

Living with Grief: Children and Adolescents

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Foreword by U.S. Senator Tom Harkin



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Military Children and Grief

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INTRODUCTION

Thousands of American deaths have resulted from U.S. military participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Many military deaths are front-page news in local newspapers or the lead stories on local television stations. Occasionally, there is a follow-up report on the funeral. Americans are saddened by these losses, but after a brief cathartic surge of sympathy and patriotic support for the bereaved family, they move on to other topics.

But what becomes of the family? After the flag is folded and the last echoing notes of “Taps” have sounded, the burden of grief is on the shoulders of those who loved the fallen soldier. Often those shoulders are too small, too fragile, and too young to bear this burden alone. They are the shoulders of the surviving children of the military men and women who have given, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, their “last full measure of devotion” in service to our country.

Although the service member’s death is reported publicly, the continuing grief and persistent courage of surviving military families is usually hidden from the media and, in general, from public view. Privacy is the standard, and each branch of service is careful to protect grieving families from unwanted intrusions by the media. However, away from the spotlight, the grief following a military death continues for months and years: horrendous, traumatic, and complicated by a number of factors. Effective support for this kind of bereavement requires some background and understanding of the culture and customs of the military.

Unlike many children growing up in the United States today, the children of military parents are more likely to realize that the world is not safe and

that, with multiple deployments, there is a chance that the outcome of their parents' military service may be death. Although at this time most military deaths occur in a combat zone, death can also occur as the result of noncombat injuries, accidents, or suicide, even after the deployment is over and the soldier is home.

Not all the issues discussed here will be relevant to every situation. The problems that arise when someone dies by suicide at home differ greatly from those related to a combat-related death. Regardless of the cause of death, however, many customs and traditions of military culture differ greatly from civilian experience. Recognizing how different a military death is for the surviving children is an important step in helping them cope with grief. In this chapter, we look at some of the specific factors that affect the grieving process for children of the military and some of the coping strategies that have helped.

MILITARY FACTORS THAT COMPLICATE GRIEF

Absence of the Deployed Parent

[It's hard] because I don't get to give him a good-night kiss.

Katie Staats, 8-year-old military survivor.

KKTV News, Colorado Springs, August 17, 2007

The deployment of a member of the armed forces creates a single-parent family overnight. In addition to the financial difficulties, the long absence of one parent, and the extra strain on the remaining parent, there is the constant worry about injury or death. Family dynamics are altered by deployment. Recent studies of U.S. Army databases suggest that the incidence of maltreatment of children in military families rises significantly during a combat deployment (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper, Johnson, 2007). If this has occurred, the family's grief journey will be even more difficult.

During a long deployment, a child may feel responsible for his or her siblings or the remaining parent. Additional stress may be unwittingly placed on a child when Dad says, "Take care of Mom and your sisters while I'm gone" or "Be good until I get home, and don't give Mom a hard time." If the father doesn't return from war, the child may feel that the mandate remains in effect forever. Acting "like a kid" again seems like a betrayal of Dad's trust.

Another aspect of deployment is that the families become accustomed to their loved ones being gone for long periods. This makes it harder, especially for a younger child, to realize or acknowledge that the parent is gone forever this time. And if a death occurs during deployment, a long time may have elapsed since the child last saw or spoke to the now-deceased parent.

Death Notification

We thought when we heard the doorbell it was the pizza man. I went to the door and I told my mom it wasn't...and the next thing I knew, she came inside starting to cry.

Angel Van Dusen, 11-year-old military survivor
(Berkes, 2007)

The death notification itself can be highly traumatic. A child raised on a military base knows the significance of a government vehicle coming to a house with a chaplain and a notifying officer, both in Class A dress uniform. One 6-year-old girl looked out the window and, when she saw the chaplain and the casualty notification officer approaching the house, screamed, "No! Not my house! You have the wrong house!" Another young child said, "Daddy promised that the chaplain would not knock on our front door. When Mommy saw the car pull up in the driveway, she knew right away what had happened. So she walked out to the driveway. She made sure that Daddy kept his promise."

The Loved One's Remains

We're getting him back in pieces....

Jocelyn Burns, mother of LCPL Kyle Burns
(Weller, 2007)

Because of the nature of combat injuries and training accidents resulting in death, the physical remains of the deceased may not be viewable. This can be traumatic for several reasons. First, children are often haunted by images of what may have happened to their loved one. These thoughts can be extremely disturbing and frightening. Second, the family will have unanswerable questions regarding what was left of the body. And finally, the

children are prevented from verifying the identification of their parent for themselves and from saying a final goodbye by sight or touch.

