

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

TAPS®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS MAGAZINE | FALL 2022



WHAT'S INSIDE: WHEN SMALL TALK IS A BIG ISSUE ★ HEALING AFTER A SUICIDE LOSS
LEARNING, GROWING, AND HEALING THROUGH PEER MENTORING

Daily Reflection

with Dr. Alan Wolfelt

"To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring."

- GEORGE SANTAYANA

Fall is upon us. Once again, the seasons are changing.
Time marches ever forward.

I love fall, so I generally look forward to September.
But today, Mr. Santayana has me considering that maybe I should work on cultivating an appreciation for the ever-changing nature of life.

Death is change. For those left behind, it's a hard change — but it's also inevitable and, sometimes, expected. Grieving is our process of learning to live with the change, to embrace our new normal.

We were hopelessly in love with the people who died.
Yet like spring, they came...then they left. Can we learn to be interested in what we are experiencing now? We are trying.

I am working on being interested in the now of life.

I am working on embracing change.



Our TAPS Daily Reflection with Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a daily email that will deliver the power of hope and comfort to you. Subscribe now to receive this daily dose of inspiration in your email inbox each morning.



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BRING HOPE TO SURVIVORS**

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TAPS PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- ★ 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline
 - ★ Peer-Based Support Network
 - ★ Survivor Care Team
- ★ Community-Based Care Connection
 - ★ Casework & Benefits Assistance
 - ★ Suicide & Illness Loss Support
 - ★ Grief & Trauma Resources
 - ★ Education Support Services
- ★ TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®
 - ★ Online Community
 - ★ Care Groups
- ★ Regional & National Seminars
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 - ★ Women's Empowerment
 - ★ Men's Program
 - ★ Young Adults Program
- ★ Youth Programs: Good Grief Camps
 - ★ Family Camps
 - ★ College Experience Program
 - ★ Sports & Entertainment Events
- ★ Publications: Magazines, Newsletters, & Blogs



ON THE COVER

In May 2022, surviving women at least 3 years out from their loss gathered in Boone, NC, for the TAPS Blue Ridge Mountains Women's Empowerment Retreat.

PHOTO: SUZIE PINERO, TAPS COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

ABOUT TAPS

Caring for the Families of America's Fallen Heroes

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we are a family of military survivors ready to embrace and connect all who grieve the death of a military loved one with resources, services, and programs. TAPS provides support to survivors regardless of the manner of death, the duty status at the time of death, the survivor's relationship to the deceased, or the survivor's phase in their grief journey. At TAPS, we open our hearts and resources to the world with our award-winning programs and services to support all military bereaved. TAPS is fortunate to work with leading experts in the fields of grief, bereavement, trauma, and peer support to integrate decades of research on military grief into action to help heal hearts.

At TAPS, we:

Honor and Remember: We cherish the lives of our military loved ones and celebrate military survivors as the living legacies of their service and sacrifice.

Empower: We empower survivors with healthy coping skills, resources, and opportunities to connect in the comfort of their home, their community, their region, and the nation to grow with their grief.

Connect: We connect all those grieving a military death 24/7 to a nationwide network of peer-based, emotional survivor support and critical casework assistance.

Educate: We inform and educate using research-informed best practices in bereavement and trauma care for survivors and advocate on behalf of survivors with policy and legislative priorities.

Create Community: We build community with survivors to provide comprehensive comfort, care, and resources where they live, when they need it, and in a manner comfortable for them.

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TAPS exceeds industry standards for financial accountability and out performs most charities. We are proud to have received many of the top nonprofit charity ratings available today. Our donors should be confident they are supporting an organization that is financially healthy, accountable, and transparent.



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To our TAPS families,



We have been given an extraordinary gift — a gift that provides support, understanding and hope when we need it most. A gift that offers the comfort of knowing we are not alone and we have a loving community to call “home.” It is the gift of family — your TAPS Family. We are present for each other in times of difficulty and joy; we share our experiences and of course, we possess an endless supply of hugs!

That’s the heart of it all. We found each other because someone we love with our entire soul has died, and we are bonded forever because their precious life included selfless service to their country. We honor and remember them always.

Like family, we are ever-present. The TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline is available for you to call anytime. Whether the dark hours of the night, significant anniversaries or the holiday season, there is a caring person patiently waiting to provide you their time, attention and care.

Our TAPS Casework Team will advocate for you and have your back when you don’t have anywhere else to turn. We have “family reunions” at our Survivor Seminars, Good Grief Camps, TAPS Togethers and Care Groups. The TAPS Peer Mentor network is our buddy system, making sure you don’t have to be out there alone. We have a great sports program through teams4taps that takes us out to the ballpark or stadium for family outings.

