

The Days Ahead

Essential Papers for Families of Fallen Service Members



Service official:

Insert branch-specific information here.

The Days Ahead

Essential Papers for Families of Fallen Service Members

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All links, commercial publications and commercial products referenced are provided consistent with the mission of this publication.

Important Telephone Numbers

Casualty Assistance by Service Branch

Army

Immediate Casualty Assistance

888-ARMYHRC (276-9472)

Survivor Outreach Services

210-466-1182 | Toll free: 855-707-2769

Marine Corps

800-847-1597

Navy

800-368-3202

Air Force

800-433-0048

Coast Guard

202-795-6647

Department of Veterans Affairs

Benefits information

800-827-1000

Bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service)

202-461-6530

Social Security Administration

800-772-1213 (7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday)

866-777-7887 (Expedited Claim Unit)

TRICARE®

East region: 800-444-5445

West region: 877-988-9378

Overseas telephone numbers: Visit <http://www.tricare-overseas.com/ContactUs>

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

If you need additional assistance connecting to resources, contact Military OneSource at <https://public.militaryonesource.mil/feedback>.

Important Contacts

Name

Program/organization

Address

Email

Work phone

Cellphone

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Resources for Casualty Survivors

Here is a list of books, programs and websites that can help you in the days ahead.

Books

A Survivor's Guide to Benefits: Taking Care of Our Families (Department of Defense)
<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/ResourceGuides/A-Survivors-Guide-To-Benefits.pdf>. This guide describes the responsibilities of your casualty assistance officer, provides information about funerals and memorial services, describes survivor benefits and how to obtain them, and contains links to resources helpful to casualty survivors. *If you don't have a copy yet, download a copy or ask your casualty assistance officer to download it for you.*

Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death, by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. (Companion Press, Center for Loss & Life Transition, 2015)

This guide contains 100 practical thoughts and ideas to help survivors understand their unique grief in the aftermath of a military death, including military suicide. Carroll is a military widow and retired Air Force Reserve officer and founded the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®; Wolfelt is a noted author, educator and grief counselor who serves as director of the Center for Loss & Life Transition.® *Surviving family members may order this book from Military OneSource by calling 800-342-9647.*

General Support

American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.

2128 Leroy Place NW
Washington, DC 20008
202-265-0991

<http://www.goldstarmoms.com>

American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. is an organization of mothers whose sons or daughters died in the line of duty or died as a result of injuries sustained while on active duty. Gold Star Mothers states its mission as “[to] stand tall and proud by honoring our children, assisting our veterans, supporting our nation and healing with each other.” It has more than 150 chapters nationwide and provides a newsletter. There are minimal national membership dues and chapters usually charge a smaller fee. Husbands and children of members of American Gold Star Mothers may join as associate members.

American Widow Project

P.O. Box 1573
Buda, TX 78610
877-297-9436

<http://www.americanwidowproject.org>

The mission of the American Widow Project is to provide military widows with vital support through peer-based support programs designed to educate, empower, inspire and assist in rebuilding their lives in the face of tragedy. This group hosts gatherings, mails free support DVDs and has a website filled with widows' stories and sources of support.

Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Ave. NW

Washington, DC 20420

202-461-6530 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp

Email: vet.center@va.gov

The VA offers bereavement counseling to parents, spouses and children of armed-forces personnel who died in the service of their country. Also eligible are family members of National Guardsmen and reservists who die while on duty. Send an email or call the number above for the location of the center nearest to you.

Give an Hour™

P.O. Box 5918

Bethesda, MD 20824-5918

<http://www.giveanhour.org>

Email: info@giveanhour.org

Individuals who served in Iraq and Afghanistan – and their families – may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. Give an Hour wants to help with healing and offers a variety of mental health services to address service member and family needs.

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.

P.O. Box 361986

Birmingham, AL 35236

888-751-6350

<http://www.goldstarwives.org>

Gold Star Wives is a congressionally-chartered nonprofit service organization. This group provides services to active-duty and service-connected military widows and widowers and supports veterans in their local communities.

Honor and Remember, Inc.®

P.O. Box 16834

Chesapeake, VA 23328

757-504-4722

<http://www.honorandremember.org>

Email: contact@honorandremember.org

The mission of Honor and Remember is to publicly recognize the sacrifice of America's military fallen heroes and their families. With the establishment of the Honor and Remember flag, the organization pays tribute to all military lives lost, not only while serving on active duty, but also as a result of serving. Military deaths in all wars or conflicts and all branches of service from our nation's inception are recognized. Through national partnerships, state chapters and structured events their four key cornerstones focus on establishing, educating, comforting and presenting personalized Honor and Remember flags to families of fallen service members.

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/survivor-casualty-assistance>

Military OneSource is a Department of Defense-funded program providing free confidential services and information to active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members, their families and survivors. Specific to survivors, un-remarried spouses and children of deceased active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members are eligible for support regardless of the conflict or cause of death of the service member. This 24/7 information-referral service addresses grief, financial counseling, health and wellness coaching, spouse employment and career opportunities and much more.

National Military Family Association

3601 Eisenhower Ave., Suite 425

Alexandria, VA 22304

800-260-0218

<http://www.militaryfamily.org>

Email: Info@MilitaryFamily.org

The National Military Family Association's goal is to educate military families about the rights, benefits and services available to them and to promote and protect the interests of military families by influencing the development and implementation of legislation and policies affecting them.

Navy SEAL Foundation®

1619 D St., Bldg. 5326

Virginia Beach, VA 23459

757-363-7490

<http://www.navysealfoundation.org>

Email: development@navySEALfoundation.org

The Navy SEAL Foundation's work focuses on three key areas. Family support services include tragedy assistance and morale-building activities. Educational programs encourage lifelong learning and provide motivation. Legacy activities – for those who make the ultimate sacrifice and for Naval Special Warfare veterans – ensure that service is always honored.

Snowball Express

<http://www.snowballexpress.org>

The Snowball Express mission is to create hope and new memories for the children of our fallen military heroes who died while serving our country since 9/11. Snowball Express hosts annual all-expenses-paid Christmas galas for the families of fallen service members.

Special Operations Warrior Foundation

P.O. Box 89367
Tampa, FL 33689
877-337-7693

<http://www.specialops.org>

Email: warrior@specialops.org

The Special Operations Warrior Foundation provides full scholarship grants and educational and family counseling to the surviving children of special operations personnel who die in operational or training missions and immediate financial assistance to severely wounded special operations personnel and their families.

Special Ops Survivors (formerly United Warrior Survivor Foundation)

P.O. Box 181097
Coronado, CA 92178
800-804-UWSF (8973)

<http://www.specialopssurvivors.org>

Special Ops Survivors assists surviving spouses and children of special operations personnel killed in the line of duty since Sept. 11, 2001. Services include emergency financial assistance, financial guidance and planning support, college scholarship grants, educational counseling, professional bereavement counseling and peer-to-peer mentorship, based on need.

Survivor Outreach Services

Department of the Army
IMCOM G9, Family and MWR Programs
2455 Reynolds Road, Bldg. 2266
Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234-7588
855-707-2769

<https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/personal-assistance/survivor-outreach/sos-leaders>

There is no cause greater than taking care of those who lost a soldier in service to our nation. The Army has made a commitment to provide long-term support to survivors of the fallen through the development of the Survivor Outreach Services Program. The program provides survivors with access to dedicated and comprehensive support services such as support groups, life-skills education, benefits milestone management, advocacy and resource information. Financial assistance is also available for long-term financial goals, budget counseling, debt management, estate planning, tax issues and higher education needs. Survivor Outreach Services helps continue the survivor's connection with the Army family and provides services for as long as the survivor desires.

Eluna and Camp Erin

206-298-1217

<https://elunanetwork.org>

Eluna funds Camp Erin, a nationwide network of free bereavement camps for children and teens ages 6-17 who have experienced the death of someone close to them. There are 43 camp locations across the United States and two in Canada. It is a weekend-long experience filled with traditional, fun camp activities combined with grief education and emotional support – facilitated by grief professionals and trained volunteers. Eluna’s mission is to provide comfort, hope and healing to children affected by loss and family addiction. For a comprehensive list of grief resources by state, please refer to the National Bereavement Resource Guide located at <https://elunanetwork.org/national-bereavement-resource-guide> and to locate the Camp Erin closest to you, visit <https://elunanetwork.org/camps-programs/camp-erin>.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

3033 Wilson Blvd. Suite 630

Arlington, VA 22201

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<http://www.taps.org>

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® is a 24/7 tragedy assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the circumstance of the death. The program provides comfort and care through comprehensive services and programs including peer-based emotional support, casework assistance, connections to community-based care and grief and trauma resources. The program hosts an annual “National Military Survivor” seminar and Good Grief Camp for children and young survivors on Memorial Day weekend in Washington, D.C.

