

Grieving the Death of a Service Member

Overview

Understanding the grieving process.

- Common emotions
- Some ways to cope
- Finding support

Whenever we face loss, we experience grief. Our reactions are unique and individual; none of us experiences grief in the same way.

Not only are we different, but our losses are different. Some may grieve a spouse, others a child, parent, brother, sister, or friend. Each of these relationships is unique. Some relationships may have been close; others may have had more tension or conflict. Circumstances may complicate. And we may each be able to draw upon different levels of support.

As we experience loss, we may need to remind ourselves of these basic facts. Sometimes we torture ourselves wondering why we do not respond as others, even our family members, do. But each of us is different.

Common emotions

We may feel anger -- at God, towards the person who died, perhaps towards someone who we feel is not responding the way we'd like him or her to respond. We may feel guilt, too. Could we have done something differently or done more? We may even feel responsible for the loss.

Other emotions are common. Feelings of sadness, longing for the person's presence, or envy of others who have not experienced our loss, may trouble us, but they are normal and natural responses to grief. Grief may affect us in other ways. In some, the experience of grief may be physical: aches and pains, difficulty eating or sleeping, fatigue. We may constantly think of the person, even replaying in our mind some final episode or experience. Grief can affect our spiritual selves. We may struggle to find meaning in our loss; our relationship with our God may change.

I often describe grief as a roller coaster. It is full of ups and downs, highs and lows, times that we may think we are doing better and times that we are sure we are not. The metaphor reminds us that our sense of progress may feel very uneven.

Some ways to cope

But there are things we can do to help ourselves as we experience grief. First it is important to accept the fact that we are grieving. Take time to grieve, to realize that life will be different, and sometimes difficult. We need to be gentle with ourselves.

Second, we can learn from the ways we have handled loss before. We need to draw on our resources - the coping skills we have, our own sources of support, and our spiritual strengths. And from earlier experiences, we can learn the mistakes we need to avoid.

Finding support

We do not have to struggle alone. We can share our grief with family and friends. We can seek help from clergy or counselors. Librarians and bookstores can point us to books that can assist us as we grieve. And finally, for more grief support, you can visit the following:

T*A*P*S (The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors)

www.TAPS.org

1-800-959-TAPS (1-800-959-8277)

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 whose death occurred while serving in the armed forces. TAPS services include the following:

- A nationwide peer support network
- Information and resources on coping with grief and trauma
- 24/7 support via the TAPS hotline (1-800-959-TAPS)
- Resources and material online
- Weekly online support groups
- A quarterly magazine for casualty survivors

These services are offered free of charge, and no membership dues are charged.

In addition, TAPS clients mark their calendars for Memorial Day weekend in Washington, DC to attend the Annual “National Military Survivor” seminar and annual “Good Grief Camp” for kids and young survivors.

Your installation’s support services

Depending on your service branch, your Fleet and Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Center, or Army Community Service Center can provide you with information and support.

Military OneSource

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. You can reach the program by telephone at 1-800-342-9647 or through the Web site at *www.militaryonesource.com*.

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