

# The Days Ahead

Essential Papers for Families of Fallen Service Members



The image features a close-up, low-angle view of the stars on the American flag. The stars are white and set against a dark blue background. The flag is slightly out of focus, with the stars appearing as soft, glowing points of light. The bottom edge of the flag shows the red and white stripes, which are also slightly blurred. The overall mood is solemn and respectful.

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**Service Official:**

Insert branch-specific information here.



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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

800-626-3317

Long-Term Case Management

866-272-5841

Survivor Outreach Services

210-466-1182

### Marine Corps

800-847-1597

### Navy

800-368-3202

### Air Force

800-433-0048

## 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)

## TRICARE

North region: 877-874-2273

West region: 888-874-9378

South region: 800-444-5445

Overseas telephone numbers: Visit [www.tricare-overseas.com/ContactUs](http://www.tricare-overseas.com/ContactUs)

## Military OneSource

800-342-9647

## Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

800-959-TAPS (8277)





**To Casualty Assistance Officer: Insert A Survivor's  
Guide to Benefits: Taking Care of Our Families  
(Department of Defense).**

Access it at  
*[www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty)*



# Important Contacts

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Program/organization \_\_\_\_\_

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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)  
[www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty)

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.*

*Military Widow: A Survival Guide*, by Joanne M. Steen, MS, NCC and M. Regina Asaro, MS, RN, CT (Naval Institute Press, 2006)

This is a comprehensive, compassionate handbook for military widows that can also be helpful to parents who lost a son or daughter in the line of duty. It contains chapters on grief work, children's reactions, making decisions and everyday coping. The guide was written by a military widow who is also a counselor with a focus on traumatic grief and by a military spouse who is a nurse and crisis responder.

## General Support

### American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.

2128 Leroy Place NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
202-265-0991  
[www.goldstarmoms.com](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 over 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  
[www.americanwidowproject.org](http://www.americanwidowproject.org)

American Widow Project provides support for military widows, including articles, blogs, podcasts and resources.

**Department of Veterans Affairs**

810 Vermont Ave. NW

Washington, DC 20420

202-461-6530 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

*[www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement\\_Counseling.asp](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp)*

Email: *[vet.center@va.gov](mailto:vet.center@va.gov)*

Through the VA, family members, including parents, spouses and children of service members who died in the service of their country, can access bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service), including outreach, counseling and referral services.

Counseling is provided at community-based vet centers near the families. Send an email or call the number above for the location of the nearest center.

**Give an Hour**

P.O. Box 5918

Bethesda, MD 20824-5918

*[www.giveanhour.org](http://www.giveanhour.org)*

Email: *[info@giveanhour.org](mailto:info@giveanhour.org)*

We understand that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan — and their families — may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. We want to help you heal and offer a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

**Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.**

P.O. Box 361986

Birmingham, AL 35236

888-751-6350

*[www.goldstarwives.org](http://www.goldstarwives.org)*

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. provides support services to men and women whose spouses died in the line of duty or from a service disability. Areas of help include legislative information services; volunteer opportunities in community, military and VA hospitals; and online chat groups. There is a minimal annual membership fee; members join local chapters and receive a quarterly newsletter.

**Military OneSource**

800-342-9647

*[www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty)*

Military OneSource is a 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, available to all active duty, Guard and reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues, including grief and bereavement. Services include consultation online or by telephone. Free face-to-face non-medical counseling sessions (and their equivalent by phone or online) are also available.

**National Military Family Association, Inc.**

2500 N. Van Dorn St., Suite 102

Alexandria, VA 22302-1601

703-931-6632

*www.militaryfamily.org*

Email: *Info@MilitaryFamily.org*

The National Military Family Association not only supports military families – we are military families. Spouses, parents and family members make up our staff and board positions. We speak up on behalf of military families and empower husbands, wives and children to understand and access their benefits.

**Navy SEAL Foundation**

1619 D St., Bldg. 5326

Virginia Beach, VA 23459

757-363-7490

*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**

*www.snowballexpress.org*

Our 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 13483

Tampa, FL 33681-3483

877-337-7693

*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)

*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

*www.sos.army.mil*

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.