Travis Manion Foundation

P.O. Box 1485

Doylestown, PA 18901

215-348-9080

<http://www.travismanion.org>

Email: amy@travismanion.org

The Travis Manion Foundation assists our nation’s veterans and families of the fallen by empowering them to take the next step in their personal journeys and inspiring the next generation of leaders. The foundation believes the best way to honor the fallen is by challenging the living. “If not me, then who,” the words Travis spoke before leaving for his second and final deployment to Iraq, have inspired a national movement to service.

The Travis Manion Foundation provides the opportunity for survivors to honor their fallen loved one by accepting personal challenges that embody the service and sacrifice of their fallen hero and at the same time, provide services that benefit the global community through their Survivor Expeditions.

USO

Support for Families of the Fallen

116 Purple Heart Drive

Dover AFB, DE 19902

302-423-6368

<https://www.uso.org/programs/support-for-families-of-the-fallen>

Email: ybottorf@uso.org

The USO funds and provides continued support and comfort through partnership with best-in-class organizations to help families cope with their grief and move forward with their lives, including the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®, Good Grief Camps for children and “Memory Boxes” with comprehensive resources for kids who lost a parent to help them and their families cope with the loss.

Benefits

Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Ave. NW

Washington, DC 20420

800-827-1000

<http://www.va.gov>

The VA website has a wealth of information about VA benefits, including Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, Survivors’ and Dependents’ Educational Assistance, Work-Study Employment Program for Survivors, Home Loan Guaranty, burial benefits, filing for Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance proceeds, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment services and Education Program refunds. The site also includes links to other sources of information for survivors.

Social Security Administration

800-772-1213

<https://www.ssa.gov>

The Social Security Administration provides information about Social Security benefits.

TRICARE®

7700 Arlington Blvd., Suite 5101

Falls Church, VA 22041-5101

East region: 800-444-5445

West region: 877-988-9378

<http://www.tricare.mil>

You can access specific benefits information on the TRICARE website by identifying “Who You Are” (for example, family of deceased active-duty member), “Where You Live” (country and ZIP code if in the United States) and “What Plan You Are Using” (for example, TRICARE Prime).

Military Relief Organizations

Military relief organizations are private, nonprofit organizations – one for each service branch – that help service members and their dependents with certain emergency financial needs. They provide financial help in the form of interest-free loans, grants or a combination of loans and grants.

Air Force Aid Society

241 18th St., Suite 202
Arlington, VA 22202
703-972-2650
<http://www.afas.org>

Army Emergency Relief

200 Stovall St.
Alexandria, VA 22332
866-878-6378
<https://www.aerhq.org>

Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

875 N. Randolph St., Suite 225
Arlington, VA 22203-1757
800-654-8364
<http://www.nmcrrs.org>

For Children and Teenagers

Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation®

44900 Prentice Drive
Dulles, VA 20166
866-917-CFPF (2373)
<http://www.fallenpatriots.org>

The mission of Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation is to provide college scholarships and educational counseling to military children who have lost a parent in the line of duty, including casualties from combat, training, illness and suicide. The foundation aims to bridge the gap in funding between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and other grants, and the total cost of undergraduate college education or vocational school. Children of Fallen Patriots Foundation serves surviving children and stepchildren of fallen service members from all military branches. There is no essay requirement or age limit, and families are encouraged to enroll their children at a young age to maintain contact as the children grow. Financial help includes, but is not limited to, ACT/SAT preparation fees, college application fees, tuition, summer courses, study abroad programs, books, living expenses, computers and student loans.

Comfort Zone Camp

7201 Glen Forest Drive, Suite 301

Richmond, VA 23226

866-488-5679

<http://www.comfortzonecamp.org>

This organization provides free weekend camps in Virginia, California, Massachusetts and New Jersey for children who have lost a parent.

KidsHealth®

<http://kidshealth.org>

KidsHealth.org has information about children's physical and mental health. The site has articles, links and other information for parents, teenagers and children. From the Parents page, click on "Emotions and Behavior," then "Feelings and Emotions" for information about helping a child deal with death.

Sesame Street's "When Families Grieve"

<https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/topic/grief/?ytid=a2VpflpbOmK>

"When Families Grieve" is part of an outreach kit, developed by Sesame Workshop, to help families who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Watch the video online, or order the DVD from Military OneSource at <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/products#!/detail/23> or by calling 800-342-9647.

Eluna and Camp Erin

206-298-1217

<https://elunanetwork.org>

Eluna funds Camp Erin, a nationwide network of free bereavement camps for children and teens ages 6-17 who have experienced the death of someone close to them. There are 43 camp locations across the United States and two in Canada. It is a weekend-long experience filled with traditional, fun camp activities combined with grief education and emotional support—facilitated by grief professionals and trained volunteers. Eluna's mission is to provide comfort, hope and healing to children affected by loss and family addiction. For a comprehensive list of grief resources by state, please refer to the National Bereavement Resource Guide located at <https://elunanetwork.org/national-bereavement-resource-guide> and to locate the Camp Erin closest to you, visit <https://elunanetwork.org/camps-programs/camp-erin>.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

3033 Wilson Blvd. Suite 630

Arlington, VA 22201

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<https://www.taps.org>

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® is a 24/7 tragedy assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the circumstance of the death. The program provides comfort and care through comprehensive services and programs including peer-based emotional support, casework assistance, connections

to community-based care and grief and trauma resources. The program hosts an annual “National Military Survivor” seminar and Good Grief Camp for children and young survivors on Memorial Day weekend in Washington, D.C.

For Suicide Survivors

American Association of Suicidology

5221 Wisconsin Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20015
202-237-2280

<http://www.suicidology.org>

The American Association of Suicidology is an education and resource association devoted to increasing understanding of suicide. Survivors may find helpful information by looking under “Suicide Loss Survivors.”

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

8120 Penn Ave. S., Suite 470
Bloomington, MN 55431
952-946-7998

<http://www.save.org>

Through the SAVE website, survivors can find information and resources on surviving the suicide of a loved one.

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<https://www.taps.org/suicide>

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® is a 24/7 tragedy assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one through suicide. Suicide loss survivors have a safe space within TAPS to remember, honor and grieve their loved one’s entire story. Special TAPS programming and resources provide gentle, understanding support as you work through the complicated emotions associated with this type of loss. Each fall, TAPS suicide loss survivors and their families gather at a secluded resort to continue the work of healing. This one-of-a-kind weekend offers survivors from across the country the opportunity to connect with others who have experienced and understand suicide loss. The program includes peer-to-peer grief support, access to resources and experts, participation in intensive grief workshops, art therapy, relaxation, family, entertainment and above all, love.

Casualty Assistance by Service Branch

Army

Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Division
U.S. Army Human Resources Command
1600 Spearhead Division Ave.
Fort Knox, KY 40122-5405
800-325-4988

Immediate Casualty Assistance: 888-ARMYHRC (276-9472)

Survivor Outreach Services: 210-466-1182

<https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/CMAOD>

Marine Corps

Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps

Military Personnel Services

Casualty Assistance Section

2008 Russell Road

Quantico, VA 22134

800-847-1597

https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page/portal/M_RA_HOME (Click on “Casualty Assistance” under “Top Requests.”)

Navy

Navy Casualty Assistance (PERS-13)

5720 Integrity Drive

Millington, TN 38055-1300

800-368-3202

<http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/casualty/Pages/default2.aspx>

Air Force

Air Force Personnel Center Casualty Matters Division

550 C St. West, Suite 14

Joint Base Antonio-Randolph, TX 78150-4716

<http://www.afpc.af.mil/Air-Force-Casualty-Operations/>

Websites on Grief and Loss

Websites Specific to Military Loss

Military OneSource

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil>

Military OneSource is a Department of Defense-funded program providing free confidential services and information to active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members, their families and survivors. Specific to survivors, un-remarried spouses and children of deceased active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members are eligible for support regardless of the conflict or cause of death of the service member. This 24/7 information-referral service addresses grief, financial counseling, health and wellness coaching, spouse employment and career opportunities and much more. You can reach the program by telephone at 800-342-9647 or through the website.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

<http://www.taps.org>

TAPS is a national organization that offers a broad range of support, mentoring and other services to those dealing with military loss.

