

Military OneSource Tools and Resources for Surviving Family Members

Webinar

[Tina] Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar titled "Military OneSource Tools and Resources for Surviving Family Members." The appearance of hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the Defense Department of this website or the information, products or services contained therein. For other than authorized activities such as military exchanges and Morale, Welfare and Recreation sites, the Defense Department does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations. Such links are provided consistent with the stated purpose of this Defense Department-sponsored webinar.

Did you know that Military OneSource is the Defense Department's platform for Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors? Become familiar with the resources, tools and information available to surviving family members of service members who died in active-duty status.

We're thrilled to have with us today, Lisa Valentine. Lisa is the Defense Department's program manager for Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors. She is responsible for policy, procedures and oversight for casualty matters, military funeral honors, personnel, accountability and DOD cemeteries. Ms. Valentine is a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army. Without further delay, I'll turn things over to Lisa.

[Lisa Valentine] Thank you very much Tina and hello everyone. Thank you for joining us today on our seminar about surviving family member resources that are available through Military OneSource. Our goal today is to familiarize you with the resources, the tools and information available on Military OneSource for surviving family members of service members, and also its resources for service providers who assist surviving family members who died while in active-duty status. Please know that the Defense Department is absolutely committed to supporting surviving family members.

Today we're going to focus on a variety of resources and services on Military OneSource which includes, but is not limited to what's listed on this slide. Such as, there's a 24/7/365 days a year information available to you and you can receive online assistance or you can call someone and talk to a person without having to push a button that says, "Well, push 1 for this or push 3 for that." It's like within moments you will have someone on the other end to answer your question from anywhere in the world.

We also provide casualty assistance which includes long-term case management because we know that losing a loved one, it's not a short process, it's a lifetime process. We also know that as time passes by and as we age, our benefits change. So, it's very

important to keep up to date and to know where to go to find out how changes will affect you.

We also have a Survivor Inquiry form. This is a nice tool that we'll talk about where if you've got a question that you can go to and ask your question and have a response within five days.

We also can help with explaining benefits and we're going to talk about some financial planning tools that are available to you. We'll talk about employment assistance, confidential non-medical counseling, and grief counseling, some resilience tools that we have and other products and this is for all ages.

We're going to talk about eTutorials, webinars and podcasts and our triannual eNewsletter to keep you informed, and we're going to talk about our online memorial where you can post tributes to your service member.

So, the first thing that I recommend is that if you are not familiar with our My Military OneSource app, I would recommend that you take the moment to download it on your cellphone. The My Military OneSource app is free. You do not have to have a military ID card to download it. All you do is just go to your app store that's on your phone and look up My Military OneSource and it'll pop up and download it. And then, what you can do is you can tailor it to say that you're a surviving family member and it will provide resources that you may find to be of assistance.

We also do recognize that being a survivor, it just doesn't mean that you want to know everything about casualty assistance, you also have your regular life that continues to deal with. So, let's say that you have an exceptional family member for example and you want to know more about the Exceptional Family Member Program and what resources are available to you.

We're going to talk about employment. For example, the SECO program, that may be of interest to you. Maybe you want to learn about what's available on the MWR platform, so that maybe you want to take a break from grief and make a new memory with your family and go on a trip some place and so MWR is there for you. There's also an online library that you may not be aware of and so when your children are going through their homework and so forth and they need to do research, that may be something you're interested in. There are so many resources on Military OneSource that is impossible for me to describe all of them within a one-hour period.

So, what I've done is, I picked out those resources that I think that as a surviving family member, you may be interested in. But I invite you to explore Military OneSource, and one way to do that, if you want to do it on your phone is through the My Military OneSource app, and also on our website.

As you go onto the website or on the My Military OneSource app, we do have various articles that are there that will lead you to resources. So if you were to go onto the My Military, or go to the Military OneSource web page which is www.militaryonesource.mil and you put in that you're a survivor, then it's going to come up with this main page that

you see here and it's going to introduce you to the various articles and different topics that may be something that you're interested in.

What you also know is that when you go to our front page for the Casualty and Mortuary Affairs, or what we do is we call Goldstar and Surviving Family Members page, what you're going to see is that there is a request form. So if you have a question or so forth that you can submit it there, it will also provide you a link to our DOD memorial that we're going to talk about. But again, I invite you to go in and explore it.