Another disturbing aspect of a combat death is that more of the loved one's remains may be discovered on the field of battle and subsequently identified. Each time, the family is contacted regarding the disposition of these remains. One mother said, "We're getting him back in pieces...I'll be crying for the rest of my life." A military widow said, "I want every piece of him back home. I don't want that country to have any part of him." Yet another family, after three of these notifications, authorized the army to handle any further remains without contacting them.

Military Funerals

We salute the flag. We serve under it. And some come home beneath it. It should be presented with the utmost honor and respect.

Lt. Col. Steve Beck, as he presented a service flag to
10-year-old Taylor Heldt (McCrimmon, 2007)

The military does a wonderful job of memorializing those who die in service to the nation. But an added complication of a military death in a combat zone is the lengthy process of recovering and transporting the body home before the burial can take place. The body must be repatriated through the Dover Air Force Base mortuary in Delaware, and it is autopsied before being released to the family. The family has no control over this process and receives very little information about the time frame. The family's grief is agonizingly prolonged by this process, during which they have no access to their loved one. The deceased's remains belong to the military until it releases the body to the family.

As the family waits, the first memorial ceremony takes place in the combat zone. The deployed unit honors its military member in a remembrance ceremony on the field of battle. This service includes eulogies by the soldier's friends and commanders; the symbolic representation of the deceased using his or her dog tags, helmet, and boots; the rifle volley; the rendering of "Taps" by a lone bugler; and farewell salutes by each person in attendance. Often, the ceremony is taped and sent to the soldier's family.

Meanwhile, the family must plan a funeral service in the soldier's hometown and possibly a second service, if the deceased is to be buried in a national cemetery such as Arlington National Cemetery. Travel arrangements must be made. And all this time, the children really have no functioning parent—one has died and the other is consumed by grief and the pressure to complete the funeral arrangements.

If the family wishes, military honors are performed at the burial site, regardless of whether it is a private or national cemetery. Military pallbearers are supplied, medals earned posthumously are presented to the next of kin, the flag that has draped the casket is ceremoniously folded and presented to the family, a rifle volley is sounded consisting of seven rifles fired three times, and the notes of "Taps" echo solemnly through the cemetery.

These ceremonial observances may be repeated when the deployed unit of the deceased service member returns to the United States. The family is invited to attend yet another memorial service, sometimes many months after their loved one has been buried.

Sometimes individual family members are not in agreement about funeral and burial arrangements, details of the disposal of personal effects, and receipt of military mementoes and honors. A soldier may be survived by a very young spouse who may not be well acquainted with the soldier's family of origin. Financial benefits (which can be considerable) are distributed according to the soldier's wishes and predetermined military policy. Before deployment, the soldier designates a person who will make funeral arrangements and decisions. Preexisting family conflicts may be significantly exacerbated if, for example, an ex-spouse receives the life insurance or a young girlfriend makes the funeral arrangements.

Media Attention and Political Protesters

It's hard enough losing someone, but losing them to a situation as politically charged as this? I'm not going to let anything take away from [my children's] father. They will know he wanted to go to Iraq and wanted to jump out of airplanes because he loved his country, but he loved us so much, too.

Crystal Becker
(Brown, 2007)

Because of the sometimes public nature of a combat death and the political nature of war, some families have been subjected to vindictive protests at their loved one's funeral and interment. Picketers have displayed extreme insensitivity by shouting at the bereaved family and waving signs telling the children and surviving spouse that God hates their country in general and their loved one in particular. The grieving family is subjected to this behavior at a time when they are least able to cope with the additional trauma.

I wonder how long this war is going to be in [my child's] face?

Mother of 11-year-old military survivor

After the funeral, the family is faced with images that can intensify their grief. Newscasts are filled with reports of death and descriptions of destruction. In an ongoing war, scenes from the combat zone are aired repeatedly. Children may be subjected to extensive media coverage not only of their loved one's death but of subsequent deaths as they occur.

Isolation from Peers in the Military Community

The American culture (which in reality is an umbrella for many different cultures within our borders) has a great reluctance to talk openly about death. We are one of the most "death-denying" cultures today. We simply do not like discussing death in any form. In fact, we don't even like to use the word "died" (Sims, 2006b).

Children who have been raised on military bases and have lost a parent are surrounded by other children whose parents are at risk. These other children may avoid the bereaved child because of their fear that their own parent may die. Mirroring the adults around them, they don't want to talk to the bereaved child.

