

**Family Readiness Group
Computer-Based Training**

Module 14: Casualty Support



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1. MODULE 14: CASUALTY SUPPORT

Trauma in the unit is difficult no matter what the situation; however, knowledge and preparation can ease some of the associated stress. The FRG can play an important support role for grieving families and the unit.

Lessons

- Casualty Notification and Assistance

- Casualty Support by FRGs

- Grief Resources

In this lesson, we will discuss the following FRG Leader responsibilities:

- Distinguishing between the roles and responsibilities of the RDC and FRG Leader.

- Explaining the casualty notification process to FRG families.

- Providing support and assistance to the family in need.

- Supporting the casualty notification process.

- Understanding and utilizing Comfort/Care Teams.

- Assisting in coordinating unit memorial service preparation.

- Assisting in conducting unit memorial services.

- Recommending grief counseling.

1.1. Notification and Assistance

1.1.1. Introduction

As an FRG Leader, you should be acquainted with the steps of the casualty notification and assistance process. While notification and assistance is not a function of the FRG, you should be able to effectively communicate the steps to family members. A thorough understanding of the process will help both Soldiers and family members to realize that the Army has defined steps in place to care for its own during tragic circumstances.

1.1.2. What is a Casualty?

A "casualty" is defined as any person who is lost to an organization by reason of having been declared deceased, captured, injured, ill, or missing in action. "Casualty status" is the military's term used to classify a casualty. Casualty status determines if or how notification takes place. There are seven casualty statuses:

1. Deceased
2. Duty Status – Whereabouts Unknown (DUSTWUN): missing in action, detained, beleaguered, besieged, or captured
3. Missing in Action (MIA)

4. Very Seriously Ill or Injured (VSI): possible death within 72 hours
5. Seriously Ill or Injured (SI): critical but stable condition
6. Incapacitating illness or injury: not yet ready for return to duty but not SI
7. Not Seriously Injured (NSI): reportable but individual has or will soon return to duty

1.1.3. Notification

Notification is accomplished in different ways depending upon the casualty status and circumstances surrounding the incident. A uniformed service representative always accomplishes notification in death and missing cases in person. However, if there is a chance that the next-of-kin may learn of the casualty by other than official sources, notification will be made by the quickest means, normally the telephone. This is only upon approval by higher-level headquarters. In other than death and missing cases, notification is normally accomplished telephonically, unless unit and installation policy provide otherwise.

1.1.4. Primary Next of Kin (PNOK)

Information is obtained from the Soldier's DD Form 93, Record of Emergency Data, to determine and contact the next-of-kin (NOK) should a Soldier become a casualty during deployment. Outdated forms may cause significant delays in notification to family members and increase the stress surrounding a difficult situation. The DD Form 93 is maintained in a Soldier's Personnel Record and should be kept up-to-date.

The term primary next-of-kin (PNOK) is used to identify one person who will receive notification of the death of the service member and from whom the military will request instructions for the transportation, preparation, and interment of the deceased. The PNOK will also receive the Soldier's personal effects in most cases.

The designated PNOK is in order of precedence (that is, the first living survivor highest on the following list):

Soldier's surviving spouse, even if a minor.

If there is no spouse, then the eldest child over the age of 18, including those by a prior marriage.

If there are no children over the age of 18, then father or mother of the deceased. The oldest parent will be notified unless otherwise requested on the DD Form 93.

If there are no surviving parents, then the eldest brother or sister or another blood relative.

The secondary next-of-kin (SNOK) is any other next-of-kin other than the PNOK.

1.1.5. Casualty Notification Process

Knowledge of the casualty notification process can ease the stress of the unknown. The following is the usual order of reporting a casualty:

1. Casualty Area Command (CAC) is notified of an incident by the unit commander or representative; police (civilian or military); medical treatment facility; or another CAC.
2. CAC confirms the incident, collects personnel information, and produces initial casualty report.
3. CAC/Department of the Army (DA) Casualty Operations coordinates all actions.
4. Casualty Notification Officer (CNO) notifies the PNOK and SNOK in accordance with the information found on the Soldier's DD Form 93, Record of Emergency Data. A Chaplain generally accompanies the CNO, but the process is not stalled if a Chaplain is not available.
5. Casualty Assistance Officer (CAO) visits PNOK and provides all reasonable assistance in order to settle the personal affairs of the casualty.
6. If requested, an FRG representative, perhaps from the FRG's Comfort/Care Team, may visit to offer emotional and logistical support.

1.1.6. Support Team Members

Responding to a casualty requires the combined efforts of many individuals and organizations. These team members provide a cohesive network of support for the grieving family in their time of crisis.

CNO notifies the next-of-kin as listed on the casualty's DD Form 93, Record of Emergency Data.

Chaplain provides emotional support, spiritual guidance (if requested), and comfort to the next-of-kin.

CAO assists the next-of-kin in making all necessary decisions to settle the affairs of the casualty to include handling the remains, arranging a funeral, collecting death gratuity, filing for benefits and entitlements, and more. Providing support to the family is the CAO's full-time duty. The governing Army regulation is AR 600-8-1, Casualty Operations, Assistance and Insurance.

Summary Court Martial Officer (SCMO) may secure and dispose of personal effects of casualty.

Public Affairs Office (PAO) offers assistance to family members (if requested) on dealing with the expected media interest and disseminates applicable press and news releases.

Unit Commander or RDC communicates with the CAO as the unit's representative and as the liaison with the casualty's family. While the CAO is the official Army representative to the grieving family, the unit commander or RDC represents the Soldier's unit and may be able to assist, clarify, intervene, or otherwise smooth the process for all involved.

FRG Comfort/Care Team offers short-term emotional and logistical support to the casualty's family without duplicating assistance or services provided officially through the Army and installation service agencies.

1.2. Casualty Support by FRGs

1.2.1. Introduction

Official casualty notification and assistance activities are not a function of the FRG. However, all members of the FRG, particularly those in leadership roles, should have a general understanding of the processes and of how the FRG role fits into the bigger picture. The FRG can then be prepared to assist the unit in offering and organizing effective support to the grieving family.

The CAO, the Chaplain, and the unit commander or RDC are the key individuals in the command who help the family during a time of trauma. While the “green suiters” and community support agencies are trained to effectively handle these situations, the FRG can also play an important role in the assistance process. As spouses, the FRG should focus on the practical, caring side of support; however, any and all support should be coordinated with the military representatives.

1.2.2. Communication

As an FRG Leader, you may receive inquiry calls from FRG members. Reiterate the process of notification and that no names are released until the next-of-kin is notified. Do not assure anyone that his or her Soldier is safe. Refer spouse and parent inquiries to the RDC, and refer media inquiries to the Public Affairs Officer. Even if you do know the specific details of an incident, it is not your place to divulge information. Communication outside of military channels should only occur after the next-of-kin has been officially notified of the casualty.

1.2.3. Accurate Information

The FRG Leader can also assist the RDC in ensuring the currency of the DD Form 93, Record of Emergency Data. Communicate to family members the necessity of maintaining current contact information, especially during time away from the primary address. Advanced preparation will be beneficial in the event of any casualty situation.

You may also consider sending a personal letter or card of sympathy to the grieving family. When preparing any such correspondence, remember that you are representing the unit. The Chaplain’s office can offer advice and assistance with words of condolence.

1.2.4. Comfort/Care Teams

The Comfort/Care Team is a group of pre-assigned FRG volunteers, usually from the same company, squadron, troop, or battery as the affected Soldier and family. The Comfort/Care Team offers short-term care and support to the families of deceased Soldiers and can also assist families of critically wounded Soldiers. They may provide food, childcare, transportation, household assistance, or other basic tasks to support the grieving family in their time of crisis.

Prior to any unit casualties, planning and coordination between the unit commander and the FRG is critical. FRGs are encouraged to collect family information, sketch

maps to homes, and gather "key friend" information prior to deployment to facilitate the assistance process in the event of a casualty.

The Comfort/Care Team notification process begins when the CNO notifies the family of the casualty and offers the surviving family member assistance from the unit's FRG Comfort/Care Team. If the family member requests assistance from the Comfort/Care Team, the CNO should remain with the family until the Comfort/Care Team arrives. If assistance is not requested, the Comfort/Care Team stands down. It is the grieving family's choice to accept help from the Comfort/Care Team as well as to determine what type of help is most beneficial.

