



# **SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED AT HOME AND DOWN RANGE**

**Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors**

# OBJECTIVES

## Participants will learn:

- The nature and stages of grief
- Ways to assist the bereaved
- What to say and what not to say to a bereaved person
- Issues for the bereaved who are down range



# AGENDA

- Introduction
- Definition of Grief
- Stages of Grief and Loss
- Emotional and Physical Symptoms of Grief
- Survivor's Guilt
- Understanding the Effects of Guilt
- What to Say and What Not to Say
- Tips for Helping a Grieving Person
- When the Bereaved is Down Range
- When the Bereaved Should Seek Help
- Taking Care of Yourself



# INTRODUCTION

- When someone we love is experiencing grief, it can be difficult to witness
- Frequently, our instinct is to try to fix the problem and make their pain stop
- While you can't fix the problem or take away their pain, you can provide comfort and support
- Sometimes the best thing we can do is just listen and make ourselves available



# DEFINITION OF GRIEF

- Grief is a natural response to loss
- It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away

**NOTE:** In addition to grieving the loss of a loved one, it is also possible to grieve the loss of someone you never knew





# STAGES OF GRIEF & LOSS

- Denial and Shock
- Anger and Emotional Releases
- Protest/Bargaining
- Guilt
- Depression/Loneliness
- Acceptance
- Hope



# EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

- Numbness, the sense that none of this is real – you're just imagining it
- Expecting the deceased to come back and be able to resume life as usual
- A sense of anger, injustice, or helplessness
- Feelings of emptiness, self-accusation, or despair
- Guilt – if only you had been there, done more, etc.



# PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

- Difficulty going to sleep or waking in the middle of the night
- Difficulty paying attention or remembering things as well as you did before your loss
- Weight loss or gain; over or under eating
- Headaches, chest pain, or racing heart
- Upset stomach or digestive problems





# SURVIVOR'S GUILT

- In addition to typical grief responses, service members down range may also experience survivor's guilt
- Survivor's guilt is sometimes experienced by those who have survived an event that took the lives of others
- This type of guilt can derive partly from a feeling that one did not do enough to save others who perished or who were injured
- The survivor may question why they survived and others did not



# UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF GUILT

## Guilt can:

- Intensify trauma and grief
- Immobilize a person mentally, emotionally and physically
- Hinder well-being, productive action and positive relationships
- Keep the guilt ridden person “stuck” and prolong the grief process



# WHAT TO SAY

- “I’m so sorry.”
- “I know this is a terrible loss for you.”
- “I don’t know exactly what to say, but I want you to know how much I care.”
- “Why don’t I come over and make a list of what needs to be done?”
- “I will keep you and your family in my thoughts and prayers.”



# WHAT NOT TO SAY

- “I know exactly how you feel.”
- “It’s God’s will.”
- “He is in a better place.”
- “At least they didn’t suffer -- or -- At least they’re out of their misery.”
- “Think about all the good things in your life.”
- “You need to get out more, make new friends, go to church, etc.”



# TIPS FOR HELPING THE BEREAVED

- Accept and acknowledge their feelings
- Be comfortable with the silence
- Let them tell their story
- Don't minimize the loss
- Be patient
- Offer to help out, but be specific
- Keep in contact



# TIPS FOR HELPING THE BEREAVED

CONTINUED

- Realize that their grief may last a very long time and that everyone grieves differently
- Accept that you don't "get over" the death of someone you care about – you just learn to move on
- Don't worry if you don't know what to say
- Let them know their thoughts and feelings are normal
- Continue with support after the funeral





# When the Bereaved is Down Range

# WHEN THE BEREAVED IS DOWN RANGE

## Distance is the biggest challenge:

- Unable to have physical contact
- Not able to be there to see when they need comforting
- Limited ability to tend to their needs



# SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED DOWN RANGE

## What you can do:

- Let them know that you are thinking about them everyday
- Call, write letters, send cards, emails or text messages often – try to have daily contact, if possible
- Ask if there is anything you can do from your end to help, such as contact the deceased's family on their behalf, send flowers, etc.
- Listen attentively and without judgment, and follow the previous tips for helping the bereaved



# WHEN THE BEREAVED SHOULD SEEK HELP

## Encourage them to seek help if they are:

- Having difficulty functioning in daily life
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing from others
- Having constant feelings of hopelessness
- Talking about dying or suicide



# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

- Seek balance in your life
- Have a “battle buddy”
- Accept help and support
- Participate in recreational activities
- Spend time with friends
- Exercise
- Eat well
- Get plenty of rest



# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

CONTINUED

If coping methods don't work, and the stress is affecting your ability to function, don't hesitate to seek help from a Chaplain, Military Community Services or Behavioral Health Services





# SUMMARY

- Grief is a natural response to loss
- While there are several stages of grief, they do not follow in a specific order or have a specific time line
- Those down range, as well as civilians, can experience survivor's guilt when there is a trauma where others are killed
- Sometimes just listening and being present is enough
- It's important to take care of yourself when you are supporting a bereaved person
- Seek help if coping methods don't work and the stress is interfering with your ability to function





**QUESTIONS?**



# RESOURCES

- Military Community Services
- Chaplain and Local Clergy
- Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
- TRICARE [www.Tricare.mil](http://www.Tricare.mil)
- Behavioral Health Services



# REFERENCES

- *Supporting a Grieving Person*, Helpguide.org, [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/helping\\_grieving.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/helping_grieving.htm)
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- *Grief Guidelines: 13 Ways to Help a Grieving Person*, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4022/is\\_200505/ai\\_n14688396/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4022/is_200505/ai_n14688396/)
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**THANK YOU**