A bereaved military child feels especially isolated when the deceased parent's unit returns home from a combat deployment. The child bears the pain of watching the joyful homecoming ceremonies and reunions of children with parents who are returning home alive and well. This painful and difficult event increases the child's feeling of isolation on the grief journey.

Isolation from the Military Community

If you are living in government housing as an authorized dependent, you are eligible to continue living in government housing for a year from the date of your loved one's death (Department of Defense, 2007,13).

Families that have suffered the tragic loss of a parent on active duty often move off base to be closer to remaining extended family. They are *required* to move off base within one year of the death. (Previously, such families had to move within the first month; the requirement was later extended to nine months.) Regardless of the timing, this is a drastic change for children who are accustomed to military life and the sense of pride and community that comes with it. This secondary loss greatly affects the military child—the stress of adapting to a new neighborhood and a new school adds to the stress of the grieving process.

One boy could not have been prouder when his father was named Army Aviator of the Year. Two months later, his dad was killed in a helicopter crash, and his family moved—away from the army he had grown up with, away from the sound of rotor blades, and away from the other kids who appreciated his father's national distinction. No one in his new school understood. The loss of identity, on top of the loss of a parent, is considered a secondary loss and the ongoing effects can be overwhelming (Gurian, Kamboukas, Levine, Pearlman, Wasser, 2006, 33). Just when they need familiarity and support the most, many of these children are taken away from everything familiar, from all their friends and the world they have grown up in. Many discover that they are grieving not only the loss of someone they love but also the loss of friendships, self-esteem, and self-identity (Sims, 2006a).

Civilian Reactions to Military Death

The bullies at my school would pick on me all the time and say, "Your dad was a pussy. He died for no reason."

Dakota Givens, 10-year-old military survivor
(Berkes, 2007)

Military children say that the civilian children in their schools don't understand the military culture and may torment them about not having a dad or mom. One 12-year-old told of being taunted by another boy in his class who said, "If your dad had done his job right, he wouldn't be dead." The bereaved boy was humiliated and deeply hurt. At school, he had no one to turn to, and he didn't want to worry his mother, who was already struggling as the surviving parent.

Other military youth have shared how difficult it is to deal with these hurtful comments. They may try to talk to teachers and counselors, but support in the school setting isn't as prevalent as it should be to assist active duty, National Guard, and Reserve families. Children need to feel that they have allies in their schools, churches, and communities while they grieve for their dead parent. External support is vital, since support is not always available from the surviving parent or a sibling who is also grieving.

Tension between Pride in Service and the Emotions of Grief

Most military survivors experience a dichotomy between the devastating negative emotions of grief and a feeling of immense pride in the accomplishments of the loved one. It is uncomfortable to speak of the pride outside the military context, because many civilians can't identify with it or mistake it for a lack of sorrow.

But despite the pride, all the usual emotions of grief are in evidence. Children often express guilt that they didn't write enough letters while their parent was deployed and remorse about not behaving well while Mom or Dad was away at war. They may feel anger toward the opposing combatants who caused the death, the government and its officials, or even the military itself, which sent their mother or father to war.

SPECIALIZED HELP FOR MILITARY GRIEF

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is the only nonprofit veterans service organization chartered solely to help those affected by the death of a loved one serving in the U.S. armed forces or in support of the military mission. The organization had its beginning in November 1992, as a result of a tragic military airplane accident over the skies of Juneau, Alaska. Brigadier General Tom Carroll and seven of his Army National Guard team

perished in the crash of a C-12 military aircraft, leaving behind eight widows and 14 children.

In the months and years following the loss of their loved ones, the survivors turned to various grief support organizations; but when they turned to each other for comfort and to share common fears and problems, they found new strength and the beginning of healing. They realized that the tragedy they shared was different from other types of losses: They shared pride in their spouses' service to the United States, as well as tremendous sadness at the ultimate sacrifice their loved ones had made (TAPS, 2007).

Because there was no national equivalent to this informal local support group for military survivors, TAPS was created. Over the years, it has grown from its modest beginnings to its current status as a national organization offering hope, healing, comfort, and care to thousands of U.S. armed forces families facing the death of a loved one. A significant part of the TAPS mission is to minister to the mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare of children who are part of a military family and have suffered the traumatic death of a parent.