Websites on Grieving Children (for parents)

KidsHealth®

<http://www.kidshealth.org>

KidsHealth.org has information about children's physical and mental health. The site has articles, links and other information for parents, teenagers and children. From the Parents page, click on "Emotions and Behavior," then "Feelings and Emotions" for information about helping a child deal with death.

Websites for Grief and Loss for Children

The Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children & Families

<http://www.dougy.org>

The Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children & Families' website provides information and peer support resources for grieving children, teens and adults.

Sesame Street's "When Families Grieve"

<https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/topic/grief/?ytid=a2VpflpbOmk>

"When Families Grieve" is part of an outreach kit, developed by Sesame Workshop, to help families who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Watch the video online or order the DVD from Military OneSource at *<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/products#!/detail/23>* or by calling 800-342-9647.

Coping With the Loss of a Spouse in Military Service

When you lose a husband or wife, you may feel as though the pain will never end. How can you cope with your feelings of loss and grief? If you have children at home, how can you comfort them when you are feeling such sorrow yourself?

The information here is meant to help you with the intense and difficult emotions that come with the death of a spouse in military service. It will also guide you to other resources available to surviving family members of a service member.

An Indescribable Sense of Pain and Loss

Few experiences are as painful as the death of a spouse. If your husband or wife died during military service, you are likely to feel intense emotions – shock, sorrow, anger and possibly guilt. You will grieve not only for the loss of your spouse’s companionship, but for the future that you expected to share. You are likely to wonder if life will ever be “normal” again.

You will suddenly be faced with details of life to carry out alone instead of with your “better half” to turn to for support and sharing. If you have children, you now face the challenges of caring for them alone. If you don’t have children but had hoped to share parenthood with your spouse, you will grieve the loss of that aspect of your life as well. If you are a civilian spouse, you also face the loss of your military community and the loss of that vital part of your identity as a military spouse.

The emotions that you are feeling are complicated and difficult to endure. It is important to let yourself feel the pain when you lose someone you love and to let your grief run its course.

Most people find that over time the intensity of their pain lessens, and they eventually come to feel more like themselves again. Although you may never again feel “the same,” you will reach a new kind of normal and your sorrow will feel less immediate and raw.

Because a death in the military is sudden, unexpected and can be violent, you may also experience “traumatic reactions” much like a combat soldier would. The images you see on television, the reports you may have read or things others have told you may give you nightmares or cause symptoms of “traumatic stress.” This is a normal reaction to an abnormal event – the death of a loved one in a violent manner. While they can happen concurrently, trauma reactions are different from grief and need to be recognized and supported differently.

Tasks of Grief

No two people experience loss in the same way. Many people feel numb for some time, while others may react with immediate anger. Some people find that the pride they take in their spouse's service to their country helps them cope, while others may feel only despair.

Both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® advise military widows and widowers to think in terms of “four tasks” of grief. This approach, developed by psychologists William Worden and Therese Rando, encourages the bereaved to be active, not passive, participants in grief.

The tasks are:

- *Accepting the reality of your loss.* This includes understanding that the loss has occurred and that the death can't be reversed. As Gen. Jimmy Doolittle wrote after the death of his son serving in the Air Force, “Only when someone very near and dear to one leaves does one appreciate the stark tragedy of death. Even then, nature tends to cushion the initial shock, and the thought ‘he is gone’ does not carry the later realization of finality and permanence that comes only with the final indisputable understanding that ‘we will never see him again.’”
- *Mourning the death of a loved one.* Grief hurts, and there is no easy way around this fact. We mourn, or physically feel the pain of our loss, because we loved so much. Some people try to distract themselves from their pain by acting as though little has changed or by filling their days with activities. But although this approach may make you feel better for a while, a broken heart must heal. If you don't allow yourself to grieve, your sorrow may stay buried and return in more painful ways.

Well-meaning friends may suggest at some point that it is time to “get over” your loss, or that you should distract yourself by taking a trip or becoming extra busy. You can explain to them that it is important that you grieve and that the kind of pain you are feeling can take a long time to lessen. During this time, try to remember the life that was lived and the wonderful meaning your spouse gave to your own life, instead of focusing on the death and the loss.

- *Adjusting to the environment in which your husband or wife is missing.* It can take time to become completely aware of the new roles you will need to take on and the skills you will need to learn. This can be complicated by moving away from military life and the changes that must be made – in some cases, before you are ready. Reach out for support when you need it.
- *Forming a new identity.* Building a new life without your spouse takes time, too. Learning new skills, forming new social connections not based on the military community and deriving satisfaction from an identity that is not intertwined with your spouse's are all critical to grieving and becoming whole again.

It is important to keep in mind that the tasks are a natural progression, and there is no timeline according to which they must be completed. The tasks can overlap or take a longer or shorter time to accomplish. The process of grief can't be rushed, nor should it be.

Coping With Your Loss

The death of a spouse takes an enormous toll, both emotionally and physically. You are likely not to “be yourself” for some time. The following guidelines may help you navigate this very difficult time:

- *Express your feelings.* Some people find it helpful to cry, pray or spend time talking about their loss with friends or family members. Others are so stunned that they have difficulty expressing their feelings about what has happened. If you find it hard to express your feelings, you may want to write them down in a journal.
- *Take care of yourself.* It's easy to neglect yourself when your thoughts are elsewhere. Try to eat well, even if it means eating small portions over the day instead of regular meals. Go for walks if possible, and take naps if they make you feel better.
- *Let others take care of you.* Often friends and neighbors want to help, but don't know what to do. Let them take the load of everyday duties away from you. When someone says, “Let me know what I can do to help,” take them up on it. (“It would help if you could do my grocery shopping this week.”) Or ask them to take care of your laundry for a while, vacuum and dust, bring you a meal or simply sit with you or go for a walk with you. If you have young children, you may want to ask a friend or relative to come live with you for a while to help with everyday tasks.
- *Stay in touch with others.* Spending time alone with your thoughts can be an important part of the healing process, but too much solitude may leave you feeling isolated from the support you need. Reach out to people who listen well, such as family, friends, clergy members and sympathetic co-workers. It can be especially helpful to talk with other people who have experienced a loss similar to yours and can understand the full range of how you are feeling. The resource list in this notebook can help you find support meant especially for people whose spouses have died in military service.
- *Respect your beliefs.* If spiritual beliefs are part of your life, they can be a great comfort after a loss. If your spouse's death has caused you to question your beliefs, try not to feel guilty – this is a normal part of grieving for many people. The sudden, traumatic death of someone who is so young and vital can shatter our “assumptive reality” and cause us to question many aspects of our belief system. Even if you haven't been religiously observant for some time, a sensitive clergy member will understand if you seek help coping with your loss. If you have been out of touch with your faith, you could begin by simply saying, “I'm not sure what I believe anymore, but I'm feeling sad and confused and wondered if you could help.”

- *Treasure your memories.* When you feel ready, take time to remember what you treasure most about your spouse. You may want to find a special way to honor him or her – by making an album of photographs and written memories, starting a website where friends and relatives can post pictures and thoughts, making a charitable contribution in your spouse’s memory or planting a tree in a place that was meaningful to him or her.

Helping Your Younger Children

If you have children at home, you will have the doubly difficult task of helping them cope with their feelings of grief while you yourself are grieving. You may want to keep the following in mind:

- *Share your feelings in appropriate ways.* Saying that you feel sad lets your child know that it’s all right to show his or her feelings. But angry outbursts or uncontrollable crying may frighten your child and make him or her less likely to talk with you, because he or she is afraid of adding to your worries. Try to save your most intense feelings for when you are with another adult. If your loss is very recent and your grief very fresh, make arrangements for your child to play at a friend’s house to give you some time for emotional release.
- *Help your child talk about the loss.* Let your child know that it’s normal to feel sad or worried and to miss his or her parent very much. Often young children have a hard time putting their feelings into words. You can help by providing tools to help your child express his or her feelings – finger paints, modeling clay, paper, crayons or markers.
- *Help your child avoid extra stress from television and movies.* Your child – and you – are likely to be in a heightened state of anxiety as you grieve. Try to limit your family’s exposure to TV news and suspenseful or violent programs. Try nature programs or comforting “family” movies.
- *Talk with your child’s teachers.* Make sure that your child’s teachers – including gym teachers and other specialty teachers – know what your child is going through. Ask them to be sensitive to your child’s loss and to let you know if your child is having any behavior changes, such as crying spells or angry outbursts.
- *Try to keep up basic family routines.* Familiar activities – baseball practice, choir, play dates – can be very comforting to a child who is going through a difficult time. Ask a friend to help with the logistics. You may be too tired to face much traffic right now. Continuing family routines such as bedtime stories, family games and walks to a park or playground can be a source of strength and comfort for all of you.

Helping Your Teenager

Teenagers, too, need reassurance and opportunities to talk about the loss of their parent. Many teenagers are reluctant to discuss their feelings with their surviving parent, because they are afraid of adding to the parent’s grief and stress.

Let your teenager know that you are available to talk, even though you are feeling sad. Make sure your teenager also has opportunities to talk with another trusted adult – a coach, teacher, guidance counselor or leader of your place of worship. Many teenagers also benefit from one-on-one counseling with an expert who understands the deep feelings of grieving teenagers.

Your teenager may also find it helpful to keep a journal during this time and in the months to come.

Coping With Holidays and Anniversaries

Holidays, when thoughts turn to family gatherings and memories, can be especially painful after the death of a spouse, causing you to re-experience feelings of intense grief and loss. The first year can be especially painful. Your husband's or wife's birthday, the anniversary of his or her death or your wedding anniversary are also likely to be extremely difficult. The following suggestions may help:

- *Prepare for your feelings ahead of time.* Talk with family members and friends as holidays, birthdays and anniversaries approach, and plan together a way to acknowledge your loss. You may want to set aside a time to share memories. Or you may want to make a donation of money, used clothing or toys to a homeless shelter in your husband's or wife's memory.
- *Think about changing how you acknowledge the holidays.* If your spouse died near the holidays, your grief may be so intense that usual celebrations are too difficult to participate in.

If it will be too painful to be in your home with reminders of your husband or wife around you, you may want to think about spending the holidays at the home of a sensitive friend or relative. Or you may want to stay home but keep holiday outings to a minimum. If you can, go to a restaurant or to someone else's house to avoid the stress of preparing a holiday meal.

- *If you have children at home, it may be especially stressful to try to celebrate the holidays for them while enduring your grief.* You can ask a friend or relative to help you by inviting your children to events with their family. ("I just can't gather the energy to do the usual holiday things. Do you think you could take Keisha to see the lights in the park with your family?") You may be too exhausted and distracted to even think about shopping, but want your children to have some special gifts. You can ask a friend to help with this, too. ("Jim has his heart set on a new computer game, but I just can't face the stores. If I give you the money can you pick it up when you do your shopping?") Most people are aching to do something to help a bereaved friend and will be relieved to know of a specific way to help you.

Finding Support

Many people find it helpful to talk about their grief with someone who understands what they are going through. Expert counselors and support groups exist that can provide you with support and understanding and suggest ways to handle the challenges you face.

The following resources can help you and your family:

American Widow Project

877-297-9436

<http://www.americanwidowproject.org>

The American Widow Project provides support for military widows including newsletters, blogs, weekend getaways and a support line answered by others who have lost a loved one.

Casualty Assistance

Each service branch has specially trained casualty assistance officers to provide compassionate assistance to casualty survivors.

- *Army Casualty Assistance* 888-ARMYHRC (276-9472)
- *Marine Corps Casualty Assistance* 800-847-1597
- *Navy Casualty Assistance/Family Liaison* 800-368-3202
- *Air Force Casualty Assistance* 800-433-0048
- *Coast Guard Casualty Assistance* 202-795-6647

Department of Veterans Affairs

Bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service)

202-273-9116 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp

Email: vet.center.bereavement@va.gov

The VA provides bereavement counseling (including outreach, counseling and referral services) to family members, including parents, spouses and children of service members who died in the service of their country. Counseling is provided at community-based vet centers near the families. Send an email or call the number above for the location of your nearest center.

Give an Hour™

P.O. Box 5918

Bethesda, MD 20824-5918

<http://www.giveanhour.org>

Email: info@giveanhour.org

Give an Hour understands that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan – and their

families – may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. Give an Hour wants to help you heal and offers a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.

888-751-6350

<http://www.goldstarwives.org>

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. provides support services to men and women whose spouses died in active duty or from a service disability. Areas of help include legislative information services (on issues such as Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Direct Deposit, Medicare Subvention and Federal Employees Health Benefits updates to military beneficiaries), volunteer opportunities in community, military and VA hospitals, and online chat groups. Minimal annual membership dues are charged. Members join local chapters and receive a quarterly newsletter.

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/survivor-casualty-assistance>

Military OneSource is a Department of Defense-funded program providing free confidential services and information to active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members, their families and survivors. Specific to survivors, un-remarried spouses and children of deceased active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members are eligible for support regardless of the conflict or cause of death of the service member. This 24/7 information-referral service addresses grief, financial counseling, health and wellness coaching, spouse employment and career opportunities and much more.

National Military Family Association

National Military Family Association

3601 Eisenhower Ave., Suite 425

Alexandria, VA 22304

800-260-0218

<http://www.militaryfamily.org>

Email: Info@MilitaryFamily.org

The goal of the National Military Family Association is to educate military families about the rights, benefits and services available to them and to promote and protect the interests of military families by influencing the development and implementation of legislation and policies affecting them.

Navy SEAL Foundation®

1619 D St., Bldg. 5326

Virginia Beach, VA 23459

757-363-7490

<http://www.navysealfoundation.org>

Email: development@navySEALfoundation.org

The Navy SEAL Foundation's work focuses on three key areas. Family support services include

tragedy assistance and morale-building activities. Educational programs encourage lifelong learning and provide motivation. Legacy activities – for those who make the ultimate sacrifice and for Naval Special Warfare veterans – ensure that service is always honored.

Survivor Outreach Services

Department of the Army
IMCOM G9, Family and MWR Programs
2455 Reynolds Road, Bldg. 2266
Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234-7588
855-707-2769

<https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/personal-assistance/survivor-outreach/sos-leaders>

There is no cause greater than taking care of those who have lost a soldier in service to our nation. The Army has made a commitment to provide long-term support to survivors of the fallen through the development of the Survivor Outreach Services Program. The program provides survivors with access to dedicated and comprehensive support services such as support groups, life-skills education, benefits milestone management, advocacy and resource information. Financial assistance is also available for long-term financial goals, budget counseling, debt management, estate planning, tax issues and higher education needs. Survivor Outreach Services helps continue the survivor's connection with the Army family and provides services for as long as the survivor desires.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<https://www.taps.org>

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® is a national organization that offers a broad range of support, mentoring and other services to those grieving the loss of a loved one in the armed forces. Services include a nationwide peer-support network, information and resources on coping with grief and trauma, online support groups and a quarterly magazine for casualty survivors. These services are free and no membership dues are charged. The program's clients also mark their calendars for Memorial Day weekend in Washington, D.C., to attend the annual "National Military Survivor" seminar and Good Grief Camp for children and young survivors.

Travis Manion Foundation

P.O. Box 1485
Doylestown, PA 18901
215-348-9080

<http://www.travismanion.org>

Email: amy@travismanion.org

The Travis Manion Foundation assists our nation's veterans and families of the fallen by empowering them to take the next step in their personal journeys and inspiring the next generation of leaders. The foundation believes the best way to honor the fallen is by challenging the living. "If not me, then who," the words Travis spoke before leaving for his second and final

deployment to Iraq, have inspired a national movement to service.

The Travis Manion Foundation provides the opportunity for survivors to honor their fallen loved one by accepting personal challenges that embody the service and sacrifice of their fallen hero and at the same time, provide services that benefit the global community through their Survivor Expeditions.

USO

Support for Families of the Fallen

116 Purple Heart Drive

Dover AFB, DE 19902

302-423-6368

<https://www.uso.org/programs/support-for-families-of-the-fallen>

Email: ybottorf@uso.org

The USO funds and provides continued support and comfort through partnership with best-in-class organizations to help families cope with their grief and move forward with their lives, including the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®, Good Grief Camps for children and “Memory Boxes” with comprehensive resources for children who lost a parent to help them and their families cope with the loss.

Your Military Support Services

Each service branch sponsors information, referral and support programs for service members and their families. You can call or visit any installation Army Community Service Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Fleet and Family Support Center, or Airman and Family Readiness Center regardless of your branch affiliation.

If you aren't near an installation, National Guard Family Assistance Centers are available in every state. The Service Provider Network on the National Guard Family Program website at <https://www.jointservicessupport.org/spn> will identify your closest center.

Each one of those we love had already risen far above the rest of our society in character, courage, honor and ability. Not an atom of their achievement can ever be lost or taken back. You can be proud of your son or daughter. Your deceased warrior deserves your pride and has earned it. If your son or daughter had lived, they would be proud today of who they are and what they are doing. Now it's our duty to be proud for them.

Both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® advise casualty survivors to think in terms of “four tasks” of grief. This approach, developed by psychologists William Worden and Therese Rando, encourages the bereaved to be active, not passive, participants in grief.

The tasks are:

- *Accepting the reality of your loss.* This includes understanding that the loss has occurred and that the death can't be reversed. As Gen. Jimmy Doolittle said after the death of his son serving in the Air Force, “Only when someone very near and dear to one leaves does one appreciate the stark tragedy of death. Even then, nature tends to cushion the initial shock, and the thought, ‘he is gone’ does not carry the later realization of finality and permanence that comes only with the final indisputable understanding that ‘we will never see him again.’”
- *Mourning the death of our loved one.* Grief hurts, and there is no easy way around this fact. We mourn, or physically feel the pain of our loss, because we loved so much. Some people try to distract themselves from their pain by acting as though little has changed or by filling their days with activities. Although this approach may make you feel better for a while, a broken heart must heal. If you don't allow yourself to grieve, your sorrow may stay buried and return in more painful ways.

Well-meaning friends may suggest at some point that it is time to “get over” your loss, or that you should distract yourself by taking a trip or becoming extra busy. You can explain to them that it is important that you grieve, and that the kind of pain you are feeling can take a long time to lessen. During this time, try to remember the life your son or daughter lived, and the wonderful meaning that your child gave to your own life, instead of focusing on the death and the loss.

- *Adjusting to the environment in which your son or daughter is missing.* If your son or daughter carried out certain tasks for you, you will need to learn to perform them or find other ways to get them done. Reach out for support when you need it.
- *Forming a new identity.* This means channeling the emotional energy that was part of your relationship with your son or daughter into another positive direction – for example, into a different relationship – with your spouse, with work (paid or volunteer), with your other children or with your grandchildren.

It is important to keep in mind that the tasks are a natural progression, and there is no timeline according to which they must be completed. The tasks can overlap or take a longer or shorter

time to accomplish. The process of grief can't be rushed, nor should it be.

Coping With Your Loss

The death of a child takes an enormous toll on parents, both emotionally and physically. You are likely not to “be yourself” for some time. The following guidelines may help you navigate this very difficult time:

- *Express your feelings.* Some parents find it helpful to cry, pray or spend a lot of time talking about their child with friends or family members. Others are so stunned that they have difficulty expressing their feelings about what has happened. If you find it hard to express your feelings, you may want to write them down in a journal.

One mother who lost her son in military service says that in the months after his death she sometimes took a “Tom day” – a day when she stayed indoors, played his favorite music and looked at photo albums she had made to remember his life. The days were painful for her, but it would have been more painful in the long term not to have experienced them.

- *Take care of yourself.* It's easy to neglect yourself when your thoughts are elsewhere. Try to eat well, even if it means eating small portions over the day instead of regular meals. Go for walks if possible, and take naps if they make you feel better.
- *Let others take care of you.* Often friends and neighbors want to help, but don't know what to do. Let them take the load of everyday duties away from you. When someone says, “Let me know what I can do to help,” take them up on it. (“It would help if you could do my grocery shopping this week.”) Or ask them to take care of your laundry for a while, vacuum and dust, bring you a meal or simply sit with you or go for a walk with you.
- *Stay in touch with others.* Spending time alone with your thoughts can be an important part of the healing process, but too much solitude may leave you feeling isolated from the support you need. Reach out to people who listen well – family, friends, clergy members and sympathetic co-workers. It can be especially helpful to talk with other people who have experienced a loss similar to yours and can understand the full range of how you are feeling. The resource list in this notebook can help you find support meant especially for parents of sons or daughters who have died in military service.
- *Respect your beliefs.* If spiritual beliefs are part of your life, they can be a great comfort after a loss. If your child's death has caused you to question your beliefs, try not to feel guilty – this is a normal part of grieving for many people. The sudden, traumatic death of someone who is so young and vital can shatter our “assumptive reality” and cause us to question many aspects of our belief system. Even if you haven't been religiously observant for some time, a sensitive clergy member will understand if you seek help coping with your loss. If you have been out of touch with your faith, you could begin by simply

saying, “I’m not sure what I believe anymore, but I’m feeling sad and confused and wondered if you could help.”

- *Treasure your memories.* When you feel ready, take time to remember what you treasure most about your son or daughter. You may want to find a special way to honor your child – by making an album of photographs and written memories, starting a website where your child’s friends can post pictures and thoughts, making a charitable contribution in your child’s memory or planting a tree in a place that was significant to your son or daughter.
- *Make major changes slowly.* It’s possible that friends or relatives may suggest that you move to a different home to “get away from the memories” of your son or daughter, or that you quit your job to rest. But it’s a good idea to postpone making major changes until you’ve had time to adjust to life without your child. A familiar house, neighbors and co-workers can provide a great sense of comfort and stability during a difficult period. Staying close to others who knew your son or daughter can be comforting and means that you will have people around who can share memories with you of your child. Taking life one day at a time can help you make the right decisions if and when you feel ready to enter a new phase of life.

Coping With Holidays and Anniversaries

Holidays, when thoughts turn to family gatherings and memories, can be especially painful after the death of a son or daughter, causing you to re-experience feelings of intense grief and loss. The first year can be especially painful. Your child’s birthday and the anniversary of his or her death are also likely to be extremely difficult. The following suggestions may help:

- *Prepare for your feelings ahead of time.* Talk with family members and friends as holidays, birthdays and anniversaries approach, and plan together a way to acknowledge your loss. You may want to set aside a time to share memories of your son or daughter. Or you may want to make a donation of money, used clothing or toys to a homeless shelter in your son’s or daughter’s memory, light a candle at a family meal or attend a religious service together.
- *Think about changing how you acknowledge the holidays.* If your son or daughter died near the holidays, your grief may be so intense that usual celebrations are too difficult to participate in. If it will be too painful to be in your home with reminders of your son or daughter around you, you may want to think about spending the holidays at the home of a sensitive friend or relative. Or you may want to stay home but keep holiday outings to a minimum. If you can, go to a restaurant or to someone else’s house to avoid the stress of preparing a holiday meal.
- *If you have younger children at home, it may be especially stressful to try to celebrate the holidays for them while enduring your grief.* You can ask a friend or relative to help you by inviting your children to events with their family. (“I just can’t gather the energy to

do the usual holiday things. Do you think you could take Keisha to see the lights in the park with your family?") You may be too exhausted and distracted to even think about shopping, but want your children to have some special gifts. You can ask a friend to help with this, too. ("Jim has his heart set on a new computer game, but I just can't face the stores. If I give you the money, can you pick it up when you do your shopping?") Most people are aching to do something to help a bereaved friend and will be relieved to know of a specific way to help you.

Finding Support

Losing a son or daughter is one of the most difficult things a person can endure. You and your family may find it easier to cope with the days and months ahead with the help of a counselor, clergy member or therapist. (There are counselors and therapists who specialize in working with families as a group or with both groups and individuals.) If you have other children, they may find it easier to bring up their worries with another adult, especially if they sense that it is upsetting to you to talk about their sibling's death.

The loss of a son or daughter can also strain a marriage – especially if you and your spouse tend to express your emotions in different ways. A counselor can help you strengthen your marriage as you face this difficult time.

The following resources can help you and your family deal with grief, traumatic stress and the other challenges you may be facing:

American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.

2128 Leroy Place NW
Washington, DC 20008
202-265-0991

<http://www.goldstarmoms.com>

American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. is an organization of mothers whose sons or daughters died in the line of duty in the armed forces of the United States or who died as a result of injuries sustained in such service. Gold Star Mothers states its mission as "[to] stand tall and proud by honoring our children, assisting our veterans, supporting our nation and healing with each other." Gold Star Mothers has more than 150 chapters nationwide and provides a newsletter.

