



Counseling Bereaved Military Families

The Hidden Casualties Of War: Promoting Healing & Resiliency for US Service Members & Their Families

May 8-9, 2008

University of West Florida



Mustard Seed Story

Loss and grief are universal

Military Casualty Information

- <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>
- www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf
- www.iraq.usa.today
- www.icasualties.org
- www.some-gave-all.com
- www.legacy.com/Soldier/Home.aspx

Military Casualty Information

**> 4,000 X family,
friends, others affected
= ?**

The background features a large, soft-focus white sphere on the right side, partially overlapping a larger, glowing orange sphere. The lighting is bright and ethereal, creating a sense of depth and movement.

TAPS

**Tragedy Assistance Program
for Survivors**

www.taps.org

Readjustment Counseling

- Program began 1979
- Vet Centers are community based
- Average staff of four
- Majority of staff are veterans
- Services for combat theater veterans & families of all eras & MST
- Readjustment issues, assess & treat for PTSD, crisis intervention
- www.vetcenter.va.gov

Readjustment Counseling

- **Bereavement Counseling – Jan '04**
- **Family members & significant others of soldiers who die on active duty**
- **Pensacola Vet Center 850-456-5886**
- **“This is a sacred mission.”**
 - **Alfonso Batres, Ph.D., RCS Director**

What is Unique?

- Many have already endured lengthy separation(s) and increased stress
- Loss occurs far away & at present the location is inaccessible
- Method of notification/DoD
 - Book > *Final Salute* by Jim Sheeler
 - Marine Major Steve Beck
 - www.npr.org Fresh Air April 30, 2008

What is Unique?

- Death details not always fully provided
- May be terrible harm to body
- Major life decisions & changes made
- Military installation families must relocate
- Pride in service vs. sacrifice in vain
- Lives are honored & memorialized

Grief is grief is grief

Shock

- **Disbelief**
 - “It’s not true.”
 - “It’s not happening.”
 - “There must be a mistake.”
- **Obsession with Details**
 - “How?”
 - “Why?”
- **Suicide**
 - Additional “What-if” and “If-Only”

Intense Emotional Pain

- **Enormous**
- **Excruciating**
- **Exhausting**
- **Inconsolable**
- **Unbearable**
- **Unsurviveable**

Total & Permanent Change

- **Life as they knew it, ended**
 - Identity/role
 - Knew, planned, dreamed
 - Ability to function
- **Life as they live it, is different**
 - Daily life & special events
- **Nothing balances the loss**
 - Money
 - Remarrying
 - Having another child

Lonely & Isolating

- Others don't know what to say/do
- Bereaved don't know what to ask for
- Support declines over time
- “What Grieving People Want You to Know” by Virginia A. Simpson, Ph.D., CT, TAPS Vol. 13, Issue 3, p. 8-9

Sanity is Questionable

- **Depth & intensity of emotion remains magnified**
 - Depression, Anxiety, Anger, Guilt
- **Cognitive & Physical Functioning remains impacted**
 - **Good & bad days**
 - Motivation > go through motions
 - Attention, concentration, decision making > variable
 - Energy is unpredictable > can't plan ahead
 - Failure to manage regular tasks

Sanity is Questionable

- **Unreality**
 - Hope of seeing or hearing again
 - Idealizing; overlooking shortcomings
 - View of others distorted
- **Avoidance of grief**
 - Intolerance of discussion of loss
 - I can't fall apart I need to be strong
- **Attachment to grief**
 - Stopping behavior or releasing objects is equated with loss

Individual Process

- **Normal & natural response to loss**
- **There is no single technique, ritual, medicine, experience**
- **No right or wrong way**
- **No timeline**

No Maps

- **No such thing as**
 - **Acceptance**
 - **Facing Reality**
 - **Letting Go**
 - **Healing or Fixing**
 - **Getting Over It**
 - **Moving On**
 - **Getting Easier**

“A New Normal”

- **The challenge is to live through it & rebuild, rebalance, readjust**
- **Most people are more resilient than they think**
- **Shift in Focus**
 - **From not wanting to let go, to wanting to live the life they are left with**
 - **From what is lost, to what is left, discovered, created, enriched**

“A New Normal”

- **What is Left**
 - Love and memories
 - Manageable emotional pain
 - Legacy of loved one
- **What is Discovered**
 - Not the only one
 - Laughter & joy are not dishonoring

“A New Normal”

- **What is Created**
 - Redefined Self/Family; Personal Growth
 - New or expanding meaning in life
- **What is Enriched**
 - Ability to help others
 - Compassion for others
 - Ability to forgive others

Facilitators of Transformation

- **Another's presence with their pain**
- **Telling their story**
- **Other's Memories of Loved One**
- **Honoring Life**
- **Memorial Activities**
- **Future Plans**

Memorial Day

- 1868, Decoration Day - May 30
- 1922, Memorial Flower - Poppy
- 1971, Memorial Day - Last Monday
- 2000, National Moment of Remembrance

[http://www.tapsbugler.com/TapsPDFa
ndsound.html](http://www.tapsbugler.com/TapsPDFa
ndsound.html)

Resources

- www.aarp.org/families/grief_loss
- www.adec.org
- www.AmericanHeroesTribute.org
- www.andrewolmsted.com
- www.bereavementacademy.org
- www.bereavedparentsusa.org
- www.dashpoemmovie.com
- www.GrievingChild.org
- www.fallenherosproject.org
- www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil
- www.patriotguard.org
- www.goldstarmoms.com
- www.Griefstore.com
- www.Healthjourneys.com – “Ease Grief” CD
- www.heartofahawk.com
- www.heropaintings.com
- www.kristykruger.com
- www.memorialgardentour.com
- www.Ospreymemorial.com
- www.PvtHeathWarner.com
- www.rickandlisawallace.com - "No Tears" song
- www.solacetreer.org
- www.SnowballExpress.org
- www.taps.org
- www.usni.org/store - Military Widow: A Survival Guide
- www.va.gov

Resources

- *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping, and Care*, Edited by Margaret S. Stroebe, PhD; Robert O. Hansson, PhD; Wolfgang Stroebe, PhD; and Henk Schut, PhD
- *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss*, Edited by Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD
- *Heart of a Hawk, Eye of the Eagle, Operation Iraqi Freedom Seen Through the Eyes of a Father and Mother*, by Deborah H. Tainsh
- *Faces of Freedom: Profiles of America's Fallen Heroes – Iraq and Afghanistan*, by Rebecca Pepin