Surviving parents have indicated that the most critical need for their families is an organized program of assistance for the children. TAPS has responded by creating the Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors. Each year, TAPS holds a grief support camp in Washington, D.C., over Memorial Day weekend. In addition to the national camp, regional camps are hosted at military bases and posts throughout the year. TAPS and its efforts on behalf of surviving children are known throughout the Department of Defense.

The Good Grief Camp

The Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors is the only national program focused on children who have lost a parent, sibling, or loved one in military service to the country. The camp gives youngsters a solid foundation on which to build a healthy future following the tragic loss of a parent in the military. The youth learn to rebuild their shattered lives and look to the future with hope. In the words of the TAPS motto, they "Remember the love, celebrate the life, share the journey."

Young survivors learn coping skills and discover that the feelings they are experiencing are normal reactions to an abnormal event—the untimely

death of a parent. At the Good Grief Camp, children find the courage to face the unthinkable together. TAPS uses four major elements to accomplish its mission:

- Age-based peer support groups
- Individual military mentors who partner with each child
- Coping strategies learned through activities and education (grief work)
- Ceremonies and rituals that honor the sacrifice of the military loved one

Age-based Peer Support Groups

Peer support groups provide opportunities for expression that helps grieving children and adolescents to understand their day-to-day needs for healing during the grieving process. Peer support groups offer children and teens a safe place to talk about similar feelings, thoughts, and experiences; provide emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental support in a nonjudgmental environment; and provide a forum to search for meaning about life and death as [they] find normalcy and commonality in their lives (Parga, 2007, 8).

At the Good Grief Camp, children are grouped according to age with others who have suffered a similar loss. This may be the first time they have met anyone else whose parent died in service to the country. Each child is also paired with an adult mentor. (This component of the program is discussed in the next section.) In addition to individual mentors, each age-based peer group has two group leaders. Generally, one is a person who works in the mental health field and the other has a background in the military culture. Both are experienced, qualified, mature, and trained in facilitating group interactions. With the help of the individual mentors, the group leaders encourage the children to talk freely about their losses.

The age-based support group provides a safe environment for the children to grieve together and share their loss in a way they may not have experienced before. Sharing and expressions of grief are encouraged in Circle Time. Children are greatly relieved to realize that they are not alone in their grief, and to be with other children who understand them without ridiculing, teasing, or

harassing them. A surprising number of children admit that they have never told anyone that their parent died. In fact, sometimes they tell people that he or she is still in Iraq and will be home later. At these camps they finally feel safe enough to talk about the loss. They know they are not alone as they tell their story to others who have lost a loved one in the armed forces.

At one of the regional camps, a 10-year-old girl said, "I have never told even my best friends about my dad's death because if I say it out loud or talk about it to anyone else, it means he is really not coming home. But I can talk about it here, because people understand and don't say they know what I am going through when they have no idea." She shared her story for the first time 11 months after her father was killed in Iraq.

Numerous teens have spoken about the feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt that surface each day as they try to find their place in the world. One said, "I don't know what to tell people about my dad. There are days that I feel like I'm in a fog. Other days, I feel that nothing is right. I'm worried that Mom is spending all our money and we won't have a place to live." Another teen shared that although she was 18 years old, she had never learned how to drive, because her dad promised that he would teach her when he returned from Iraq. When he didn't return, she didn't want to learn without him. Some teens talked about how painful it is for them to listen when their friends complain about their dads being hard on them or embarrassing them.

Therapy dogs trained in grief work are in attendance at the national camp in Washington, D.C. They give children a feeling of support, understanding, and acceptance. It is not uncommon to find children lying on the floor, petting the Labrador retrievers and telling the dogs about their sorrow. One young boy who was having difficulty participating in the peer group was allowed to go out into the hallway. He sat with two of the comfort dogs and told them the story of how his father had died. At the end of the story, he said to the dogs, "I don't want anyone else to know that I really miss my dad. But I know that you won't tell, right?" Talking to a dog is a start toward being able to share his feelings with a person.

The participants in each age-based support group share contact information. This helps to create a network of support and comfort that can carry the children far into the future. The young survivors can keep in touch for

birthdays, holidays, and the extremely difficult anniversaries of the deaths of their loved ones.

TAPS also networks with chaplains and other supportive peer mentors to allow the families to receive added assistance when they return home. In larger cities, Vet Centers (Readjustment Counseling Services of the Department of Veterans Affairs) provide bereavement support sessions for the families of deceased military members.

Through age-appropriate peer support groups, children and teens find what is lost, what is left, and what is possible. Through this process, children and adolescents bond, in a safe and secure climate in which information and self-confidence turns adversity into opportunity, as they learn about themselves and others. At most, friendships are made, and even in the difficult time of grief, tears and laughter are shared (Parga, 2007, 8).