We also have what we call the Online Survivors Benefit Report and I'm talking about this today because it is so important. You're going to hear me talk a little bit about that. There is the Survivor Benefit Plan or SBP and Dependent Indemnity Compensation Offset, DIC, that's going to be going into effect in January of 2023. The Online Survivors Benefit Report is an interactive report that is available to you 24/7. But in order to have access to that report which you're going to want to do, is to contact the FAST team and make sure that they have your DS Logon and if you're really not so sure what the DS Logon is, our page on Military OneSource about the Online Survivors Benefits Report will take you to there.

But we have a family assistance team that's available to help you Monday through Friday unless it's a holiday from 8 to 5 Eastern Standard Time and they can answer various questions for you. But with the Online Survivors Benefit Report, what's nice about it is, like, let's say that you want to know what your benefit is going to be in January-February timeframe of 2023 because you yourself may be affected by the SBP DIC offset. Well, this will help you to be able to see what changes to expect and it will also give you projected changes in the years to come. Let's say that you maybe are contemplating remarriage or maybe you've become disabled or you're going to be a full-time student. These are questions and that's what makes our Online Survivors Benefit Report interactive, that you can go to on this platform and you put in the information and they'll show you how your benefits changed or maybe they remain the same but it's important to know.

So, for example if you have children in the household and you have a child that's going to turn 16, how do those benefits change? How did this benefit change if they're no longer considered to be a dependent? Maybe they're at the age 21 or 22, so forth, all these different things. So, it's even for adult children who are receiving benefits as well. So, they may be going to college and maybe they're eligible to receive the SBP or DIC.

Another financial tool that we have is Sen\$e. And Sen\$e is an app and just like the My Military OneSource app, all you have to do is go to your cellphone and go to the app store and then you would just type in the Sen\$e and it will come up and you can download that, and this is also a very helpful tool.

So, if you were to go and load up the Sen\$e app and then enter into it, it's going to ask you questions like, are you a surviving family member? Or maybe you're someone like me, I'm a military retiree. You can go in and you can put your information, it'll set it up specifically to you and for your needs. And then what's nice about it too is that there's a

category as you go in it says Point of Need, and then from there if you go to Point of Need there's another tab, it's called Estate Planning and you'll see a little picture that says Last Will and Testament. But when you pull on that, then you're going to have, you click on the Estate Planning. And when you do, you will see that there's another button that you can push and it's called Survivor Benefits. It's the third one on that page that opens up. And then it talks about the different survivor benefits from the HEART Act, reimbursements, life insurance such as the SGLI, the TSGLI, the combat tax zone forgiveness, SBP, death gratuity, the Thrift Savings Plan or the TSP, the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, DIC, education, training support, Social Security, unpaid/paid allowances and other benefits.

I also encourage you to take a look for this financial tool and I would also say that if you've got a high schooler or maybe a college student that this may also be very benefit. And again, just like the My Military OneSource app, you do not have to have a military ID card or anything like this. This is a free benefit to anybody who wants to download it on their phone.

If you're a surviving spouse or maybe you're an adult surviving child who still have ID card for benefits, then you may be eligible for the free MilTax preparation for eligible survivors and so this is every year. As long as you're an un-remarried spouse or you are an adult child and you need to do your tax preparation and you're still considered to be an eligible beneficiary, we highly recommend that you use this. And so, January, it'll be available again. And so, we highly, highly encourage you to take a look and take advantage of this wonderful free resource.

If you are interested in a job, then you are eligible, and even adult children that are seeking employment are eligible for the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program and the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. This is a really wonderful program. They'll help you from creating a resume into practicing, you know, going to interviews and they also are a resource for jobs with this partnership that the Department of Defense has. And so we highly encourage that you take a look at that if you're interested in getting a job or maybe you are seeking a different kind of employment.

Military OneSource has non-medical counseling resources. And so, if you're looking for grief counseling or maybe you're looking for trauma, a lot of people don't realize that with grief there's also a trauma component that one may need assistance with, but Military OneSource can get you that non-medical counseling and you can receive free private and personalized health from trained counselors. Now, again, these are only for eligible beneficiaries that you would have to have that military ID card that enables you to receive this care. If you are not a beneficiary for DOD, you can receive this kind of support through the Department of Veterans Affairs. So, they have their vet centers and they can provide free and confidential bereavement counseling. You can contact that center at the number below which is 877-927-8387. With Military OneSource, you can also contact them 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year and the number to Military OneSource is a 1-800-342-9647 or you can just hop on our Military

OneSource page and they can also help you to click and connect. So, one of the things that you could do is if you would prefer to chat, you can do that as well. Also know that through this non-medical counseling, you don't necessarily have to do it in person.

