



Mental Health America of Franklin County
2323 W. Fifth Ave. Suite 160, Columbus, OH 43204
Telephone: (614) 221-1441 Fax: (614) 221-1491
info@mhafc.org www.mhafc.org

Bereavement and Grief Information for Military Families

The death of a loved one is always difficult. When the death results from a war or a disaster, it can be even more troubling--given the sudden and potentially violent nature of the event. After the death of someone you love, you experience *bereavement*, which literally means, “to be deprived by death”. You may experience a wide range of emotions, including:

- Denial
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Shock
- Sadness
- Yearning
- Anger
- Humiliation
- Despair
- Guilt

These feelings are common reactions to loss. Many people also report physical symptoms of acute grief – stomach pain, loss of appetite, intestinal upsets, sleep disturbances or loss of energy. Of all life’s stresses, mourning can seriously test your natural defense systems. Existing illnesses can worsen or new conditions may develop. Profound emotional reactions can include anxiety attacks, chronic fatigue, depression and thoughts of suicide.

Mourning is the natural process through which a person accepts a major loss. Mourning may include military or religious traditions honoring the dead, or gathering with friends and family to share your loss. Mourning is personal and can last months or years. *Grieving* is the outward expression of your loss. Your grief is likely to be expressed both physically and psychologically. For example, crying is a physical expression, while depression is a psychological expression.

Be aware that the death may necessitate major life adjustments, such as parenting alone, adjusting to single life or returning to work. These challenges may intensify any anxiety and grief you are already experiencing. Allow yourself to express these feelings.

Living with Grief

When a loved one dies, the best thing you can do is to allow yourself to grieve. There are many ways to cope effectively.

Seek out caring people. Find relatives and friends who understand your feelings. Tell them how you feel; it will help you to work through the grieving process. Join a support group with others who have experienced similar losses. Support groups exist at most military installations. If you feel overwhelmed, ask for help. It is not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted relative, friend, family services staffer, minister or rabbi. Military chaplains can be helpful, as most receive training in pastoral counseling and crisis. Don't let yourself become isolated.

Take care of your health. See your family physician. Eat properly, exercise and get plenty of rest. Be aware of the danger of using medication or alcohol to deal with your grief.

Be patient. It takes effort and time to absorb a major loss, accept your changed life, and begin to live again in the present and not dwell on the past.

Seek help. If your feelings become too much to bear, seek professional assistance to help work through your grief. It's a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek help.

Helping Others Grieve

If someone you care about has lost a loved one, you can help him or her through the grieving process.

Listen. Encourage the person to talk about his or her feelings and to share memories of the deceased. Remember, it may take the person a long time to recover from the loss.

Do not offer false comfort. It does not help the grieving person to say, "It was for the best," or "You will get over it in time,". Instead, offer a simple expression of sorrow and take time to listen.

Offer practical help. Baby-sitting, cooking and running errands are ways to help someone who is grieving.

Encourage professional help when needed. Do not hesitate to recommend professional help when you feel someone is experiencing too much pain to cope alone.

Helping Children Grieve

Children grieve differently from adults. A parent's death can be particularly difficult for small children, affecting their sense of security. Often, they are confused about the changes they see taking place, particularly if well-meaning adults try to protect them from the truth or from their surviving parent's grief. Limited understanding and an inability to express feelings put very young children at a special risk. They may revert to earlier behaviors (such as bed-wetting), ask

questions about the deceased that seem insensitive, invent games about dying or pretend that the death never happened.

Coping with a child's grief puts added strain on a bereaved parent. However, angry outbursts or criticism only deepen a child's anxiety and delays recovery. Instead, take extra time and talk honestly with children, in terms they can understand. Help them work through their feelings, and remember that they are looking to you for suitable behavior and coping skills.

Helping Resources

Contact Mental Health America of Franklin County (MHAFC) at 614-221-1441 for information on mental health, mental illness, treatment options, and local treatment/support services.

Columbus area military personnel or their families can access the Family Advocacy Program web site via the Defense Supply Center home page at www.dsc.dla.mil. You may contact the Family Advocacy Program Manager via the email address listed there.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Inc. assists people who have lost family members in the Armed Forces. TAPS provides a survivor-peer support network, grief counseling referrals, and crisis information and can be reached at 1-800-959-TAPS (8277) or www.taps.org.

The *Army Family Assistance Hotline* is 1-800-833-6622, and the *Army Reservist Hotline* is 1-800-318-5298. The *Coast Guard Reserve Website* is www.uscg.mil/hq/reserve/reshmpg.html. The number for *Marine Corps Community Service Centers* West of the Mississippi is 1-800-253-1624; and, East of the Mississippi, the number is 1-800-336-4663.

The *U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs* website contains information on and applications for compensation, health, burial, special programs, and other benefits. Contact www.va.gov.

The following military family service-related websites include information and networking: www.lifelines2000.org; www.militarycity.com (this includes access to www.armytimes.com, www.navytimes.com, www.airforcetimes.com, and www.marinecorpstimes.com); www.afsv.af.mil/FMP; and www.sgtmoms.com.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.