Individual Military Mentors

Grieving children need to feel that they are being heard and understood.... Many young people will experience grief and trauma.... They need caring adults to create an oasis of safety to explore these sensitive experiences (Goldman, 2007,12).

At the Good Grief Camp, each child is paired with a volunteer military mentor. Most mentors at the annual Washington, D.C., camp come from the ranks of the Honor Guard, which is stationed nearby. These are the people who serve at Arlington National Cemetery as pallbearers or members of the firing party, or who present the service flag to the surviving spouse, child, or parent. Additional mentors come from the ranks of military spouses and retired military. A background check is performed, and the mentors attend a training event each year before the camp.

The mentors understand military culture and can explain all the military customs and courtesies to the children, to help them realize how highly the military values their sacrifice. The mentors allow the children to share whatever they are able to about their loved one—likes and dislikes, the fun they had with him or her, and the hurt and sorrow they are experiencing

with their loss. For four days, the mentor accompanies his or her buddy to all activities and on all field trips.

A concept that is familiar to military personnel but little known in the civilian world is the “battle buddy.” Each soldier who deploys to a distant location has a battle buddy—someone who will watch out for him and make sure he is doing well, both mentally and physically. A battle buddy understands that his partner will be there for him in difficult times, just as he will pick up the slack for his buddy when the need arises. The experience of caring for a battle buddy helps TAPS mentors as they work with their young charges.

Coping with Grief through Activities and Education

Children need age-appropriate information, skills to identify their emotions, and ways to express them in order to appropriately cope with death and grief. Size has nothing to do with the hurt in one's heart (Sims, 2006b).

Lesson plans for the camp incorporate accepted psychological strategies for coping with grief. Each child receives a copy of the official TAPS edition of *A Kid's Journey of Grief*, by Susan K. Beeney and Jo Anne Chung. This book is “a coloring and activity book for children of military families who never chose to travel down the path of grief, but, nevertheless, find themselves on the road” (Beeney, 2005, title page). The book uses the grief model of Dr. J. William Worden, which involves four tasks of mourning. The first task is to acknowledge the reality of the death of your loved one and understand that the grieving process will be difficult. The second is to experience, rather than avoid, the pain of loss. The third is to adjust to an environment that no longer includes your loved one. The fourth task is to devise ways to emotionally relocate your loved one in your heart, since the relationship can no longer be interactive (Beeney, 2005, 1).

The children learn to work through the pain of their grief as they express it in words, artwork, music, and with animals. They discover that they “feel some relief from expressing their inward thoughts outwardly” (Goldman, 2007, 12). The mentors and group leaders accompany the children on this journey by listening and being present for them. Younger children may be led in a guided discussion as they work through *A Kid's Journey of Grief*. In

the teen group, journaling, artwork, and music therapy are used.

Recently, camp activities have revolved around specific themes, such as “Seasons of Grief,” “Remembering Our Loved Ones,” and “The Circus of Grief and Loss.” Age-appropriate activities are developed to address why the child or teen is attending the camp, to explore the emotions of grief, and to create a memorial or tribute to the loved one.

Some activities allow the children to use their creativity to connect with and honor their loved one with stories, artwork, and poems. The poems and stories can be incorporated into songs that are sung in memory of the deceased. Other activities allow them to explore emotions. In one project, the children made stress balls using Play-Doh and balloons to cope with anxiety. In another, they cut out words from magazines and glued them to both the inside and outside of paper bags, expressing how they felt on the inside compared with what they showed to the world. Circus-themed activities were developed for the 2007 Good Grief Camp in conjunction with the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus. In a metaphoric journey through grief, the circus team helped children learn about keeping everything going in their lives by learning to spin plates; handling the many life challenges they were facing by learning to juggle; painting their face with a clown’s smile while they feel sad on the inside; and walking a tightrope to learn to have balance in their life.

Ceremonies and Rituals that Honor the Sacrifice

*Dear Dad, What is it like in heaven? What are you doing?
Does it really hurt when you die? Do you miss me? I LOVE
YOU! From Ryan.*

Message on a helium balloon
from a young military survivor

At the national Good Grief Camp, field trips are designed to show the young military survivors how much the country honors those who have died in service. They learn that their family is now a part of a national legacy, and that their loved ones will not be forgotten. The mentors help the children understand the history and significance of the war monuments. Recent camps have toured the Vietnam Wall, the World War II Memorial, the Korean War

Memorial, and Arlington National Cemetery. While on field trips with their mentors, the young survivors explore the importance of the funeral traditions that honored their loved ones: the rifle volley, the ceremonious folding of the flag, and the playing of “Taps.”