There is also a virtual component to it. TRICARE can also provide medically necessary coverage of mental health services during times of grief as well. And so, just know that these resources are there for you and we highly encourage you to take advantage of them.

So, we have some wonderful Military OneSource resiliency tools. Some of them, it's just again, it's downloading a free app. One of the ones that we have is a CoachHub, and this is a really good program. If you were to get it in the civilian sector that can be quite expensive but this is a wonderful tool for eligible beneficiaries where you can go to this page and you can sign up to have a mobile coach for your life. When you're going through your grief journey or even it doesn't necessarily have to be grief, it's just, you know, managing the day-to-day everyday tasks that one has to do in raising a family and so forth. They can help you to help set your goals that you want to achieve and have someone there that's a positive voice, a cheerleader to help you to achieve your goal.

There's also a wonderful program that I recommend, and this is for all ages, which is the Chill Drills by Military OneSource. One of the things that I hear is about the teenagers, you know what do we have for teenagers and so forth because that's very complicated. They're already going through just a tough time with the changes that they are going through on the stressors. But Chill Drills is one that I would highly recommend for teenagers as well. It's an app so all you have to do is go into the app store, put in Chill Drills and download it. This app is free to anybody. And so you don't have to have an ID card in order to access that.

Another one is MoodHacker, and so that's also another app. So just go into the app store and download MoodHacker. It's got different activities that you do to help you to improve your mood. Doesn't mean that we're trying to say, "Hey, it's not OK to feel sad or it's not OK to go through what you're feeling because that's a normal part of grief. You have to go through that, but let's find ways to help you go through it in a more healthy manner."

We have another resiliency tool that I think is very wonderful, which is Breathe to Relax. Sometimes as we go through grief, especially in the initial stages, it's really hard to just catch our breath and just to breathe and belly breathing, it's a very good technique. If you can learn to master that, it can help you with relaxing and give you the strength that you need to just get through a moment. It can do better, you know breathing can be a better tool than having to take a pill for some people and some people you do you need to go to the doctor and get what you need to take care of yourself. The most important thing is you've got to take care of yourself so that you can survive your journey.

We even have some resiliency tools for children. One of the ones that we have is the Breathe, Think and Do with Sesame Street and we also have the Big Moving Adventure. We do know that surviving spouses, they have to make that last move and they're going

to be making that last move without their service member and that can be very, very tough. But it's also hard on children to have that change, but we have the Sesame Street that can help your children to make it more of a positive than a negative adventure.

And then there's the Virtual Hope Box, and this can help users with coping, relaxation, distraction, positive thinking, using personalized, audio and video, pictures, games, mindfulness, exercises and so forth. And this is for all ages, maybe not so much for the little kids, but it's also a great tool for teenagers. So, I highly recommend taking a look at that as well. And again, these are apps that all you have to do is go to the app store on your phone and you can download them. They are free and you do not have to have the military beneficiary card.

We do offer support for our young survivors. There are educational training opportunities through the DOD MWR libraries. They offer tutoring, there's scholarship information, online resources such as e-books, magazines, journals and an array of databases. And if you go through our resources that we have on the survivor page, you'll find that there's other opportunities for tutoring as well. Then we have financial planning which we talked about at the Online Survivor Benefits Support tool, because it's not just for the surviving spouses. But remember, it's also for the children that are receiving benefits too, so they can get their own report as long as they're of age. They need to be 18 years old or older.

If you happen to be a guardian of a child, then the information is not available to you online. However, we strongly recommend that you contact our FAST team, the Family Assistance Team that's listed on our page about the Online Survivors Benefit Report. Call them and they can mail you as the guardian, the report.

Again, we have the tax services. So, if you're a surviving child and you're working and you need to fill out your tax form and so forth, know that you too are eligible to use the MilTax prep and the filing software. We also have consultants and other resources. Our young survivors are also eligible to receive emotional support through the free non-medical counseling which can be scheduled anytime. And again, this type of non-medical counseling is available in person, by phone or by secure videoconferencing or via online chat, so whichever a user would like to use.