Casualty Assistance

Each service branch has specially trained casualty assistance officers to provide compassionate assistance to casualty survivors.

- *Army Casualty Assistance* 888-ARMYHRC (276-9472)
- *Marine Corps Casualty Assistance* 800-847-1597
- *Navy Casualty Assistance/Family Liaison* 800-368-3202

- *Air Force Casualty Assistance* 800-433-0048
- *Coast Guard Casualty Assistance* 202-795-6647

Department of Veterans Affairs

Bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service)

202-273-9116 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp

Email: vet.center.bereavement@va.gov

The VA provides bereavement counseling (including outreach, counseling and referral services) to family members, including parents, spouses and children of service members who died in the service of their country. Counseling is provided at community-based vet centers near the families. Send an email or call the number above for the location of your nearest center.

Give an Hour™

P.O. Box 5918

Bethesda, MD 20824-5918

<http://www.giveanhour.org>

Email: info@giveanhour.org

Give an Hour understands that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan – and their families – may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. Give an Hour wants to help you heal, and offers a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/survivor-casualty-assistance>

Military OneSource is a Department of Defense-funded program providing free confidential services and information to active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members, their families and survivors. Specific to survivors, un-remarried spouses and children of deceased active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members are eligible for support regardless of the conflict or cause of death of the service member. This 24/7 information-referral service addresses grief, financial counseling, health and wellness coaching, spouse employment and career opportunities and much more.

National Military Family Association

National Military Family Association

3601 Eisenhower Ave., Suite 425

Alexandria, VA 22304

800-260-0218

<http://www.militaryfamily.org>

Email: Info@MilitaryFamily.org

The National Military Family Association's goal is to educate military families about the rights, benefits and services available to them and to promote and protect the interests of military

families by influencing the development and implementation of legislation and policies affecting them.

Navy SEAL Foundation®

1619 D St., Bldg. 5326
Virginia Beach, VA 23459
757-363-7490

<http://www.navysealfoundation.org>

Email: development@navySEALfoundation.org

The Navy SEAL Foundation's work focuses on three key areas. Family support services include tragedy assistance and morale-building activities. Educational programs encourage lifelong learning and provide motivation. Legacy activities – for those who make the ultimate sacrifice and for Naval Special Warfare veterans – ensure that service is always honored.

Survivor Outreach Services

Department of the Army
IMCOM G9, Family and MWR Programs
2455 Reynolds Road, Bldg. 2266
Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234-7588
855-707-2769

<https://www.armymwr.com/programs-and-services/personal-assistance/survivor-outreach/sos-leaders>

There is no cause greater than taking care of those who have lost a soldier in service to our nation. The Army has made a commitment to provide long-term support to survivors of the fallen through the development of the Survivor Outreach Services Program. The program provides survivors with access to dedicated and comprehensive support services such as support groups, life-skills education, benefits milestone management, advocacy and resource information. Financial assistance is also available for long-term financial goals, budget counseling, debt management, estate planning, tax issues and higher education needs. Survivor Outreach Services helps continue the survivor's connection with the Army family and provides services for as long as the survivor desires.

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<https://www.taps.org/youthprograms>

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® is a national organization that offers a broad range of support, mentoring and other services to those grieving the loss of a loved one in the armed forces, including young survivors. TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing, led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health and education. These include Good Grief Camps where children are able to share and learn coping skills through games, crafts, and other activities in a fun and supportive environment. Separate programming for parents stresses resources, communication strategies, and ways to help grieving children at every stage. Special programming is offered for children of

those who died by suicide, as well, including the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, a one-of-a-kind weekend that offers survivors of all ages the opportunity to connect with others who have experienced and understand suicide loss.

Travis Manion Foundation

P.O. Box 1485
Doylestown, PA 18901
215-348-9080

<http://www.travismanion.org>

Email: amy@travismanion.org

The Travis Manion Foundation assists our nation's veterans and families of the fallen by empowering them to take the next step in their personal journeys and inspiring the next generation of leaders. The foundation believes the best way to honor the fallen is by challenging the living. "If not me, then who," the words Travis spoke before leaving for his second and final deployment to Iraq, have inspired a national movement to service.

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USO

Support for Families of the Fallen
116 Purple Heart Drive
Dover AFB, DE 19902
302-423-6368

<https://www.uso.org/programs/support-for-families-of-the-fallen>

Email: ybottorf@uso.org

The USO funds and provides continued support and comfort through partnership with best-in-class organizations to help families cope with their grief and move forward with their lives, including the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®, Good Grief Camps for children and "Memory Boxes" with comprehensive resources for kids who lost a parent to help them and their families cope with the loss.

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Each service branch sponsors information, referral and support programs for service members and their families. You can call or visit any installation Army Community Service Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Fleet and Family Support Center, or Airman and Family Readiness Center regardless of your branch affiliation.

If you aren't near an installation, National Guard Family Assistance Centers are available in every state. The Service Provider Network on the National Guard Family Program website at

<https://www.jointservicessupport.org/spn> will identify your closest center.

Helping a Child Deal With Death

What can an adult say to a child following the death of a beloved family member or friend? Children often ask probing or painful questions. For a grieving adult, it may seem daunting to have to explain death to a child, especially when there are no simple answers. The following guidelines may make this process easier.

Some Guidelines

- *It is OK to say you don't know the answer to a child's question.* You can even say, "No one knows for sure, but this is what I think."
- *Consider a child's age and ability to understand complex ideas.* Many experts believe children do not have a mature understanding of death until about age 8 or 9. Younger children may think that being dead is temporary and that the dead person will return in the future.
- *Use precise terms when talking about death.* People typically refer to "losing" a loved one. Children may interpret this literally and assume that the person can be found. You should also explain that being dead means that the body has stopped working and that it cannot be fixed. It no longer feels cold or gets hungry. The good side of this is that a dead body does not feel any more hurt or pain.
- *If the child asks whether you will die, respond that everybody dies someday,* but that you hope to live to do things with the family for a long time.
- *Remember that children cannot tolerate long periods of sadness.* This means that they may want to play and participate in their usual activities. This does not mean that they didn't love the person who died, nor does it mean that they are being disrespectful. It's OK to permit or encourage children to have fun as they did before the death.
- *Changes in the child's behavior or patterns might be signs that the child is experiencing problems associated with the death.* In these instances, it's appropriate to obtain advice from a specialist in child bereavement counseling.

Knowing They Are Not Alone

Many children benefit by participating in bereavement groups with other children who have suffered loss, like the TAPS® Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors. They discover they are not alone. Children hate to be different from their peers and being bereaved makes them different. (To find out more about the camp and about other ways that TAPS supports families, visit TAPS online at <http://www.taps.org>, or call 800-959-TAPS.)

Although you may not know what to say, don't avoid bereaved children. Tell them that you love them, and although you may be sad and crying, you will always love them and take care of them.

Also, learn to express your own grief. You'll find the strength to carry out these suggestions, and you and the child will feel better as a result.

Finding Support

Many people find it helpful to talk about their grief with someone who understands what they are going through. Expert counselors and support groups exist that can provide you with support and understanding and suggest ways to handle the challenges you face.

The following resources can help you and your family:

Give an Hour™

P.O. Box 5918

Bethesda, MD 20824-5918

<http://www.giveanhour.org>

Email: info@giveanhour.org

Give an Hour understands that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan – and their families – may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. Give an Hour wants to help you heal and offers a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/survivor-casualty-assistance>

Military OneSource is a Department of Defense-funded program providing free confidential services and information to active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members, their families and survivors. Specific to survivors, un-remarried spouses and children of deceased active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members are eligible for support regardless of the conflict or cause of death of the service member. This 24/7 information-referral service addresses grief, financial counseling, health and wellness coaching, spouse employment and career opportunities and much more.

National Military Family Association

National Military Family Association

3601 Eisenhower Ave., Suite 425

Alexandria, VA 22304

800-260-0218

<http://www.militaryfamily.org>

Email: Info@MilitaryFamily.org

The National Military Family Association's goal is to educate military families about the rights, benefits and services available to them and to promote and protect the interests of military families by influencing the development and implementation of legislation and policies affecting them.