The field trips are designed to be interactive and participatory, allowing the children to join other Americans in honoring fallen war heroes. One year, roses were placed at the base of the Vietnam Wall. Each year, several children are chosen to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day. The wreath is made of red, white, and blue paper cutouts of each child’s handprint, on which they have written a message to their loved one. A trip to the Caisson Stables in Arlington National Cemetery allows young military survivors the experience of sitting on or hugging the specially trained horses that draw the caissons carrying the caskets in military funerals.

Senior military leaders spend time with the children during the course of the weekend. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff often visits. Other senior leaders host the group at nearby military installations, such as the Marine Barracks or Ft. Myer. The children come to understand the extent to which their loved one’s sacrifice is honored throughout the ranks.

A final ceremony at the camp is the launching of helium balloons containing messages to the loved one who has died. Children tie handwritten messages to their balloons and take them outdoors to release, accompanied by their mentors. In Washington, TAPS works with the air traffic control tower at Reagan National Airport. The messages to heaven are given priority for departure airspace: All air traffic is halted until the balloons are safely airborne. A 7-year-old survivor asked, “Do these balloons really go to heaven?” Her mentor said, “Well, they go pretty high” (Meadow, 2007, 27).

Self-care

No discussion about helping bereaved people would be complete without a few words on self-care. Often, the mentors who are chosen to be buddies for grieving children are combat veterans who are grieving their own losses. Members of the Honor Guard have experienced many funerals and provided military honors for many grieving families. Becoming TAPS mentors allows them to relate on a personal level to the children of fallen soldiers, sailors,

marines, airmen, and Coast Guard personnel. Many mentors say that in volunteering, they feel that they are fulfilling a commitment to their fallen battle buddies. Part of the U.S. Army Warrior Ethos states, “I will never leave a fallen comrade” (United States Army, 2007). Helping the family of a fallen comrade is a significant part of “never leaving.”

However, the volunteer work can take its toll on these young men and women. They are with the children all day and evening for four consecutive days. They are touched by the grief and pain they witness. At the end of the Good Grief Camp, a closing circle for mentors allows them to express their own sorrows and losses. They are given the support and resources they need for continuing the connection with “their” child.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “It is one of the most beautiful compensations in life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.” Many of the mentors return year after year. As one said, “These children give me the courage and strength to do my job each day with pride and respect. They are the real heroes.”

SUMMARY

The average American doesn’t understand the immense sacrifices military families make for the country. Being a military family requires a certain kind of commitment and dedication. When a parent in that family dies in service to his or her country, the rest of the family deserves the very best care possible. The military child, in particular, needs a caring adult to be present for him or her as the surviving parent struggles to regain some balance amid the grief and the added complications of a military death.

The military death requires a special type of grieving, allowing room for the customs and courtesies of the branch of service, the military honors, the assignment of a casualty assistance officer, and the certainty of relocation at some point. Hospices, school counselors, hospitals, and outpatient settings often need guidance to successfully help these military families and children. TAPS is a ready resource. Its mission statement includes helping all who have been affected by a death in the military.

Much can be learned from the U.S. military culture, including honoring the lives that were lived and taking pride in their accomplishments. The ceremony of a military burial service, with its history and traditions, provides

a tangible and visible symbol of honor, dignity, and respect. It also provides a fitting final salute that signals the end of one chapter and, with the help of programs like TAPS, the beginning of a new chapter of comfort and healing. That is the message—that we can survive the pain, cherish the memories, and gain strength from walking side by side down this painful journey of grief, alongside those who understand and care.

The children of the men and women who have died in service to the country are proud of their family members' military service. They are among the most worthy recipients of our help as they face the fears and struggles that may lie ahead for years to come. Listen to their stories so that they, too, can begin to heal. Help them as they strive to:

Remember the love, celebrate the life, share the journey.

Betsy Beard is a TAPS peer mentor and frequent contributor to *TAPS Magazine*. In her writing, she draws freely on her own experience of traumatic grief following the death of her only son, SPC Bradley S. Beard, who was killed in action during combat operations in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, on October 14, 2004. She lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with her husband Randy and their daughter Staci. Before Brad's death, she worked in various fields, including banking, substitute teaching, and medical laboratory technology.

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