### **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors**

1777 F St. NW, Suite 600  
Washington, DC 20006  
800-959-TAPS (8277)

*www.TAPS.org*

This national organization offers a broad range of support, mentoring and other services to those grieving the loss of a loved one in the armed forces. TAPS 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.

TAPS clients also mark their calendars for Memorial Day weekend in Washington, DC, 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

*www.travismanion.com*

Email: *teamtravis@travismanion.com*

The Travis Manion Foundation provides grants to survivors of fallen American heroes, active duty troops, veterans and military family members for service projects, furthering education, physical challenges and everything in between.

## **USO**

Families of the Fallen Support

116 Purple Heart Drive

Dover AFB, DE 19902

302-359-6907

*[www.uso.org/families-of-the-fallen-support](http://www.uso.org/families-of-the-fallen-support)*

Email: *[wfish@uso.org](mailto:wfish@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

*[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)*

On the VA website, click on “Veteran Services,” then on “Survivor Benefits” for 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

*[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)*

The Social Security Administration provides information about Social Security benefits.

### **TRICARE**

7700 Arlington Blvd., Suite 5101

Falls Church, VA 22041-5101

North region: 877-874-2273

West region: 888-874-9378

South region: 800-444-5445

*[www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil)*

On the TRICARE website, you can access specific benefits information by identifying “Who You Are” (e.g., family of deceased active duty member), “Where You Live” (country and ZIP code if in the United States) and “What Plan You Are Using” (e.g., 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 Street, Suite 202  
Arlington, VA 22202  
800-769-8951  
[www.afas.org](http://www.afas.org)

### **Army Emergency Relief**

200 Stovall Street  
Alexandria, VA 22332  
866-878-6378  
[www.aerhq.org](http://www.aerhq.org)

### **Navy Marine Corps Relief Society**

875 N. Randolph Street, Suite 225  
Arlington, VA 22203-1757  
703-696-4904  
[www.nmcrs.org](http://www.nmcrs.org)

## For Children and Teenagers

### **Comfort Zone Camp**

7201 Glen Forest Drive, Suite 301  
Richmond, VA 23226  
866-488-5679  
[www.comfortzonecamp.org](http://www.comfortzonecamp.org)

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

### **Sesame Street Workshop “When Families Grieve”**

[www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-work/dealing-with-grief-30-detail.html](http://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-work/dealing-with-grief-30-detail.html)

“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 [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil) or by calling 800-342-9647.

### **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors**

1777 F Street NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20006

800-959-TAPS (8277)

*www.TAPS.org*

This national organization offers a broad range of support, mentoring and other services to those grieving the loss of a loved one in the armed forces. TAPS 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. TAPS holds an annual “Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors.”

### **For Suicide Survivors**

#### **The American Association of Suicidology**

5221 Wisconsin Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20015

202-237-2280

*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

*www.save.org*

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

## Casualty Assistance by Service Branch

### **Air Force**

Casualty Services  
Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center  
550 C Street West, Suite 48  
Randolph Air Force Base, TX 78150  
800-433-0048  
[www.afpc.af.mil/library/casualty.asp](http://www.afpc.af.mil/library/casualty.asp)

### **Army**

Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center  
U.S. Army Human Resources Command  
200 Stovall Street  
Alexandria, VA 22332-0470  
800-626-3317  
[www.hrc.army.mil](http://www.hrc.army.mil) (click on “Special Programs” and “Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center”)

### **Marine Corps**

Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps  
Manpower and Reserve Affairs  
3280 Russell Road  
Quantico, VA 22134  
800-847-1597  
[www.manpower.usmc.mil](http://www.manpower.usmc.mil) (click on “Casualty Assistance” under “Top Requests”)

### **Navy**

Navy Personnel Command  
5720 Integrity Drive  
Millington, TN 38055-6200  
800-368-3202  
[www.npc.navy.mil/CommandSupport/CasualtyAssistance/](http://www.npc.navy.mil/CommandSupport/CasualtyAssistance/) (Note: website address is case sensitive)



# Books and Websites on Grief and Loss

Many of the following books are available at public libraries, bookstores and through online retailers:

## Books on Grief and Loss (for adults)

### Specific to Military Loss

*Military Widow: A Survival Guide*, by Joanne M. Steen, MS, NCC and M. Regina Asaro, MS, RN, CT (Naval Institute Press, 2006).