Comfort/Care Team assistance should be coordinated with the RDC, Chaplain, and CAO whenever possible. The privacy and wishes of the grieving family should be respected at all times. A Comfort/Care Team assistance timeline may be as follows:

0-2 hours: Initial assessment of family needs to include meals, childcare, pet care, and home care. Provide initial emotional support.

2-24 hours: Initial assistance begins by providing the identified assistance and continued comfort.

24-72 hours: Subsequent assistance by providing comfort, assistance, and support until other family members arrive in area or until surviving family members depart to another location.

72 hours forward: As needed assistance for meals, childcare, home care, etc.

1.2.5. Memorial Services

FRG Leaders and members may be invited to participate in a tangible act of remembrance, such attending, planning, or participating in a memorial service. Memorial services are a way to remember a fallen Soldier and facilitate the healing process for the living.

Units may conduct a memorial service for the deceased Soldier in order to facilitate closure for fellow Soldiers and to honor a fallen comrade. The rear detachment Chaplain's office can assist with the planning and coordination of such a ceremony. The Chaplain's office can explain the different types of memorial services and the appropriateness of any religious content.

Memorial services should incorporate the wishes of the PNOK, the requirements of higher-level headquarters or installation officials, and the guidance of the Chaplain's office.

Memorial services will generally be planned and organized by the casualty's unit. FRG Leaders may be asked to communicate information concerning the service to FRG members or to coordinate supporting details, such as providing a guest book or refreshments. The FRG Leader should coordinate any actions with the unit commander and Chaplain and should keep the family's desires and requests in the forefront.

1.3. Grief Resources

1.3.1. Local Support Services

Trauma in the unit will obviously affect the grieving family; however, the consequences of the trauma may be even more far reaching. Assist the unit commander or RDC in identifying family members who may be in need of grief counseling and ensuring that these individuals receive the proper referrals and assistance. Even family members who are not directly impacted by a casualty situation may be affected adversely with the realization that a casualty occurred very close to home and could happen to them next.

Assist the unit command in the coordination of crisis management briefings for family members within the unit. Tasks may include advertising, arranging logistical support, coordinating childcare options, and contacting local community services for assistance and take-home resources. Also, coordinate referrals for grief counseling for anyone that needs or requests such services. Utilize the unit's Chaplain's office, Army Community Services, and the installation's medical treatment facility and mental health providers. Publicize the services and contact information for Military OneSource at www.militaryonesource.com.

1.3.2. Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

TAPS is a national non-profit organization, providing free services geared to those impacted by the loss of a Soldier while on active duty, killed in the line of duty, but open to any military family member, including retirees.

TAPS services include a peer support network, grief and trauma counseling referral, an annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Kids Camp, a quarterly newsletter, and a caseworker assistance program. Children are individually paired with Soldiers and receive help geared to their unique needs. TAPS also provides financial planning information and critical incident stress management through a network of experienced caseworkers. These services are available 24 hours a day to help survivors cope with the sudden loss of a loved one.

TAPS counselors are also available to assist the CAO, if needed. Additional information is available at the TAPS website at www.taps.org. FRG Leaders should be familiar with the assistance provided by TAPS, and be prepared to identify and refer family members who would benefit from its services.

1.4. Summary – Key Points for Casualty Support

Trauma in the unit is difficult no matter what the situation; however, knowledge and preparation can ease some of the associated stress. The FRG can play an important support role for grieving families and the unit.

Lessons in this module discuss Casualty Notification and Assistance, casualty support by FRGs, and grief resources. The FRG Leader should be clear on distinguishing between the roles and responsibilities of the RDC and FRG Leader in a time of trauma.

Additionally, the FRG Leader may be called on to explain the casualty notification process to FRG families, provide support and assistance to the family in need, and/or prepare a personal letter of sympathy and condolence.

Resources

www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/dclm/docs/traumapdf.pdf, to link to "A Leader's Guide to Trauma in the Unit"