



UNDERSTANDING GRIEF REACTIONS AND TIPS FOR SPOUSES ON COPING WITH GRIEF

Grieving is a process. It takes time to go through different emotional stages and your emotions will likely shift back and forth before some sense of “normalcy” is reached. Having experienced such a sudden traumatic death, it can take time for the painful feelings and thoughts to diminish. In addition to grieving the loss of a loved one, there is a readjustment to the changes in your role and other aspects of your life. The transition to adjusting to life without your spouse (and for children, a parent) and forming a new identity takes time and can be stressful. Give yourself and everyone in your family time to go through this process. Over time, the proportion of good days to bad days increases. The family may experience setbacks in the process, especially with holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and other important dates. It takes time to learn to live with the loss. Below is information on the feelings typically experienced along with some tips on how to cope with grief.

Normal reactions to death and grief symptoms

- Shock
- Numbness
- Denial
- Sense of loss
- Strong yearning or longing for loved one
- Sense of emptiness; sense that a part of you has died
- Crying
- Loss of interest in eating
- Anger
- Guilt
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Agitation and/or feelings of restlessness
- Physical symptoms (e.g., pain or heaviness in chest, stomach upset, headaches, intense fatigue)
- Sadness
- Depressed or hopeless about the future
- Loneliness
- Lack of motivation
- Loss of interest in outside activities
- Social withdrawal
- Preoccupation
- Dreams about deceased
- Difficulty sleeping.

Tips On Coping With Grief

- * Express your feelings.
- * Take care of yourself and your health (this includes eating properly, exercise, and adequate sleep).
- * Let others take care of you (this is where Care Team and friends/neighbors can be helpful).
- * Stay in touch with others. Don't let yourself become isolated.
- * Be patient. It takes time to absorb and accept the loss of a loved one. Don't rush into make life changes which are likely to add to your stress.
- * Find ways to calm yourself.
- * Treasure your memories.
- * Talk to someone and/or join a support group. Find a support system and/or someone who will listen. In the list below are resources where you can either talk to others who have had the same experience, professional counselors, or support groups.
- * Reach out for help. Make your needs known since others may not make the first move or be afraid to intrude on your privacy.
- * Seek professional help if:
 - Have thoughts of suicide
 - Unable to function months after the death (e.g., unable to care for children, hold a job, take care of household matters)
 - Severely depressed or feel hopeless about the future
 - Increased or heavy use of alcohol or other drugs
 - Struggling with substantial feelings of guilt or uncontrolled rage
 - Still experiencing intense grief after six months.

Where To Go For Help

- **Army Casualty and Memorial Affairs Operation Center (CMAOC)** (www.hrc.army.mil/site/active/TAGD/CMAOC/cmaoc.htm) – assists families in bereavement through Army Family Assistance hotline (1-800-833-6622) and has a Families First Casualty Call Center (1-866-272-5841) that provides advocacy and follow-up assistance to survivors
- **Military One Source** (www.militaryonesource.com) – a 1-800 telephone number and Web site where families can self-refer for confidential counseling at any time; counseling is available by either speaking to or emailing a masters level consultant; also has articles, list of books and links to web sites on a range of topics including casualty assistance and grief and loss
- **Department of Veteran’s Affairs** (www.va.gov) – offers bereavement counseling at community-based veterans’ centers throughout the U.S.. To locate the nearest VHA Readjustment counseling service center, call (202)-273-8967 or visit the www.va.gov/rcs/
- **Gold Star Wives** (www.goldstarwives.org) – provides support services to spouses of those who died in active duty or of service-related disability. Offers opportunity to connect with local chapters, legislative updates and resource information. Also can be reached by telephone at 1-888-751-6350.
- **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)** (www.taps.org) – a national organization that offers support and other services to families grieving the loss of loved one who served in the armed forces. TAPS offers survivor-peer support network, online information on grief and trauma, grief counseling referrals, and online support groups; TAPS can be reached by telephone at 1-800-959-8277 or via the Web
- **Society of Military Widows (under National Association for Uniformed Services)** (www.militarywidows.org/) – provide moral support and referral service
- www.griefnet.org – offers grief support on the Internet through email support groups
- **Mental Health America (formerly National Mental Health Association)** (www.nmha.org) – contact your local Mental Health Association for information on coping with loss and assistance in locating local treatment/support services

Source: This information is a compilation and adaptation of information provided in documents, such as Army War College’s *A leader’s guide to trauma in the unit*, Robin Goodman’s *Caring for kids after trauma and death: A guide for parents and professionals*, and National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder & Walter Reed Army Medical Center’s *Iraq War Clinician Guide*. Additionally, information was obtained from the web sites of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), National Mental Health Association (NMHA), Military One Source, International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), and Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC).