



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
WANT
GRIEF TO
WORK



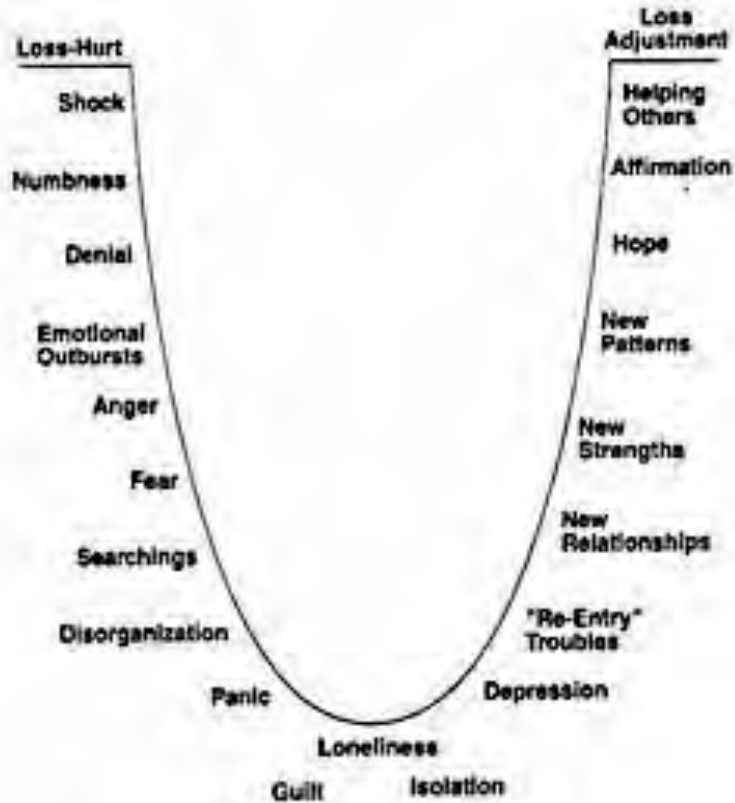
HOW GRIEF
ACTUALLY
WORKS





REALITY. IT'S WHERE WE LIVE

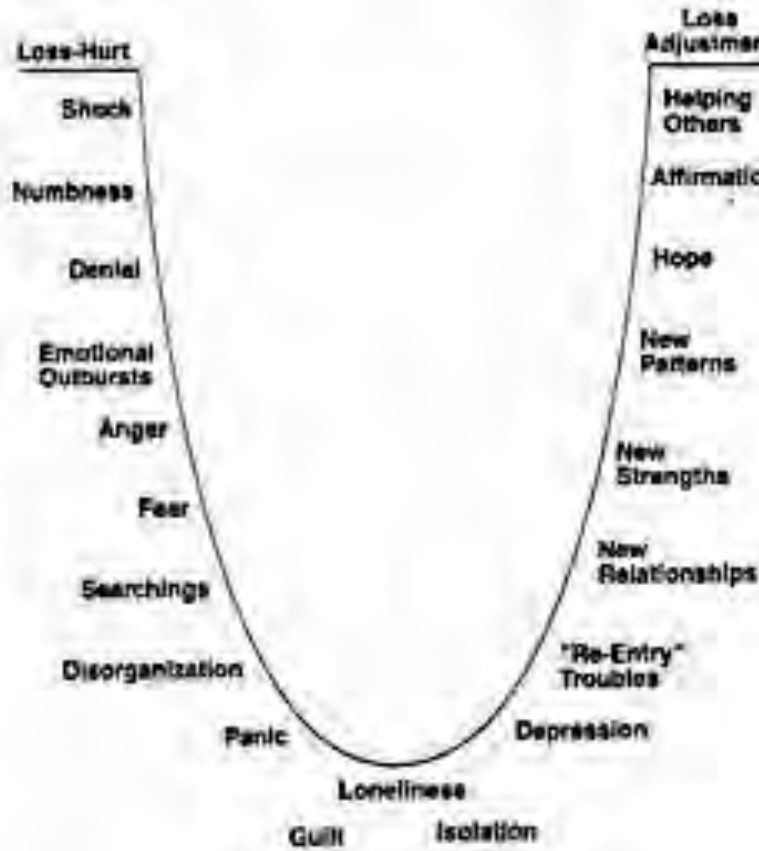
STAGES OF GRIEF



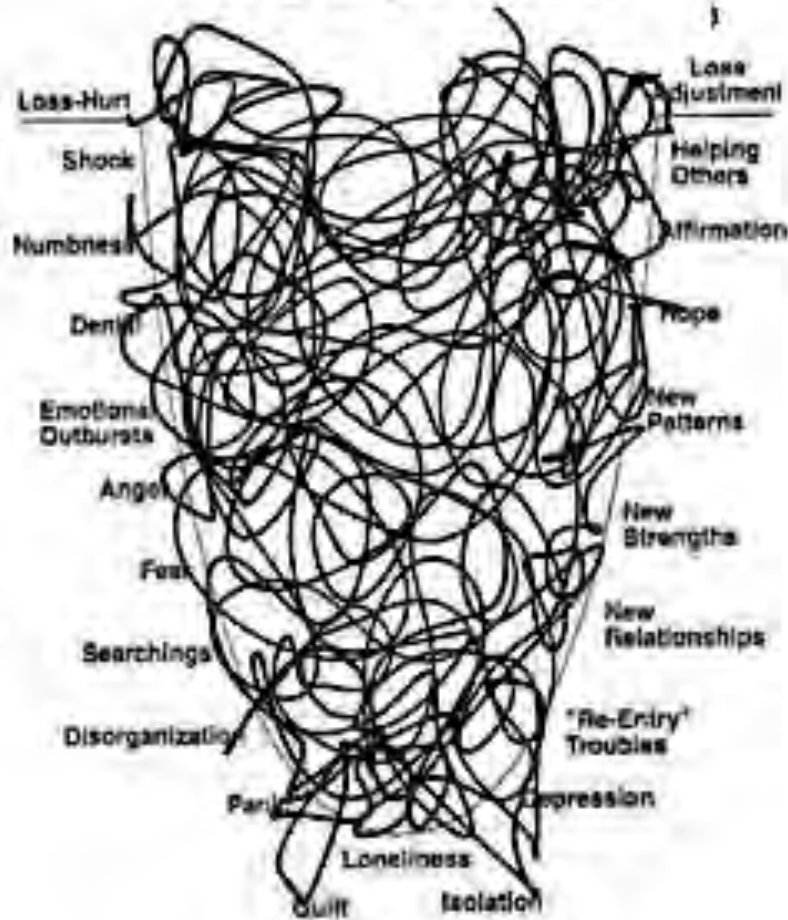


REALITY. IT'S WHERE WE LIVE

STAGES OF GRIEF



My experience





GROWING WITH GRIEF

"TAPS provided emotional and psychological support, which was invaluable during my grieving process."
– Surviving Sibling (now over the age of 18)



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



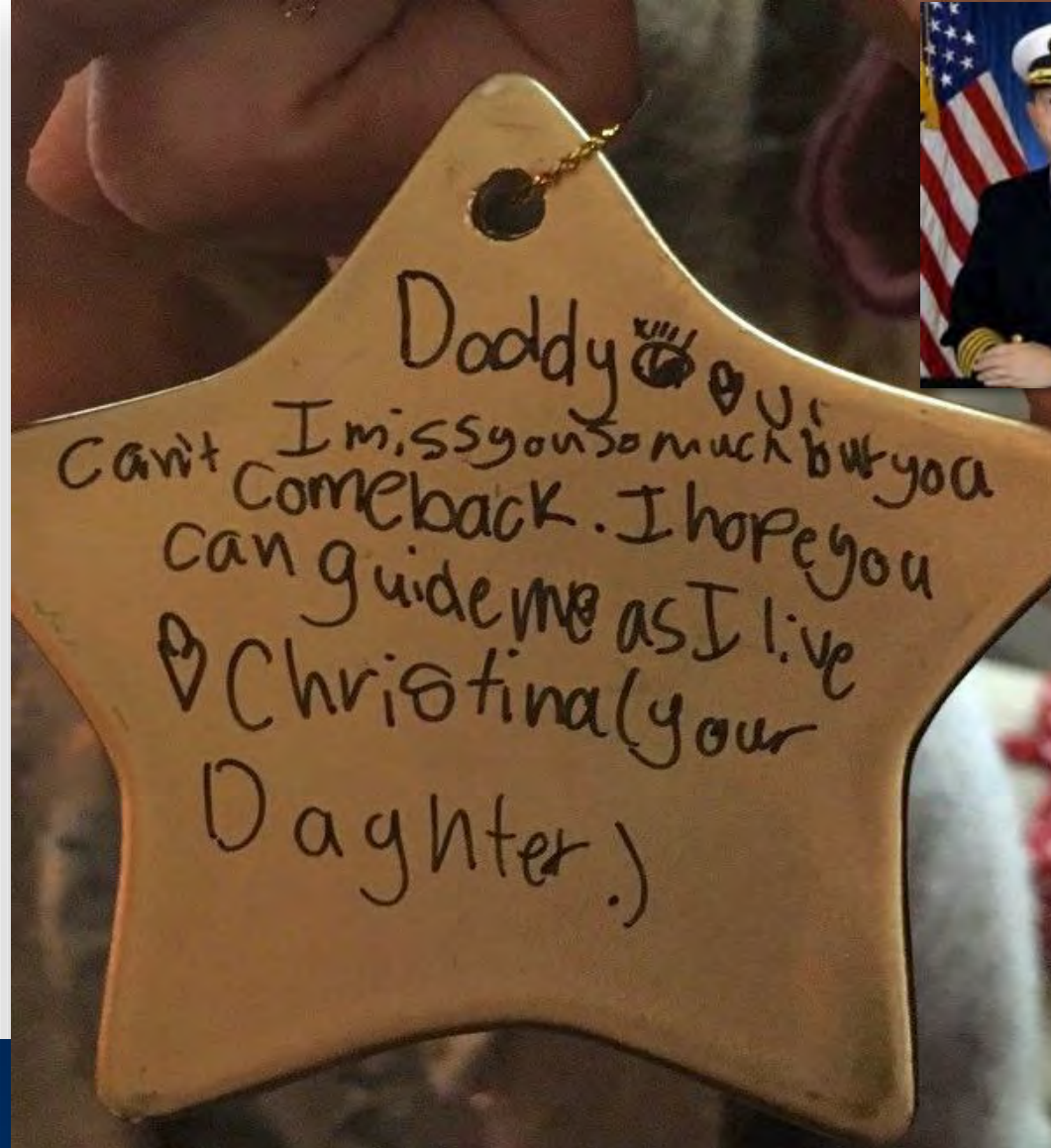
GOAL: Help survivor derive a sense of meaning from their loss and integrate positive life patterns while looking ahead to their future.



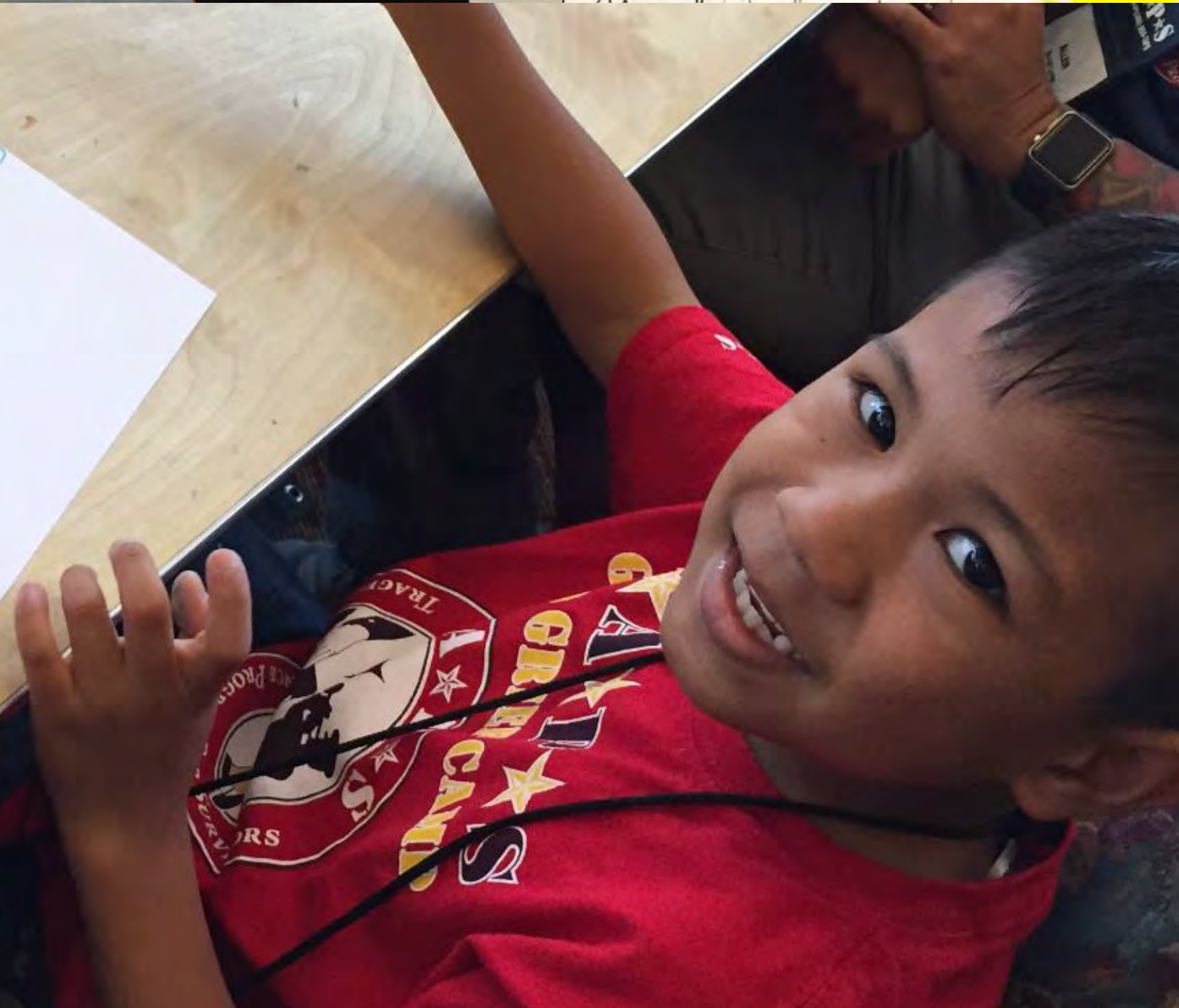
¹Dooley, C.M., Carroll, B., Fry, L.E., Seamon-Lahiff, G. & Bartone, P.T. (2019). A Model for Supporting Grief Recovery Following Traumatic Loss: The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). *Military Medicine*. doi:10.1093/milmed/usz084



EMBRACING LIFE AS LIVING LEGACIES



My Dad is in heaven eating
Steaks and chiden watching
over me!!





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



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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.



TAPS PUBLICATIONS

MILITARY MEDICINE, 00, 000, 1, 2019

A Model for Supporting Grief Recovery Following Traumatic Loss: The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

Chantel M. Dooley¹; MAJ Bonnie Carroll, USAF R. (Ret)²; Laura E. Fry³; Grace Seamon-Lahiff, LMFT⁴; COL Paul T. Bartone, MS USA (Ret)¹

While grief is a normal response to death and loss in human beings, some individuals experience severe and debilitating grief. Complicated grief was recognized in the 1990s as a prolonging of the normal grief process that impairs the mental and physical health of its sufferers. While there is some disagreement as to diagnostic criteria, it was included in DSM-5¹ as “persistent complex bereavement disorder.” Prevalence estimates for complicated grief in the general population range from 2.4%² to 3.7%³ to 4.8%.⁴ Among the bereaved prevalence is higher, ranging from 10%⁵ to 40%.⁶⁻⁸

Those who experience the sudden death of a spouse or child are at higher risk for complicated grief, as are women in general.^{2,3} While

have been used successfully to assist military family members who experience the sudden death of a military member.

TAPS – the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors – was founded by Major Bonnie Carroll, whose husband was killed in a 1992 military plane crash along with 7 other servicemen. Following the crash, Carroll found meager support for survivors of a military death. Professional mental health providers she encountered seemed to have no understanding of the military and little real empathy for her situation of loss. Eventually, she found effective support among the other widows whose husbands died in the crash. It was this personal experience that convinced Carroll of the therapeutic value of peer support for grieving survivors, and

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) provides bereavement care and support for military death.¹⁰ TAPS is a national organization, and is funded

services do provide a variety of support. These tend to be time limited. Professional mental health care is available in the military health system, but providers frequently lack the military and the unique needs of military death. The TAPS organization has the expertise and the ability to provide support. Each military service has a Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the referral of survivors to

Central to the TAPS approach is the use of volunteer peer support professionals, survivors who have experienced a military death in their own family, and have received special training to

AMSUS
The Society of Federal Health Professionals

MILITARY MEDICINE

International Journal of AMSUS

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Original Manuscript

Risk Factors for Complicated Grief in the Military Community

Grace E. Seamon-Lahiff¹, Chantel M. Dooley¹, Paul T. Bartone², and Bonnie Carroll¹

DEATH STUDIES
ISSN 0014-0139
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Exploration into best practices in peer support for bereaved survivors

Paul T. Bartone¹, Jocelyn V. Bartone², Zaneta Gileno³, and John M. Violanti⁴

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Abstract
This exploratory, qualitative study addressed the question: what are the important elements in effective peer support programs for bereaved survivors? Interviews with 16 highly experienced peer support programs for the bereaved revealed themes and elements. Findings indicate that effective peer support programs for the bereaved should be easily accessible, confidential, provide a safe environment, use peer supporters with similar shared experiences to clients, select peer supporters carefully, partner with professional mental health providers, train peer supporters thoroughly, and provide care and monitoring for peer supporters. These results can help inform efforts to improve peer support programs for bereaved survivors.

Keywords: complicated

Introduction

Recent years have seen a rapid growth in peer support programs that aim to help people recover from a range of problems, including mental and physical illness, alcohol and drug addiction, and various disabilities [Repper & Carter, 2011; Sloge & et al., 2011]. A recent review by Chinnai et al. (2014), covering 20 studies including 11 randomized controlled trials (RCTs), concluded that peer support programs bring significant benefits to those with serious mental problems, over and above the benefits of traditional care. These benefits include increases in self-care and compliance with treatment programs, reduced hospitalizations, and enhanced autonomy and sense of hope.

Peer support programs are also being used increasingly to assist those impacted by death, including family members of military casualties, parents of a children who have died, and police and firefighters who have lost friends and coworkers [Harrington-LaMore & Buocco, 2011; Prielman, Jordan, McIntosh, & Prielman, 2012; suicide death who received peer support assistance [Barlow et al., 2010; Kramer et al., 2015]. Also looking at survivors of death due to suicide, Feigelman and colleagues found that peer support was associated with more personal growth and positive grief resolution [Feigelman, Jordan, and Gorman, 2009; Feigelman et al., 2012].

Despite these studies confirming the benefits of peer support programs for bereaved survivors, little is known about why or how they work. Also, while several organizations have developed best practice guidelines for peer support programs, these focus on peer support for patients dealing with mental illness, addictions, or chronic illnesses such as heart disease or diabetes [Daniels et al., 2015; Daniels, Fricks & Tauter, 2011; Daniels et al., 2012]. Unfortunately, these guidelines do not address peer support programs for bereaved survivors of traumatic loss, as for example with war casualties, suicides, or fatal accidents. At the same time, it is known that death by sudden and violent means

DEATH STUDIES
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TAPS Suicide Postvention Model™: A comprehensive framework of healing and growth

Kim A. Ruocco, Carla Stumpf Patten, Kim Burditt, Bonnie Carroll, and Matt Mabe

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Original Article

Perspectives of Suicide Bereaved Individuals on Military Suicide Decedents' Life Stressors and Male Gender Role Stress

A. Graham Sterling IV, Jennifer L. Bakalar, Kanchana U. Perera, Kathryn A. DeYoung, Jill Harrington-LaMore, Diana Haignrey & ...

Pages 152-164 | Accepted author version posted online 15 May 2016, Published online 16 Jun 2016

Download citation | <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2016.1166087>

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Peer Support for the Bereaved

Paul T. Bartone and Chantel M. Dooley

Check for updates

Peer Support Services for Bereaved Survivors: A Systematic Review

Paul T. Bartone¹, John M. Violanti², Jocelyn V. Bartone³, and Zaneta M. Gileno⁴

Abstract
This systematic literature review assesses the evidence regarding benefits of peer support services for bereaved survivors of sudden or unexpected death. Reports were included that addressed peer support services for adults who experienced death of a family member, close friend, or coworker. Of the 32 studies reviewed, inclusion criteria, most showed evidence that peer support was helpful to bereaved survivors, reducing grief symptoms and increasing well-being and personal growth. Studies also showed benefits to providers of peer support, including increased personal growth and positive meaning in life. Several studies addressed the growing trend of internet-based peer support programs, finding that these are beneficial in part due to their easy accessibility. Peer support appears to be especially valuable for survivors of suicide loss, a result that may be related to stigma and lack of support from family and friends, experienced by many suicide survivors. The reviewed studies provide consistent evidence that peer support is beneficial to bereaved survivors.

Keywords: grief, bereavement, peer support, recovery, death, suicide



TOOLS FOR YOUR TOOLKIT

"Being with my TAPS Family at the seminar helped me to understand that I'm not alone and it's OK that I miss him. There's not a time limit on my grief, and the things I am going through are normal. It was good to meet others and know we all have things in common. We love and miss our loved ones, and that never dies."

– Surviving Spouse



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

"I have attended countless trainings as part of my job and throughout my career. None of the prior trainings have been as meaningful, practical, informative, and useful to my duties in casualty as what you shared about TAPS."
– DoD casualty assistance representative





TAPS and the FIVE AND THRIVE PLAN by Mrs. Sharene Brown Spouse of the 21st Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Advocate for Quality-of-Life Improvements

Improve the lives of military survivors by connecting them with TAPS for 24/7 access to support, resources, and services following the death of a service member.

Foster Community Partnerships

Include military and veteran survivors in engagements supporting military installations (Air Shows, Family Days, Memorial Day Ceremonies, etc.) to honor all who served and died.

Consolidate Quality-of-Life Resources in a One-Stop Shop

TAPS is a one-stop shop for all those grieving the death in the military and veteran community. TAPS supports all grieving a loss regardless of the duty status at the time of death, the relationship to the deceased, or the circumstances of the loss, to include military dependent deaths.

Educate Military Families on Existing Efforts and Best Practices

TAPS resources and support are available in communities across the nation through TAPS Togethers and TAPS Care Groups. Host surviving families by sponsoring refreshments at gatherings, meet survivors, and learn about the life and legacy of their loved one.

Promote the Exceptional Value of the Military-Connected Spouse

From Dr. Alan Wolfelt and the TAPS Model of Bereavement Care™, utilize *Companionship* to support military survivors and warmly connect with TAPS at 800.959.TAPS(8277).



TAPS TRAININGS

Contact:

militarycasualty@TAPS.org

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



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



TAPS.ORG/MILITARYCASUALTY



Developed specifically for our partners in military casualty

- ★ Steps To Connect Military and Veteran Survivors with TAPS
- ★ Links to DoD, VA, and Military OneSource Resources for Survivors
- ★ Death by Suicide Toolkit for Military Leadership
- ★ Document Library for All Manners of Death
- ★ Document Library for Suicide Loss



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)
8. Scottie's Little Soldiers (United Kingdom)



Down Range (MOU renewals in process)

1. Defense Suicide Prevention Office
2. Australian War Widows



Australian War Widows Incorporated



Lifelong support for our Forces and their families

Long-Range Planning (MOUs in pursuit)

1. Military Academies
2. State Departments of Veterans Affairs



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

Federal Government

- ★ Administer benefits to those who are eligible
- ★ Render final honors
- ★ Provide final resting place for deceased
- ★ Emergency financial assistance to survivors, regardless of duty status
- ★ Emotional support for all who are grieving
- ★ Peer-based emotional support and connections to vetted grief and trauma professionals
- ★ Access to federal, state, and private resources
- ★ Secondary lodging following a death by suicide
- ★ 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline staffed by peer professionals



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

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 AUGUST 2024

Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes

800.959.TAPS(8277)
@TAPSo rg

202.588.TAPS (8277)
TAPS.org