Navy SEAL Foundation®

1619 D St., Bldg. 5326
Virginia Beach, VA 23459
757-363-7490

<http://www.navysealfoundation.org>

Email: development@navySEALfoundation.org

The Navy SEAL Foundation's work focuses on three key areas. Family support services include tragedy assistance and morale-building activities. Educational programs encourage lifelong learning and provide motivation. Legacy activities – for those who make the ultimate sacrifice and for Naval Special Warfare veterans – ensure that service is always honored.

Snowball Express

<http://www.snowballexpress.org>

The Snowball Express mission is to create hope and new memories for the children of our fallen military heroes who died while serving our country since 9/11. Snowball Express hosts annual all-expenses-paid Christmas galas for the families of fallen service members.

SOFWOLF

<http://www.sofwolf.org>

Email: info@sofwolf.org

SOFWOLF is a nonprofit organization that offers a college and career outdoor leadership program for the teenagers of the fallen Special Operations Forces community, which includes Air Force Commandos, Green Berets, Navy SEALs and Marine Special Operators. Each summer, students are flown out to Park City, Utah, where they participate in outdoor leadership, team-building activities, career mentoring, resume-building, community outreach and networking for internships.

Special Operations Warrior Foundation

P.O. Box 89367
Tampa, FL 33689
877-337-7693

<http://www.specialops.org>

Email: warrior@specialops.org

The Special Operations Warrior Foundation provides full scholarship grants and educational and family counseling to the surviving children of special operations personnel who die in operational or training missions and immediate financial assistance to severely wounded special operations personnel and their families.

Eluna and Camp Erin

206-298-1217

<https://elunanetwork.org>

Eluna funds Camp Erin, a nationwide network of free bereavement camps for children and

teens ages 6-17 who have experienced the death of someone close to them. There are 43 camp locations across the United States and two in Canada. It is a weekend-long experience filled with traditional, fun camp activities combined with grief education and emotional support – facilitated by grief professionals and trained volunteers. Eluna’s mission is to provide comfort, hope and healing to children affected by loss and family addiction. For a comprehensive list of grief resources by state, please refer to the National Bereavement Resource Guide located at <https://elunanetwork.org/national-bereavement-resource-guide> and to locate the Camp Erin closest to you, visit <https://elunanetwork.org/camps-programs/camp-erin>.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<https://www.taps.org/youthprograms>

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors® is a national organization that offers a broad range of support, mentoring and other services to those grieving the loss of a loved one in the armed forces, including young survivors. TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing, led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health and education. These include Good Grief Camps where children are able to share and learn coping skills through games, crafts, and other activities in a fun and supportive environment. Separate programming for parents stresses resources, communication strategies, and ways to help grieving children at every stage. Special programming is offered for children of those who died by suicide, as well, including the National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar, a one-of-a-kind weekend that offers survivors of all ages the opportunity to connect with others who have experienced and understand suicide loss.

USO

Support for Families of the Fallen

116 Purple Heart Drive

Dover AFB, DE 19902

302-423-6368

<https://www.uso.org/programs/support-for-families-of-the-fallen>

Email: ybottorf@uso.org

The USO funds and provides continued support and comfort through partnership with best-in-class organizations to help families cope with their grief and move forward with their lives, including the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®, Good Grief Camps for children and “Memory Boxes” with comprehensive resources for kids who have lost a parent to help them and their families cope with the loss.

Your Military Support Services

Each service branch sponsors information, referral and support programs for service members and their families. You can call or visit any installation Army Community Service Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Fleet and Family Support Center, or Airman and Family Readiness Center regardless of your branch affiliation.

If you aren't near an installation, National Guard Family Assistance Centers are available in every state. The Service Provider Network on the National Guard Family Program website at <https://www.jointservicessupport.org/spn> will identify your closest center.

Day-to-Day Challenges After a Suicide Loss

Many practical matters must be taken care of after the death of a loved one. Death by suicide brings additional challenges that also must be addressed. The following information offers guidance to help you through some of the steps in this difficult process. An additional purpose of this article is to help all survivors understand the challenges faced by someone who lost a service member to suicide. Having this knowledge may help you support each other. Finally, you will find quotes from other parents and spouses who lost a service member to suicide in this article; these quotes reflect other families' personal experiences that you may find helpful and meaningful.

Talking about suicide

It is most important that you do what is comfortable for you, but you may wish to consider sharing how your loved one died, without focusing on the details of the circumstances or the method. Being honest about the way your loved one died may help your friends and family better support you in your grief. Suicide loss survivors say that, over time, they are glad they shared the manner of death with others.

"I am so glad that I chose to be honest with my son about how his father died. I wanted to create a foundation of trust, so we could talk about mental health in our family openly. He grew up knowing the truth about how his father died but he also learned how his father lived, and about his honorable life and service. My goal was to make sure he knew that help was available for any struggles he may experience and we could always talk about it."

Notifying other family members

You may want to ask a relative or trusted friend to help you notify others of your loved one's death. In addition, your casualty assistance officer can provide moral support and accompany you when you speak to your family members. While your casualty assistance officer cannot notify other family on your behalf, he or she can help you determine what to say to them.

Talking about suicide with children

Before talking about suicide with a child or children, you should first consider and manage your own feelings, so that you can speak calmly with them. Use age-appropriate language to explain how your loved one died, but do not share unnecessary details that may be upsetting. Be sure to emphasize that the person who died was struggling and thinking differently from most people.

Children may react in a number of ways, and it is important to acknowledge and validate their feelings. One way to do this is to identify the emotions that they express and to acknowledge that you feel the same way (for example, "It sounds like you are feeling sad. I am sad, too.").

It is common for children to think that the suicide is their fault; if so, you should correct their misperception (for example, “It sounds like you are blaming yourself. This is not your fault.”). Check in with the child regularly and ask how he or she would like you to help. Some children may wish to process their feelings through talking; others may need time alone, engaging in quiet activities such as art or music.

“I had no idea how to talk about this with my children, but I knew they needed to know in ways they could understand. I learned some facts on how to best speak to children about suicide, and how to base my conversations on honesty and open communication. I wanted my children to know they could always trust me.”

Military investigations

Several investigations are conducted following a suicide, including the line of duty investigation, command investigation, safety investigation and medical examination. The purpose of these investigations is to determine the cause and manner of death and a service member’s duty status when the death occurred. This information is important for processing certain benefits and entitlements (see “A Survivor’s Guide to Benefits” for more information).

An investigator may interview you as part of the military investigative process and ask questions that may feel very personal. Remember that you are being interviewed because you may have information that could help the investigation. You are not required to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable; however, your cooperation may help speed the process.

Military police or investigators may also need to take some of your loved one’s belongings as evidence to help them investigate the death. You may want to write down what they took, so it can be returned to you at the conclusion of the investigation.

Investigating a death is a complicated process that can sometimes take a year or more to complete. During that time, your casualty assistance officer may be able to help you obtain information on the military investigation, and he or she may be able to advise you on how best to inquire about investigations conducted by other civilian organizations. You are entitled to receive a copy of the investigative report. Your casualty assistance officer or a family liaison from the Military Criminal Investigation Organization can help you complete and submit the required paperwork to obtain the report. This process can take time as well. Your casualty assistance officer or the Military Criminal Investigation Organization family liaison can also help you arrange to review the report with someone who will help you understand its contents. You may wish to have a close friend or family member present when reviewing the report.

Viewing the body of your loved one and autopsy report

If you are the immediate next of kin, you may be asked to identify the body of your loved one either in person or through photographs. If this is too much for you, you may ask someone else to do so. Because seeing the body of your loved one can be very upsetting, you might want to ask first about the state of the body. You could also ask someone close to you to view the body first and help you prepare.

Survivors note that viewing the body, although difficult, helped them come to terms with the reality of the death of their loved ones. You also have the right to ask for time alone with your loved one. And you may request a copy of the medical examiner's report.

Obituary

Obituaries are written to help us remember how our loved ones lived and served. Death does not define the person. Include what you are comfortable with in your loved one's obituary, but keep in mind that including the cause of death may help prevent questions and rumors about how your loved one died.

Funeral and memorial service

The Department of Defense determines eligibility for military funeral honors based on how your loved one served, not on how he or she died. Similarly, the funeral or memorial service should focus on the life of your loved one. If you feel comfortable discussing the manner in which your one loved died at the service, do so, without focusing on the details of the circumstances or method.

Contact the funeral home to discuss your loved one's arrangements including cause of death. If you need support in doing this, please contact your casualty assistance officer.