We also have resources where we can connect survivors, our young survivors with other survivors their age at bereavement camps that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of our young people. We also have different products that you can order or that you can download. All you have to do is go to the link that's listed on this slide, and if you were to go and choose Casualty, we have the electronic version, for example, of the Survivor's Guide to Benefits. We try to update this every six months. Right now we're currently a little bit behind with other priorities that came about. But that is going to be a place to go to find the latest and greatest information. We have worksheets, our fact sheets and death gratuity. The asset worksheet, this is something to think about, especially if now you're the sole parent and you're raising children, is to plan ahead and

make sure that your affairs are in order, and to ensure that your last wishes are written and that they can be carried out in case something happens to you.

We also have a book that has been donated by the Tragedy Assistance Program for survivors. So, they donated this book, it's strictly for surviving family members and it's called Healing Your Grieving Heart. And so, you can either order it online or you can just call Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647, and they'll be glad to get that for you. And there's a myriad of other products in which one can view.

We also have the Survivor Milestone Trifold and that's another one of our products. I recommend that you check that out and what it does is it just kind of tells you that through the years, OK, at this point these are some things that you need to do or just expect that there's going to be some changes. And again, that's where the online survivors benefit report comes into play, because you'll want to see how your benefits change and so forth.

We also have casualty courses for survivors. So, one of our newest ones that we created is After Suicide, and I highly recommend anyone that's been exposed to a death by suicide, whether you knew the person or you don't know the person, this is a very important e-tutorial that I highly recommend. There's some good tips and tools. If you're a service provider, we highly recommend taking the After A Suicide — Walking Through Providing Support. It's about a two-and-a-half-hour course, and it goes through and explains the complications about suicide and how does the survivor and what tools that are out there to assist. And then we also have the video about the Casualty Assistance Program and what is available for survivors.

We have one about military funeral honors. So, if you happen to be a veteran, that is a good one to look at. We have one about the Online Survivors Benefit Report, and I'm talking about that a lot because we do have the big change that's coming into effect January 2023 and what that means for many of our survivors is that the amount of money that they're receiving may be changing, especially if you are a child and you're not living in the same household as the surviving spouse. So that's very, very important to take a look and to be aware. And also, to make sure that your address with DFAS is kept up to date, so that you can be in the know of whether or not your benefits are changing.

We have one about recognizing military service that talks about the gold star lapel button, provides the history about that. It also talks about the service flag and what that gold star on the service flag means. We even have one that's about investigations involving the death of a loved one. It explains what types investigations might occur as a result of someone's death, and how you can request a copy of that investigation and the expectation. So, it's going to take a while, most investigation takes six to 12 months and sometimes longer depending on the complexity of it. When you do receive a copy of that report, it's going to be redacted. And what that means is that some information that pertains to living persons will be blocked out because of the privacy laws. But I invite you to come and look to see what courses that we do have and see if there's

something that you think that you would like to see and you can always submit or request through our survivor inquiry form. So, we love to hear from survivors to see how we can improve and provide more products and services.

We have a list of different webinars that we have. For example, Online Survivors Benefit Report, we even have one that's how children grieve. Children grieve differently than grownups. And then also as individuals, we all grieve differently. And so, we have another course that's called Understanding Grief and it's the education for caregivers webinar, but this can benefit survivors as well. It's another one of those things that I highly recommend.

And then we have the Survivor Connection eNewsletter. I highly recommend signing up for this. It comes up three times a year and it's about two weeks, we try to publish it two weeks before the VA and DOD Survivors Forum. And so, it'll provide you the latest, greatest information of what's coming up. You're going to see a lot about the SBP and the DIC offset and any other new changes that are coming about. And sometimes, it'll be reminders of stuff we already know, but sometimes those reminders because we just get into busyness, and also, you know, grief is hard and it's hard to remember everything that we need to do. But we also want you to know that you're not alone, we have resources and we have people that truly, truly want to help.

And most important thing, we hear from our survivors. One of the things that they ask is, please don't forget my loved one. All of our service members, they've made a difference by serving and they've made sacrifices. And so, currently our Military in Lasting Tribute, which is an online memorial for those deaths that happened from 1985 to present. In the future we hope to be able to go before 1985, but right now, with the backlog, with the pandemic, it requires us to a NARA and we need to get them to be able to catch up and then we can add people who died before 1985 while in active-duty service. So, the only requirement is that, you had to die in active duty and under honorable conditions. And we would say that, when we say under honorable conditions, it means that you didn't commit a crime. So, our military and lasting tribute also includes suicide deaths as well.

