



Department of the Air Force RESILIENCE

SUPPORTING BOTH OUR AIR AND SPACE FORCES AND FAMILIES



Prevention - #3

Death

DEATH OF SOMEONE CLOSE/UNIT MEMBER

When someone close dies, intense emotions are usually experienced. Death of someone close can be associated with other stressors, including changes in routine, loss of emotional support, increased responsibility, and financial loss. Grief reactions are very personal and vary in the amount of time required for grieving. Many survivors experience stages of denial, anger, and depression before finally accepting the loss. Remember that there is no “right” way to grieve and that grief can be manifested in many ways and last for several months. It may even resurface on the anniversary of the death or other significant dates related to the individual who has passed, such as his/her birthday or wedding anniversary. Grief reactions may also reappear unexpectedly in response to things that remind the individual of the person who has died.

Signs Wingmen Should Know/Look For

- The survivor has few social supports.
- The survivor has a history of mental health issues or difficulty coping.
- The death precipitates other hardships, such as financial stressors.
- The survivor seems unusually devastated by loss or does not resume normal functioning within a reasonable period of time.

Recommended Wingman Action

- Be aware that significant loss can be a trigger for thoughts of suicide.
- Be particularly attentive to wingman role.
- Avoid spreading rumors about the death.
- Mobilize social support to assist the individual/family while grieving.
- Be vigilant for unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol or drug abuse.
- Maintain awareness of the survivor’s status even after the initial adjustment period has passed.
- Communicate any concerns to leadership.
- Ensure personnel are aware of the availability of helping resources such as the chaplain and other mental health resources.

Leadership Considerations

- Be aware of functioning of surviving family and mobilize unit to meet needs.
- Provide basic information to unit members regarding the death while ensuring protection of the privacy of the deceased individual and their family. Be careful to avoid placing blame, passing judgment, or speculating on the causes of accidental death or suicide.
- Consult with Public Affairs regarding any public statements about the death.
- Be aware of potential safety issues among survivors who are very distressed and take steps to ensure safety.



- Consult with the Mental Health Clinic (MHC) if there are any concerns about possible suicidal ideation, or if reaction to death does not resolve in a reasonable amount of time or interferes with duty performance.
- Participate in the funeral service when appropriate.
- When the deceased is a unit member, consider requesting the assistance of the Disaster Mental Health Team (DMH) as appropriate.
- Assign a Family Assistance Representative (FAR) to assist the surviving family.
- Inform personnel who are away from the unit at the time.