

Speaker Notes

Supporting the Bereaved at Home and Down Range

Page 1 – Title Slide

- Sometimes it is difficult to know exactly what to do to support someone who is grieving.
- Today, we will look at different ways to provide comfort and support to those we love and care about who are experiencing a loss.
- First of all, in order to have an understanding of what the grieving person may be going through, we will take a look at what grief is and what the stages of grief are.

Page 2 – Objectives

None

Page 3 – Agenda

None

Page 4 – Introduction

None

Page 5 – Definition of Grief

- You do not have to be personally attached to the person you are grieving. The deceased could be a public figure or a victim of a disaster or violent act. In the military, it could even include service members from a unit other than your own.

Page 6 – Stages of Grief and Loss

- The five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with our loss. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. Not everyone goes through all of them or in a prescribed order and many times people will go through the different stages several times.
- These stages are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss. Our grief is as individual as our lives.
- Denial and shock: At first, it may be difficult to accept the death of a loved one. As a result, you will deny the reality of death. “This is not possible...there must be some mistake...that can’t be true.” At any moment, our loved one could reappear, or so we imagine. Time seems to briefly suspend itself. However, this denial will gradually diminish as you begin to express and share your feelings about death with others.
- Anger and emotional releases: During this stage, the most common question is asked “why me?” You are angry at what you perceive to be the unfairness of death, and you may project and displace your anger onto others. Some may turn their anger inwards and blame themselves for what happened. When given some social support and respect, you will eventually become less angry and more able to move into the next stage of grieving.
- Protest/bargaining: We may try to negotiate the situation, bargain with some sort of higher power. They probably try to bargain and offer to give up an enjoyable part of their lives in exchange for the return of the health or life of the lost person. “If you will reverse this, then I will ___ in return.” The sad truth is that things will not go back to the way they were before. And that’s when the next phase hits.

- Guilt: We may experience feelings of guilt for things we did or didn't do prior to the loss. It is important to forgive ourselves and accept our humanness.
- Depression/Loneliness: When we realize the loss is real and unchanging, we may sink into a deep sorrow. Mood fluctuations and feelings of isolation and withdrawal may follow. It takes time for the grieving person to gradually return to their old self and become socially involved in what's going on around them.
- Acceptance: Acceptance does not mean happiness. We may miss being able to share our life with that person, no matter how long it's been since their death. We will gradually let go of the struggle against the tide of emotions we experience, accept our new circumstances and find peace within ourselves.
- Hope: Eventually we will reach a point where remembering will be less painful and we can begin to look ahead to the future and more good times.

Page 7 – Emotional Symptoms of Grief

None

Page 8 – Physical Symptoms of Grief

None

Page 9 – Survivor's Guilt

- Civilians can also experience survivor's guilt, especially if they have survived a national or natural disaster.
- A person may question why they survived, and even blame themselves for surviving a traumatic event, as if they did something wrong.

Page 10 – Understanding the Effects of Guilt

- Intensify trauma and grief: Feeling guilty about what you might or might not have done can magnify both the trauma and grief that's experienced.
- Immobilize a person mentally, emotionally and physically: When you are "stuck" in the guilt can lead to an inability to act and take care of what needs to be taken care of.
- Hinder well-being, productive action and positive relationships: Guilt feelings can begin to take a toll on relationships; the down or angry mood begins to affect those around the person. Guilt makes taking productive action difficult, and it is difficult to have a sense of well-being when guilt consumes a person.
- Keep the guilt ridden person "stuck": A person sometimes continues to stay stuck because they feel guilty about feeling happy, and therefore won't allow themselves to experience happiness. Guilt keeps a person from moving forward with their lives and doing what needs to be done.

Page 11 – What to Say

None

Page 12 – What Not to Say

- Although well intentioned, these are typically statements that are not helpful and tend to minimize what the grieving person is going through. It is enough to just acknowledge their loss, let them know how very sorry you are, and let them know you are there to help and listen when they need you.

Page 13 – Tips for Helping the Bereaved

- Accept and acknowledge their feelings: Listen with compassion and don't question their feelings; just listen. Let them know it's ok to cry in front of you
- Be comfortable with silence: The person may not feel like talking. If you can't think of anything to say, just sit silently with them. You may offer a hug or touch their hand if they are comfortable with that.
- Let them tell their story: The person may need to tell their story many times. This is a way of processing their grief, and for some it is very important. Be patient.
- Don't minimize the loss: Don't compare the grief you may have experienced with theirs. Don't tell them everything will be ok, or that the person is in a better place.
- Be patient: The grieving person's mood may change back and forth from sadness to anger to contentment. Just listen and accept that this is part of the process.
- Offer to help out, but be specific: People can become overwhelmed when they are grieving and not be able to think about what it is they need help with. Offer to write letters, send e-mails, or make phone calls on their behalf; bring food; offer to clean their house, pick up groceries; etc.
- Keep in contact: Call them or send cards, letters or e-mails now and then just to let them know you are thinking about them.

Page 14 – Tips for Helping the Bereaved (Continued)

- Realize that their grief may last a very long time: Remember there is no time limit on grief and there is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- Accept that you don't "get over" the death of someone you care about; you just learn to move on: Don't expect them to just "get over it." Even though people learn to cope and move on, there may always be an empty space in their heart for the person they lost.
- Don't worry if you don't know what to say: Sometimes there are no words. Just your presence is enough.
- Let them know their thoughts and feelings are normal: Sometimes people who are grieving begin to feel that the thoughts and up and down feelings they have are something to be concerned about. It's important to let them know that their reactions are completely normal considering the situation they are in.
- Continue with support after the funeral: After the funeral, the bereaved is still grieving, but the support is often not as consistent as prior to the funeral. It's important to stay in touch by phone or e-mail or periodically send a "thinking of you card." Remember, they will have good days and bad days. Knowing others are still thinking about them will help on the bad days.

Page 15 – Subtitle Slide

None

Page 16 – When the Bereaved is Down Range

- Distance is the biggest challenge: It can be frustrating for you and for the bereaved when they are down range. The initial urge in a situation like this is to reach out and hug the person, and it can be frustrating and painful for you when this isn't possible.

Page 17 – Supporting the Bereaved Down Range

- When the bereaved are down range, encourage them to seek help from a chaplain or their command.

Page 18 – When the Bereaved Should Seek Help

None

Page 19 – Taking Care of Yourself

- Supporting someone who is grieving can be stressful, and it is easy to get overwhelmed if you are not taking care of yourself.

Page 20 – Taking Care of Yourself (Continued)

None

Page 21 – Summary

None

Page 22 – Questions

None

Page 23 – Resources

None

Page 24 – References

None

Page 25 – Thank You

None

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