



# HOW WE GRIEVE



# WHAT IS GRIEF?

- ★ A universal emotional response
- ★ A natural response to death and loss of a person we **love**
- ★ Separate from *depression* and *anxiety* and *trauma*



Risk Factors for Complicated Grief in the Military Community. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, First Published 20 May 2021. Grace E. Seamon-Lahiff, Chantel M. Dooley, Paul T. Bartone, Bonnie Carroll

Disenfranchised Grief in Gold Star Military Families. *Combat Stress*. Fall 2022. Paul T. Bartone, Ken Doka. Retrieved January 19, 2023, from <https://www.stress.org/disenfranchised-grief-in-gold-star-military-families>.





# THE “TASKS” OF GRIEF

- ★ **The Four Tasks of Grief**
  - ★ Acknowledge the reality of the death
  - ★ Experience the pain of grief
  - ★ Adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing
  - ★ Form a new identity and reinvest energy *without forgetting the past*

Carroll, B. & Wolfelt, A. D. (2015). *Healing your grieving heart after a military death: 100 practical ideas for family and friends*. Companion Press.

Worden, J. W. (2018). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner*. Springer Publishing Company.

Dooley, C., Carroll, B., Fry, L., Seamon-Lahiff, G. (2019). *A model for supporting grief following traumatic loss: The tragedy assistance program for survivors (TAPS)*. Journal of Military Medicine (In press).





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**’.”





# LIFE...AND DEATH.

HOW WE  
WANT  
GRIEF TO  
WORK





# LIFE...AND DEATH.

HOW WE  
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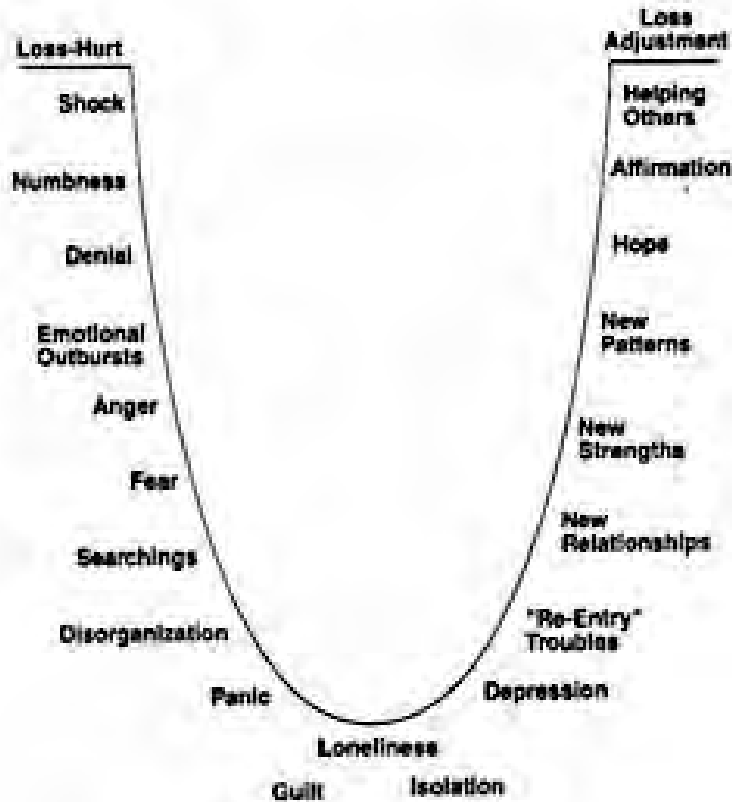
HOW GRIEF  
ACTUALLY  
WORKS