Talk in advance with any chaplain, member of the clergy or other speaker who is taking part in the funeral to gauge their views on suicide. Consider inviting only clergy whose views align with yours, and who can speak about and focus on the life and service of your loved one, instead of the manner of their death.

"When my husband died, we had no idea what to do first. My casualty officer suggested I connect with my pastor; we were so fortunate that our family pastor actually had some experience and understanding in handling a funeral for a suicide with sensitivity. He helped my family create a service that honored my husband and that was very comforting for us."

Adapted from <https://afsp.org/find-support/live-lost-someone/practical-information-for-immediately-after-a-loss/>

Finding support

The following resources can help you and your family:

Casualty Assistance

Each service branch has specially trained casualty assistance officers to provide compassionate assistance to casualty survivors.

- *Army Casualty Assistance* 888-ARMYHRC (276-9472)
- *Marine Corps Casualty Assistance* 800-847-1597
- *Navy Casualty Assistance/Family Liaison* 800-368-3202
- *Air Force Casualty Assistance* 800-433-0048
- *Coast Guard Casualty Assistance* 202-795-6647

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/survivor-casualty-assistance>

Survivor Outreach Services

Department of the Army
IMCOM G9, Family and MWR Programs
2455 Reynolds Road, Bldg. 2266
Fort Sam Houston, TX 78234-7588 855-707-2769
<http://www.sos.army.mil>

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<https://www.taps.org>

Coping and Healing After a Suicide Loss

The sudden loss of a loved one is painful under any circumstance, but losing someone to suicide can feel even more difficult. Everything said previously about grief, coping, and the indescribable sense of pain and loss still applies here, but suicide comes with its own challenges. The information in this section is meant to help you with the difficult emotions that come with the death of a loved one by suicide and is based on what other survivors have experienced.

What is unique to suicide

The loss of a loved one by suicide can be shocking and unexpected. Many survivors report

experiencing intense and seemingly conflicting emotions as they cope with their loss such as shock, denial or disbelief, grief, relief, rejection or abandonment, blame, betrayal, isolation, depression or sadness, suicidal feelings and yearning for the person. Whatever emotions you are or are not feeling is normal. These are some of the emotions others survivors have expressed:

- *Confusion:* Like many other survivors, you will likely try to make sense of the death and try to understand why your loved one died by suicide, and unfortunately, you may never know the answer. Some survivors find that learning more about the topic of suicide helps in the grieving process. However, this approach may not be for everyone.
- *Guilt:* It is common for survivors to wonder if they could have done something to prevent the suicide. Many survivors review every detail of the days and weeks before the suicide in an attempt to understand and make sense of what happened. Feelings of guilt and self-blame often accompany thoughts such as “If only I had known” and “I should have somehow prevented this.” While this response is common, it is important to remember that you are not to blame and that you did the best you could at the time.
- *Shame:* You might worry that other people will think negatively about your loved one, you, or your family because of the way in which your loved one died. Stigma and ignorance of suicide on the part of friends and family may contribute to their uncertainty in how to best support you during this time and add to feelings of shame. Finding the right people to support you during this time is critical. You may want to seek professional help or a support network of fellow survivors.
- *Anger:* You may also feel anger towards yourself, others, or your loved one. Some survivors feel angry with their loved ones for the way in which they died. Anger isn’t bad – it’s a coping mechanism for extreme stress and loss. The way that anger is expressed can be healthy or unhealthy. Try to recognize that anger is a way to reclaim something you lost. Refocus your energy on finding a way to reclaim your own sense of control in your life.

The task of grieving

In the days ahead, the pain may be so great that you will try to ignore your feeling of loss. You may have difficulty talking about your emotions and about how your loved one died at first. Part of coping and healing following a suicide loss is finding space and time for you to mourn in your own way.

Those close to a suicide death are at higher risk for depression and suicide. If you experience persistent and intense sorrow or other health problems, consult your doctor or a mental health provider. Families that do not communicate about the suicide loss may experience tension over a lack of emotional expression. Finding ways to express your emotions, be they grief, anger, or sadness, is an important part of the healing process.

It is critically important to address any emotional challenges you may be experiencing for a

number of reasons, one being that suicide risk is increased among those bereaved by suicide. However, it is important to know that suicide is still a very rare occurrence, even among those bereaved by suicide. Seek professional help if you or someone in your family experiences suicidal thoughts.

Many suicides are associated with severe trauma. If you or your family are suffering from exposure to these events, please seek professional care. There is good treatment available and many resources to help.

Ways to cope and heal

“The first time I felt some hope was when I attended a local suicide loss support group. Knowing I was not alone was key in my healing.”

Everyone has different ways of coping and healing. There is no one way to grieve. Here are some ways to cope and heal following a suicide:

- *Reach out:* You may be inclined to withdraw and close yourself off from others because they remind you of your loved one. However, the support of your family, friends, and community can help you through the loss. Try to surround yourself with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and can simply be present when you would rather not talk.

Some survivors find it helpful to stay in touch with their loved one's unit. Your casualty assistance officer may be able to help you connect with the unit. Note that if you do not authorize disclosure of your contact information to third parties it may be difficult for members of the unit to obtain your contact information and thus keep in touch.

- *Don't rush:* There is no time limit for coming to terms with the loss of a loved one. Take your time and grieve in your own way. There may be times that the pain ebbs and flows, particularly around significant dates, locations, or even powerful memories attached to familiar smells. This is all natural as you grieve.
- *Expect challenges along the way:* The grieving process is not linear. You may also experience setbacks in your grief. There will be good and bad days, even years after the suicide. This is okay and common. Over time, there will be more good days than bad. One day you will find yourself learning to live again, without your loved one's physical presence.
- *Find other suicide loss survivors:* Other survivors of suicide loss have been through similar experiences and can speak with you from a place of empathy. Although none have the exact same experience, they can speak to you on a similar emotional level. Their stories can help you understand what to expect from the grieving process, and you can share your story with someone who wants to listen. These websites will help you find a regional suicide loss survivor support group:

- <https://afsp.org/find-support/live-lost-someone/find-a-support-group/>

- *www.taps.org*
- *Find support - professional or otherwise:* Some people may find the greatest value in support obtained through a licensed mental health professional. Others may find it most helpful to speak with a religious or spiritual leader, a mental health professional working outside a traditional mental health setting, a family member, a peer, a survivor support group, or some combination. Finding the best fit for you is crucial for the healing process.

Adapted from:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/end-of-life/in-depth/suicide/art-20044900>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/coping-after-suicide.aspx>

Additional Resources

The following resources may be helpful to you and your family.

Casualty Assistance

Each service branch has specially trained casualty assistance officers to provide compassionate assistance to casualty survivors.

- *Army Casualty Assistance* 888-ARMYHRC (276-9472)
- *Marine Corps Casualty Assistance* 800-847-1597
- *Navy Casualty Assistance/Family Liaison* 800-368-3202
- *Air Force Casualty Assistance* 800-433-0048
- *Coast Guard Casualty Assistance* 202-795-6647

Military OneSource

800-342-9647

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/survivor-casualty-assistance>

Department of Veterans Affairs

Bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service)
202-273-9116 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp

Email: *vet.center.bereavement@va.gov*

Give an Hour

P.O. Box 5918

Bethesda, MD 20824-5918

<http://www.giveanhour.org>

Email: info@giveanhour.org

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors®

800-959-TAPS (8277)

<http://www.taps.org>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

1-888-333-AFSP (2377)

<https://afsp.org>

Email: info@afsp.org

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is a voluntary health organization that supports survivors of suicide loss, and funds research, runs educational programs, and advocates for mental health and suicide prevention policies. Use their “Find Support” link to locate resources and connect with other suicide loss survivors.

Other Important Documents

Other important documents that you will want to keep ready and organized include:

- Civilian death certificates (These can be purchased through the funeral home. Twelve copies are recommended.)
- Marriage certificate
- Divorce decree
- Immigration documents
- Naturalization papers
- Adoption or custody documents
- DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge From Active Duty
- DD Form 215, Correction to DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge From Active Duty (if applicable)
- Guardianship papers (for establishing trust funds for children)
- Social Security numbers/cards for all family members
- Wills and deeds of trust
- Insurance policies (life, home, vehicles, etc.)
- Income tax records (past three years)
- Documents referring to bank accounts, loans, securities, etc.
- References to safe deposit boxes

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www.MilitaryOneSource.mil | 800-342-9647