Eligible survivors can add their service members named to the site if they're not already included. So, we invite you to view the memorial. You can add a photo, and in the future, we hope to progress and make additional changes and it's a place where you can memorialize your loved one and then share it with other family members and friends.

We invite you to come and take a peek. So, connect with Military OneSource and please check out all of our resources. I just told you a little bit, but there's so much more and if you're not sure where to go, just pick up the phone or just connect online at militaryonesource.mil. They're there 24/7 and you won't get that robotic answer where, you know, push that button and then wait and go to this button. You're going to actually have a live person.

One of the things that I also want to tell you is if you were to go into our products page, you can also order a DVD that is available for grief with Sesame Street for children. It's very wonderful but one of the things that I learned was that people don't really have DVDs anymore. We all stream and so we do have a way that you can stream those resources, and so we will provide that in the future. But anyways, you can go on to the Military OneSource and you can stream those videos as well, so you don't have to have a DVD player. Thank you again for your time and for joining us. If you have any questions, come to Military OneSource for your answers and we will connect you to the right people if we're not the right ones. So, if it's a VA question and so forth. Thank you.

[Tina] Thank you, Lisa. If you have a question, please go to that chat box. Excuse me, the question pane on your control panel. While we wait for those questions, Lisa, was there anything else that may be a commonly asked question?

[Lisa Valentine] Well, what I would say is that grief is a lifetime journey. And so, what we want you to know is that we're here for you throughout your journey, for as long as you need us and for as long as you want us. There are various resources and people who are out there and so highly recommend that you keep in touch and to know what's out there and what changes and how they affect you. So, yes, let's go ahead and go to the question.

[Tina] OK. Will there be a way to get this presentation to download? I think actually I can answer that question. The presentation will be available on the Military OneSource website. It generally takes two to three weeks for processing, but you can look for it then. The next question is, thank you for all the information you gave to us. Not really a question but a comment instead and then a question. I thought guardians could now get an OSCR login or do they get a mailed report?

[Lisa Valentine] At this time, they can only receive a mailed in report. The policy does allow for guardians to receive the report, but the technology hasn't caught up yet. So, we're waiting for our partners over at DHRA to have that technology, but currently it is not available. But we are happy to make sure that you get the report through the mail.

[Tina] Are there any age limits for non-medical counseling for children?

[Lisa Valentine] That is a very good question. I don't know how young when they start the non-medical counseling for children, but you would have to have an ID card holder to get it through TRICARE or through the Military OneSource. However, if you age out, I would recommend contacting the Department of Veterans Administration and they can definitely provide the carrier. For the adult children, they don't age out. There's always some place that they can go through. What I also recommend is checking out some of the resources that are listed in the Days Ahead binder. An example would be the Tragedy Assistance Program for survivors. They do peer-to-peer mentorship and they have like a grief camp that occurs every year. So, definitely recommend checking that out as well.

[Tina] Mothers with military children, not marriage, get benefits? That's a question.

[Lisa Valentine] Can you say that one more time?

[Tina] Yes, ma'am. It's just kind of a statement. Mothers with military children, not marriage, get benefits. I'm assuming that do mothers with military children who aren't married to the service member, do they still get military benefits?

[Lisa Valentine] If you are the guardian and the parent of a surviving child of a service member, you yourself would not be eligible for benefits. Now, if you happen to be a parent who has a service member who died, you may be eligible to receive the Dependent Indemnity Compensation through the Department of Veterans Affairs. But keep in mind that that is income based and so if you don't meet a certain threshold, then you may be eligible. And so we would refer you to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

[Tina] Any other questions?

[Lisa Valentine] So what I recommend is please, please go check out Military OneSource. Check out our apps. We would love to hear from you if there's things that you think that we can make improvements on. If there's a resource that you would like for us to consider to see if we can add, we would be very interested in knowing that. And you can submit your input through the Survivor Inquiry Form, or you can just go on to Military OneSource and submit that way. There's just different avenues. Thank you very much for joining us and know that you don't have to be alone, just reach out. There are various resources and people who are there to assist you. If you're unsure where to go, contact Military OneSource at 1-800-342-9647 or you can go to our website at www.MilitaryOneSource.mil.

[Tina] Thank you. I also want to thank Lisa for sharing her invaluable expertise and experience and also like to thank all of you our attendees for participating in today's webinar. If you do find yourself having any questions after the webinar is over, please email moswebinars@MilitaryOneSource.com and we'll send them over to the presenter. This concludes today's webinar on Military OneSource tools and resources for surviving family members. Thank you.