# REALITY. IT'S WHERE WE LIVE

## STAGES OF GRIEF

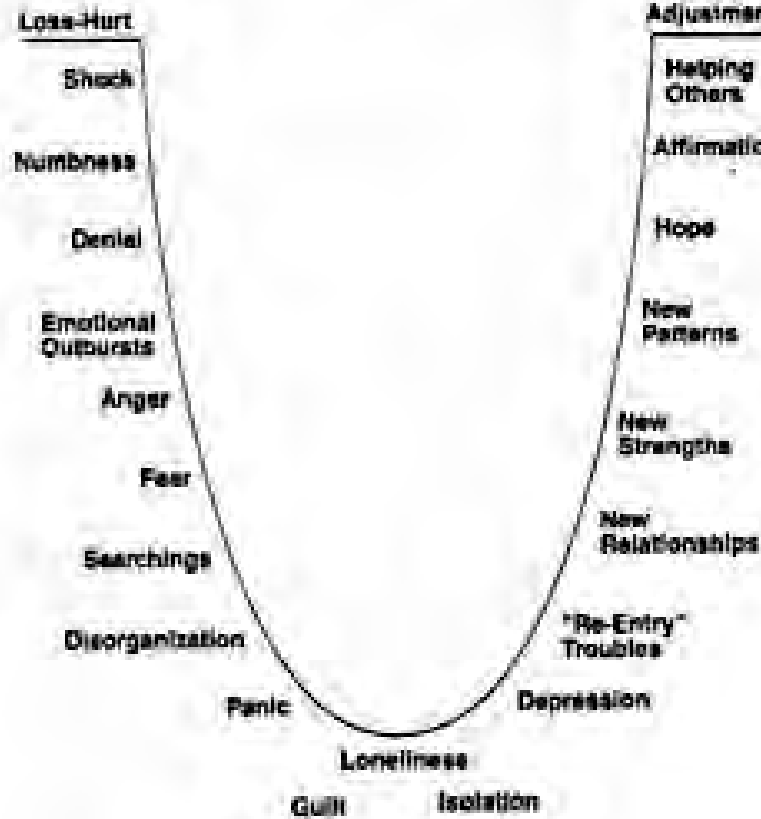




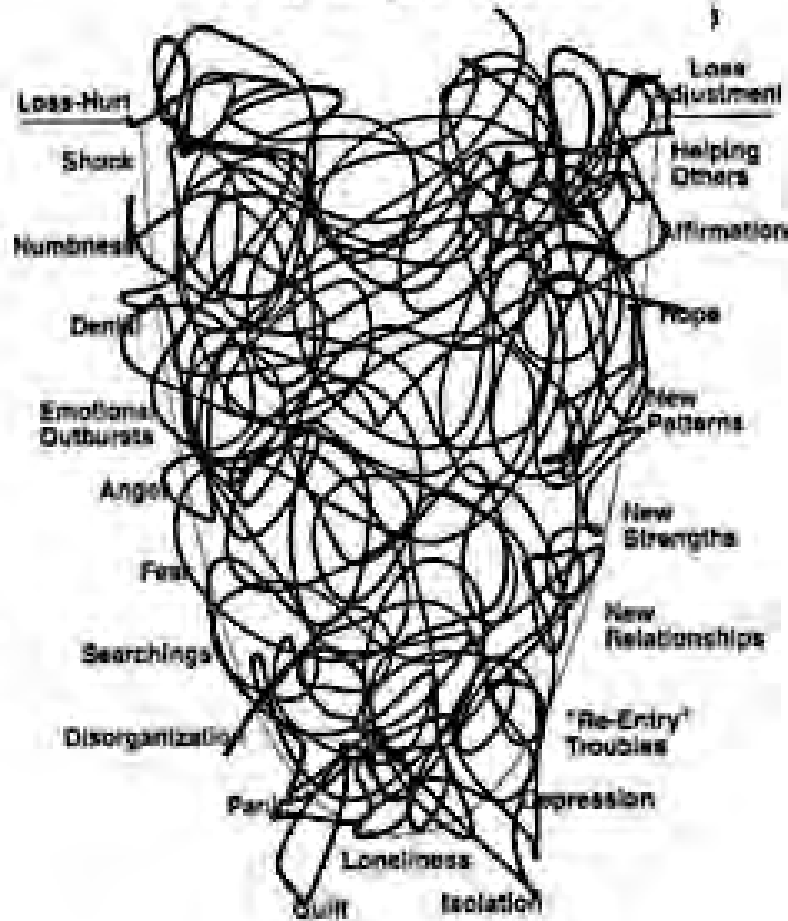


# REALITY. IT'S WHERE WE LIVE

## STAGES OF GRIEF



## My experience







# TAPS MODEL OF BEREAVEMENT



## Safety & Stabilization

**GOAL:** Provide immediate care, comfort, and practical support to survivors.



## Healthy Grief Journey

**GOAL:** Assist survivors in confronting and acknowledging their loss, addressing emotions of grief and establish a sense of hope for the future.



## Meaning & Purpose

**GOAL:** Help survivor derive a sense of meaning from their loss and integrate positive life patterns while looking ahead to their future.



<sup>1</sup>Dooley, C.M., Carroll, B., Fry, L.E., Seamon-Lahiff, G. & Bartone, P.T. (2019). A Model for Supporting Grief Recovery Following Traumatic Loss: The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). *Military Medicine*. doi:10.1093/milmed/usz084









# IS MILITARY GRIEF DIFFERENT?

- ★ Sudden and traumatic death differs dramatically from anticipated death
  - ★ Leading causes of death among the military: suicide, training accident, other accidents, rare and aggressive illnesses
- ★ Trauma shatters the way we look at the world
  - ★ Risk of survivors feeling accountable for death, or the death was preventable
- ★ Loss of community and identity



Risk Factors for Complicated Grief in the Military Community. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, First Published 20 May 2021. Grace E. Seamon-Lahiff, Chantel M. Dooley, Paul T. Bartone, Bonnie Carroll

A Model for Supporting Grief Recovery Following Traumatic Loss: The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). *Military Medicine*, 184(7-8), 166–170 (April 2019). Grace E. Seamon-Lahiff, Chantel M. Dooley, Laura E. Fry, Paul T. Bartone, Bonnie Carroll.



# TOOLS FOR YOUR TOOLKIT

- ★ Note the use of the word “**phases**” instead of “stages”. Grief does not have stages.
- ★ Give **accurate information**, not awkward platitudes and sympathy.
- ★ Know survivors are aware that **you can't fix** what is truly broken, nor are you expected to.
- ★ No matter what you do, the family won't be "happy" or "satisfied" – but they can be reassured their loved one will be treated with **dignity and honor**.
- ★ **Follow up is so important** - if you don't know something, say that. Offer to get the information and get back in touch with them. Then get back in touch with them.
- ★ Say **their person's name** - it's the most wonderful sound we hear.





# WHAT CAN YOU SAY?

- ★ “I’m very sorry.”
- ★ “You have our support. Call on us.”
- ★ “This is a great loss to the organization/nation.”
- ★ “\_\_\_\_\_ will be greatly missed.” (use their loved one’s name)
- ★ Offer choices and listen to requests
- ★ Begin conversations with those emotionally related to the deceased with an acknowledgement of their sacrifice
  - ★ not just a “statement of facts” or need for information
- ★ Focus on the life and the service rather than how and where they died



# WORDS TO AVOID

- ★ The bereaved are often ***traumatized***, they are not ***mentally ill***
- ★ Acceptance - *this feels “unacceptable”*
- ★ Goodbye - *they live forever in our hearts*
- ★ Closure - *you never “close” them out of your life or forget the life and the love*
- ★ Loss - *they are not “lost”, they have died*
- ★ Move past this - *you can’t force healing*
- ★ Get on with life - *life is forever altered*
- ★ Get over it - *“it” is not something you “get over”, you must find comfort and peace within and then, somehow, create a new future*





## ***Companioning is about:***

**Being present to another person's pain;** it is not about taking away or relieving the pain.

**Going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being;** it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

**Honoring the spirit;** it is not about focusing on the intellect.

**Listening with the heart;** not analyzing with the head.

**Bearing witness to the struggles of others;** it is not about judging or directing those struggles.





## ***Companioning is about:***

**Walking alongside;** it is not about leading.

**Discovering the gifts of sacred silence;** it is not about filling every painful moment with talk.

**Being still;** not about frantic movement forward.

**Respecting disorder and confusion;** it is not about imposing order and logic.

**Learning from others;** it is not about teaching them.

**Compassionate curiosity;** it is not about expertise.





# PARTNERSHIPS



# TAPS TRAININGS

TAPS provides **virtual and in-person trainings** for Military Casualty and Military Community Partnerships to Casualty and Mortuary representatives and ships **Casualty Care Packages**

*“We just had an amazing brief about the wonderful program, TAPS, to our group here in Europe. What you and this organization do for not just grieving families of loved ones, but also the country is extraordinary. These people are members of our American community, no matter how their loved one was lost. What this organization can provide **is bigger than assisting the grieving families within the DoD entity.**”*

*These family members **become a more powerful version of themselves** as a result of this organization's resources and efforts and interject their genuine character and meaningful contributions into society, much like this organization does for each grieving person.”*

– Army Casualty Notification Officer | Casualty Assistance Officer Training

Contact:

[militarycasualty@TAPS.org](mailto:militarycasualty@TAPS.org)



Air National Guard Casualty Mortuary Affairs (CAMO) Course at Dover Air Force Base with Mrs. Kelly Hokanson, spouse of GEN Dan Hokanson, 29<sup>th</sup> Chief, National Guard Bureau



# RENEWED PARTNERSHIPS

“What is unique about TAPS is the **level of commitment to all survivors**,” Hokanson said. “Your loved one may not have died on the battlefield. They might not have died in a duty status. You may not be officially recognized as ‘next of kin.’ But **TAPS has built a sanctuary that transcends these distinctions**, honoring all service members who’ve lost their lives, and supporting the loved ones they left behind.”

[National Guard Chief begins Memorial Day weekend by renewing ties with survivor group](#)







# STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

## **Mission Success** (*MOUs signed or renewed in 2023*)

1. Department of Veterans Affairs
2. United States Air Force Services
3. Go PAGA (Burkina Faso)
4. LEPL State Service of Veterans Affairs (Georgia)
5. Fundacja Dorastaj z Nami (Poland)
6. Mama Zahra Foundation (Somalia)
7. SSAFA (United Kingdom)

## **Down Range** (*MOU renewals in process*)

1. Defense Suicide Prevention Office
2. Children of Fallen Patriots
3. Military Spouse Jobs

## **Long-Range Planning** (*MOUs in pursuit*)

1. Military Academies



**Lifelong support  
for our Forces  
and their families**





# TAPS IS YOUR FORCE MULTIPLIER

Without coping strategies or a long-term support system in place, survivors could experience grief severity, prolonged trauma symptoms, and complicated grief.

TAPS provides 24/7 support for you and your survivors.





# TAPS IS YOUR FORCE MULTIPLIER

## Connecting survivors immediately guarantees:

- ★ The likelihood survivors will seek and accept current and future assistance
- ★ Survivors will process their loss in a healthy manner and find meaning along grief journey
- ★ Individually tailored coping strategies
- ★ Positive and safe social engagement