### Other Books

*A Grace Disguised*, by Jerry Sittser (Zondervan Publishing House, 2005).

*The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love*, by Thomas Attig (Oxford University Press, 2002).

*How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, by Thomas Attig (Oxford University Press, 2010).

*I'm Grieving as Fast as I Can: How Young Widows and Widowers Can Cope and Heal*, by Linda Feinberg (New Horizon Press, 1994).

*I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: Surviving, Coping and Healing After the Sudden Death of a Loved One*, by Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair (Sourcebooks, Inc., 2008).

*The Lessons of Love: Rediscovering Our Passion for Life When It All Seems Too Hard to Take*, by Melody Beattie (HarperCollins Publishers, 1995).

*No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One*, by Carla Fine (Broadway Books/Doubleday, 1999).

*Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*, by Pat Schwiebert, RN and Chuck Deklyen (Grief Watch, 2010).

*To Begin Again: The Journey Toward Comfort, Strength and Faith in Difficult Times*, by Naomi Levy (Ballantine, 1999).

*Touched by Suicide: Hope and Healing After Loss*, by Michael F. Myers, M.D. and Carla Fine (Gotham Books/Penguin, 2006).

*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, by Harold Kushner (Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2004).

*Widow to Widow*, by Genevieve Davis Ginsburg (DaCapo Press, 2004).

## Books on Grief and Loss (for parents of service members who have died)

*Heart of a Hawk: One Family's Sacrifice and Journey Toward Healing*, by Deborah Tainsh (Elva Resa Publishing, 2006).

## Website Information on Grief and Loss

### Specific to Military Loss

#### Military OneSource

[www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil)

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard and reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues, including grief and bereavement. Services include consultation online or by telephone. Free face-to-face non-medical counseling sessions (or their equivalent by phone or online) are also available. You can reach the program by telephone at 800-342-9647 or through the website.

#### Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

[www.TAPS.org](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.

## Books on Grieving Children (for parents)

*Guiding Your Child Through Grief*, by Mary Ann Emswiler and James P. Emswiler (Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing, 2009).

*Healing a Child's Grieving Heart*, by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. (Companion Press, 2004).

*Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies*, by Janis Silverman (Fairview Press, 1999).

*Helping Teens Cope with Death*, by Dougy Center Staff (Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1999).

*Parenting Through Crisis: Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief, and Change*, by Barbara Coloroso (Harper Resource, 2001).

*Thirty-five Ways to Help a Grieving Child*, by Dougy Center Staff (Dougy Center for Grieving Children, 1999).

*What Children Need When They Grieve: The Four Essentials—Routine, Love, Honesty and Security*, by Julia Wilcox Rathkey (Three Rivers Press, 2004).

*When Children Grieve: For Adults to Help Children Deal with Death, Divorce, Pet Loss, Moving and Other Losses*, by John W. James and Russell Friedman (HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

## Websites on Grieving Children (for parents)

KidsHealth.org

*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.

## Books on Grief and Loss for Children and Teenagers

### Specific to Military Loss

*For ages 6 to 12*

*The Hero in My Pocket*, by Marlene Lee (Early Light Press, 2005).

### Other Books

*For ages 4 to 8*

*After Charlotte's Mom Died*, by Cornelia Spelman (Albert Whitman & Co., 1996).

*I Don't Have an Uncle Phil Anymore: A Story About Death, Grieving and Cherishing, Written Especially for Children*, by Marjorie Pellegrino (American Psychological Association/Magination Press, 1999).

*Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss*, by Michaelene Mundy (One Caring Place, 2010).

*For ages 9 to 12*

*Don't Despair on Thursdays!: The Children's Grief-Management Book*, by Adolph J. Moser (Landmark Editions, 1998).

*Healing Your Grieving Heart for Kids: 100 Practical Ideas*, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. (Companion Press, 2001).

*What on Earth Do You Do When Someone Dies*, by Trevor Romain (Free Spirit Publishing, 1999).

*For teenagers*

*The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends*, by Helen Fitzgerald (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

*Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas*, by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. (Companion Press, 2002).

*For all ages*

*Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*, by Pat Schwiebert, RN and Chuck Deklyen (Grief Watch, 2010).

## **Websites on Grief and Loss for Children**

### **The Dougy Center for Grieving Children & Families**

*www.dougy.org*

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

### **Sesame Street Workshop “When Families Grieve”**

*www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-work/dealing-with-grief-30-detail.html*

“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 *www.militaryonesource.mil* 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 only feel 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 General 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 time line 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 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 any more, 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 a sensitive friend's or relative's home. 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

[www.americanwidowproject.org](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* 800-626-3317
- *Marine Corps Casualty Assistance* 800-847-1597
- *Navy Casualty Assistance/Family Liaison* 800-368-3202
- *Air Force Casualty Assistance* 800-433-0048

## Department of Veterans Affairs

Bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service)

202-273-9116 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

[www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement\\_Counseling.asp](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp)

Email: [vet.center@va.gov](mailto:vet.center@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

[www.giveanhour.org](http://www.giveanhour.org)

Email: [info@giveanhour.org](mailto:info@giveanhour.org)

We understand that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan — and their families — may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. We want to help you heal and offer a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

## Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.

888-751-6350

[www.goldstarwives.org](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

*www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty*

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard and reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues, including coping with the loss of a loved one. Services include consultation online or by telephone. Free face-to-face non-medical counseling sessions (or their equivalent by phone or online) are also available.

## National Military Family Association

National Military Family Association, Inc.

2500 N. Van Dorn St., Suite 102

Alexandria, VA 22302-1601

703-931-6632

*www.militaryfamily.org*

Email: *Info@MilitaryFamily.org*

The National Military Family Association not only supports military families – we are military families. Spouses, parents and family members make up our staff and board positions. We speak up on behalf of military families and empower husbands, wives and children to understand and access their benefits.

## Navy SEAL Foundation

1619 D St., Bldg. 5326

Virginia Beach, VA 23459

757-363-7490

*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

*www.sos.army.mil*

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)

*www.TAPS.org*

TAPS 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. TAPS 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.

TAPS clients also mark their calendars for Memorial Day weekend in Washington, DC, 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

*www.travismanion.com*

Email: *teamtravis@travismanion.com*

The Travis Manion Foundation provides grants to survivors of fallen American heroes, active duty troops, veterans and military family members for service projects, furthering education, physical challenges and everything in between.

### USO

Families of the Fallen Support

116 Purple Heart Drive

Dover AFB, DE 19902

302-359-6907

*www.uso.org/families-of-the-fallen-support*

Email: *wfish@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 Local Community Resources Finder on the National Guard Family Program website at [www.jointservicesupport.org](http://www.jointservicesupport.org) will identify your closest center.



# Coping with the Loss of a Son or Daughter in Military Service

When you lose a son or daughter, you may feel as though the pain will never end. How can you cope with your feelings of loss and grief? How can you comfort others who are sharing your loss?

The information here is meant to help you with the intense and difficult emotions that come with the death of a son or daughter. 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 overwhelming as the death of a child, no matter what the child's age. If your son or daughter 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 child's companionship, but for the future that your son or daughter will not have, and that you will be unable to share.

It is important to understand that the process of grieving can't be rushed and shouldn't be. It is also important to let yourself feel the pain when you lose someone you love. Most people find that over time, the intensity of their grief lessens and that 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

It is important to keep in mind that no two people experience loss in the same way. Many parents feel numb for some time, while others may react with anger. Some parents find that the pride they take in their child's service to his or her country helps them cope, while other parents may only feel despair.

