their Language Access Protocol for establishing effective communication.

In the unlikely event that a caller will be able to indicate that they need an immediate patch-through, but they cannot otherwise communicate in English, patch them through to SAPARS, #1306, who will follow their Language Access Protocol.

Other Types of Calls and Responses

Calls from Cumberland County

Parts of Cumberland County are covered by three different centers as outlined in the previous section titled, Sexual Assault Support Centers in Maine. For Cumberland County only, operators will ask for a specific town from the caller so they can pass this information along to the on-call advocate. If the on-call advocate receives a call from the operator in an area they do not cover, they have explicit instructions to let the operator know that the call will need to be sent to another center.

For example, if an advocate from SARSSM #1307 gets a call from a town in Cumberland County they do not cover, they will take one of the following actions:

- The SARSSM advocate will immediately let the operator know they do not cover that town and instruct the operator to call another center. When doing this, the advocate will provide the Nationwide account number of the other center.
- The SARSSM advocate will accept the call, hang up with the operator and then review their materials. If the call is from a town covered by another center, they will call the Helpline number back and ask for a dispatcher. Once they get on the phone with a dispatcher the advocate will instruct the dispatcher to call another center and will provide the account number of the other center.

Misdirected Calls

Similar to the process above for calls from Cumberland County that may be sent to the incorrect center, if an advocate at any center receives a call from an area they do not cover, they may ask the operator to send that call to another center. Center advocates have been instructed to ask to speak with a dispatcher and to provide the Nationwide account number of the center the call would need to be dispatched to.

General Support Calls

General Support Calls involve callers who want to connect with an advocate over the phone to get emotional support and/or information about services. They may not know what an answering service is and may think that because you have answered the phone, they can start talking to you about why they called. These callers may start phone calls off with phrases like:

- “Is this the sexual assault line?” or “Something happened, and I need help”

It's important to let the caller know that your role is to get them connected to a trained advocate and that you are not an advocate. Should a caller begin to share information about why they called, it's important that you interrupt them in a kind yet firm manner as discussed in STEP 1.

Police and Hospital Accompaniment Calls

Our helpline is also used by law enforcement and medical staff who may call to reach the on call advocate in their area. These professionals usually call because there is a survivor at their hospital or police station and an advocate is needed to provide support and/or information. We refer to the process of an advocate going to a hospital or police station to see a survivor in person as an accompaniment.

For calls from professionals requesting an advocate, please obtain the name of the facility in addition to their name and call back number. When dispatching the call be sure to provide the name of the facility as well as any other information provided.

If a caller is not from a hospital or police department and they are requesting accompaniment from an advocate please treat the call as you would any other. DO NOT make agreements with the caller about someone coming to meet them. In some situations, advocates may not be able to provide in-person advocacy.

Informational Calls

We get calls from individuals in administrative and other professional roles, such as social workers and teachers. A caller may want to schedule an educational presentation or talk with an advocate about a specific situation. Follow STEP 1 above and get the information from the caller.

Challenging Situations

Some callers may be frustrated with various people and systems and may take it out on you. Some callers may also use an abrupt or aggressive tone or challenge you when you ask for their information. It is important that you do not match this tone or behavior.

A caller may demand to talk to a specific advocate, may ask about who's on the schedule for the day, or want other information that needs to be kept private. As described in the STEP 1 script alternatives, if a caller insists on being connected with a specific advocate or challenges you in other ways, please remain kind yet be clear that you cannot connect them with a specific advocate or tell them what advocates are on call. You may need to state that you have the responsibility of getting the caller connected to the on-call advocate and you are unable to do more.

Callers Who Are Incarcerated

Maine's prisons and many jails have a legal obligation to make outside, confidential support available to incarcerated survivors of sexual violence. Incarcerated individuals usually access our helpline through a public phone inside a facility and cannot receive a call back in the same manner we use for other callers. The caller will need to be patched through directly to the advocate as explained in the section titled, Callers Who Cannot Receive a Call Back, under STEP 1.

Callers Who Can't or Won't Provide a Location

It is important to connect callers with an on-call advocate at the appropriate agency, determined by the callers location. If the caller can't or won't provide a location connect them with the on-call advocate from Sexual

Assault Prevention and Response (SAPARS #1306). SAPARS is the default center in Maine for any unknown caller locations as well as out of State callers.

Callers Who Don't Want to be Connected to Their Local Center

If the caller doesn't want to be connected with the center in their local community you can connect them with an on-call advocate for another region or connect them with a SAPARS (#1306) on-call advocate. In the event that a caller who does not want to be connected locally is from SAPARS service area, or for some other reason doesn't want to be connected with SAPARS, please call the Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Center (SAC&SC #1308) on-call advocate.

Blocked Callers

Centers may choose to set boundaries with specific callers because they have been abusive or inappropriate when using the helpline. Being blocked means that the caller is no longer able to access some or all center services for a specified amount of time. Centers have shared guidance on handling blocking callers internally and with our phone provider and will not involve Nationwide operators in this process.

Crisis Calls

We know that following the protocol can be difficult especially when a caller is audibly in crisis. Waiting those 2 minutes may be difficult and you may have feelings of wanting to jump to the next on-call advocate. We know it can feel arbitrary or even unnecessarily bureaucratic to follow protocols when someone is in crisis. It's important to stay calm and follow the protocols. They have been crafted from decades of doing this work and reflect the best practices in providing prompt services for survivors and safety and balance for advocates.

The Difference Between Operators & Advocates

Although both roles are very important in our helpline process, answering service staff have not received the training needed and required to provide advocacy services to survivors and families. Please do not engage with helpline callers in ways that fall beyond collecting basic information and connecting callers to trained on-call advocates. It is essential that you do not talk with callers about their situations or experiences, and that you follow the protocols and scripts provided.

Quick Helpline Reminders

Please DO

- Use a warm, formal tone of voice.
- Speak slowly and wait for callers to respond before talking over them.
- Promptly access the Language Line when needed to communicate with a caller.
- Ask if you suspect the person calling may be from a hospital or a police department.

Please DO NOT

- Use gender specific language such as sir or ma'am.
- Ask for the caller's last name or ask what the call is about.
- Try to answer any of the caller's questions about services.
- Answer questions about who is on call currently or in the future.
- Tell the caller the office is closed or that an advocate is not available.
- Make agreements with callers about someone meeting them in person.

THANK YOU!

CONFIDENTIAL FREE HELP

- Talk about sexual violence, abuse, or harassment.
- Make a plan for safety and healing.
- Connect to services like healthcare, legal, and counseling.
- Find a support group.

We can support you.

**Maine's Sexual Assault Support Centers
are available any day, any time.**



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