# HOW CAN YOU HELP?



Connect Survivors Immediately



Share the Mission



TAPS Engagement Opportunities

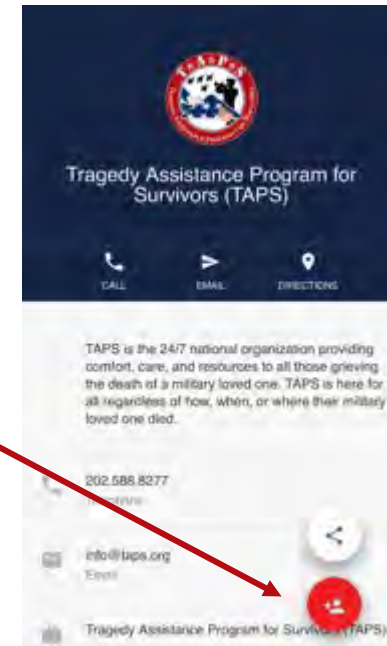




# SAVE AND SHARE TAPS CONTACT



**24/7 800.959.TAPS**  
**TAPS.org/JoinTAPS**







# CONNECT A SURVIVOR

[TAPS.ORG/SURVIVOR](https://taps.org/survivor)

## WELCOME TO THE TAPS FAMILY

TAPS is a family. A family of care, compassion and hope. We are here for you, whether you need someone to listen, a shoulder to cry on, a connection to resources, or an opportunity to remember and honor your loved one.

TAPS offers help, hope and healing to all who are grieving the death of a military or veteran loved one, regardless of the relationship to the service member or the circumstances or cause of death.

I HAVE LOST

*a military or veteran loved one*



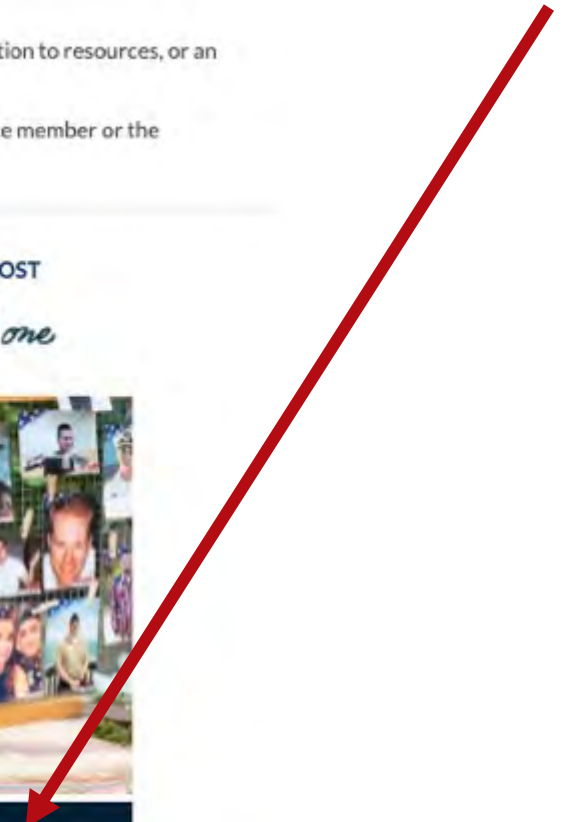
JOIN THE TAPS FAMILY

I AM CONNECTING SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST

*a military or veteran loved one*



CONNECT A SURVIVOR TO TAPS



**“The lives of those we love, remember, and honor are carved into our soul, imprinted on our hearts, and woven into the fabric of our nation. They make us stronger, they inspire us, and in that way, they are eternal.”**

**- Bonnie Carroll, TAPS Founder and President**





# TAPS INTERNATIONAL



# TAPS families and previously abducted Ukrainian children at TAPS Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia - February 2024



# With TAPS Ukraine families in Dnipro Ukraine - February 2024





# Global Federation Gathering in Abu Dhabi, UAE - November 2023





# With TAPS Ukraine families in Dnipro Ukraine - October 2023





# With the First Lady of Somalia in Mogadishu - August 2023





# TAPS Afghanistan Food Program in Kabul - August 2023







**Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors**

# **CAPSTONE BRIEFING**

## **FEBRUARY 2024**

*Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes*

3033 Wilson Blvd, Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

202.588.TAPS (8277)  
[TAPS.org](https://TAPS.org)