It may help to know that your child had already achieved something amazing — something far beyond the rest of America's youth. While you may think that you have "lost" the years of work and emotion you invested in your son or daughter and are bombarded with thoughts of futility, of someone's mistake, of what "should have — would have — could have been," you must forever know that there is no futility in the death of one whose living had so much merit. You

don't have to let what your son or daughter could have been take away any of the glory of who they already were.

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 General 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 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 any more, 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 a sensitive friend’s or relative’s home. 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  
[www.goldstarmoms.com](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 over 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* 800-626-3317
- *Marine Corps Casualty Assistance* 800-847-1597
- *Navy Casualty Assistance/Family Liaison* 800-368-3202
- *Air Force Casualty Assistance* 800-433-0048

## Department of Veterans Affairs

Bereavement counseling (through the Readjustment Counseling Service)

202-273-9116 (Vet Center Bereavement line)

[www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement\\_Counseling.asp](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Bereavement_Counseling.asp)

Email: [vet.center@va.gov](mailto:vet.center@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

[www.giveanhour.org](http://www.giveanhour.org)

Email: [info@giveanhour.org](mailto:info@giveanhour.org)

We understand that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan — and their families — may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. We want to help you heal, and offer a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

## Military OneSource

800-342-9647

[www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty)

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard and reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. Services include consultation online or by telephone. Free face-to-face non-medical counseling sessions (or their equivalent by phone or online) are also available.

## National Military Family Association

National Military Family Association, Inc.

2500 N. Van Dorn St., Suite 102

Alexandria, VA 22302-1601

703-931-6632

[www.militaryfamily.org](http://www.militaryfamily.org)

Email: [Info@MilitaryFamily.org](mailto:Info@MilitaryFamily.org)

The National Military Family Association not only supports military families — we are military families. Spouses, parents and family members make up our staff and board positions. We speak up on behalf of military families and empower husbands, wives and children to understand and access their benefits.

## Navy SEAL Foundation

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

*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

*www.sos.army.mil*

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)

*www.TAPS.org*

TAPS 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. TAPS 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.

TAPS clients also mark their calendars for Memorial Day weekend in Washington, DC, 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  
*www.travismanion.com*

Email: *teamtravis@travismanion.com*

The Travis Manion Foundation provides grants to survivors of fallen American heroes, active duty troops, veterans and military family members for service projects, furthering education, physical challenges and everything in between.

## USO

Families of the Fallen Support  
116 Purple Heart Drive  
Dover AFB, DE 19902  
302-359-6907  
*www.uso.org/families-of-the-fallen-support*

Email: *wfish@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.

## 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 Local Community Resources Finder on the National Guard Family Program website at *www.jointservicessupport.org* 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 eight or nine. 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 [www.TAPS.org](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

[www.giveanhour.org](http://www.giveanhour.org)

Email: [info@giveanhour.org](mailto:info@giveanhour.org)

We understand that individuals who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan — and their families — may need help dealing with the effects of wartime service. We want to help you heal and offer a variety of mental health services to address your needs.

### Military OneSource

800-342-9647

[www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty)

This free 24-hour service, provided by the Department of Defense, is available to all active duty, Guard and reserve members and their families. Consultants provide information and make referrals on a wide range of issues. Free face-to-face non-medical counseling sessions (or their equivalent by phone or online) are also available.

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## Snowball Express

*www.snowballexpress.org*

Our 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 13483  
Tampa, FL 33681-3483  
877-337-7693

*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.

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800-959-TAPS (8277)

*www.TAPS.org*

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Email: *[teamtravis@travismanion.com](mailto:teamtravis@travismanion.com)*

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## USO

Families of the Fallen Support

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302-359-6907

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# 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 (Changes 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



*Call.* 1-800-342-9647 *Click.* [MilitaryOneSource.mil](http://MilitaryOneSource.mil) *Connect.* 24/7