Consider this magazine a place where you can catch up on what everyone is up to, be inspired by your fellow survivors and make plans to share time with the most loving, caring, kind people you could ever hope to count as kin.

This Fall issue of our TAPS Magazine is filled with survivor stories, articles to honor our heroes, and information to help you navigate your grief journey. Within these pages, it is our hope that you find comfort and strength.

Years may pass and seasons may come and go. Wherever you are in your life, you always have a safe space. Space that allows you to be where and who you need to be. Space to nourish and energize your soul.

This is a beautiful family, and I am honored to share this journey with you.

With so much love and hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Bonnie".

Bonnie Carroll ★ TAPS President and Founder

Dear TAPS...

SUPPORT NETWORK

I can't tell you how much it means...just knowing I have this support network brings me strength and comfort. What I truly cherish, though, are the communications I receive from you. From Tyler's birthday, to National Siblings Day, to Thanksgiving and Christmas, and the anniversary of his death, you remember them all. It means so much to know other people continue to honor Tyler's memory with me. I received the below message from you all on National Siblings Day in 2017 and it deeply moved me. I have it saved and look to it for comfort when I really start to miss him. In particular, I wanted you all to know how much I appreciate the thought and care you put into these notes. I write donor communications for a nonprofit, and I know that sometimes they can feel like they are just a drop in the bucket. So I wanted you to know that at least to one person, they mean the world.

"We are meant to grow old with our siblings — experiencing life together, sharing each other's dreams and achievements, crying for each other's heartbreaks and enjoying a few pranks along the way. When a brother or sister dies, that relationship doesn't end. Our relationship doesn't look the way we ever imagined, but they're still our siblings, still inspiring us, motivating us, annoying us. We can still create beautiful, new memories. We can

still draw strength from them and know they would be proud of us. We can carry them in our hearts, and we can honor them in the way we live. We can choose to celebrate both the relationship we had and the legacy they left behind."

Veronica Spake

Surviving Sister of U.S. Coast Guard
ET3 William "Tyler" Spake

TAPS TOGETHERS

It was amazing and wonderful to host the TAPS Together. I had a great time with everyone, including our new survivors. The TAPS family always has a special place in my heart and I am so grateful to be with them. Sharing our thoughts with each other helps us on our grief journey. Being with my fellow survivors makes me realize that no matter how hard our grief journey may be, we can still smile, laugh and be able to talk about our loved ones. We will always talk about good memories and the way they lived not the way they died. We enjoyed our time together and discussed other places to visit and things to do at our next TAPS Together outing.

Allen Burton

Surviving Spouse of U.S. Army
Staff Sergeant Jeffrey Wayne Burton

ONLY LOVE

This is a group of the most caring, kind, understanding and nonjudgemental people I have ever seen. TAPS has been the single most influential contributor to my surviving and learning to cope again after the loss of my son. I attended events where TAPS has put me up, fed me, honored my son, and exposed me to the



trinkets of hope and tools for learning to live again. I have received unsolicited acts of kindness, such as phone calls, checking on how I am doing or gifts just letting me know that someone cares and gets it. And the care and love I see expressed is for all ages, all relationships to the lost hero, and for survivors of every kind of loss imaginable. No stigma. No condescension. Only love.

Robyn Wixom

Surviving Mother of U.S. Army
Sergeant Trevor Cole Wixom

TAPS IS ALWAYS THERE

My husband had been gone for over 1 year... and I felt I hadn't truly — grieved. I was too busy with kids. And life. And then... it just suddenly hit me. I was overcome with emotion, and felt I had no one to turn to. I looked at the TAPS magnet on my refrigerator and decided to pick up the phone. I cried and cried to the sweet woman who spoke to me. And she just LISTENED. She didn't try to explain, or judge me, or tell me how to get over it. She just really listened. And supported how I was feeling. And it was one of the most therapeutic, impactful experiences of my life.

Jessica Campbell

Surviving Spouse of U.S. Marine Corps
Sergeant Jerrod S. Campbell



Visit [TAPS.org/DearTAPS](https://www.taps.org/DearTAPS) to submit your TAPS experience and share hope and encouragement with others.



WHEN SMALL TALK *is* A BIG ISSUE

Emily Muñoz ✨ TAPS Director of Health & Wellness
Surviving Spouse of U.S. Army Cpt. Gilbert Anthony Muñoz

Traveling the country to host Regional Seminars, the TAPS team hears about the sense of freedom that comes from connecting with other people who understand. At TAPS events, you can be yourself — the armor can come off; the mask can fall away. As this happens, our bonds as a TAPS family strengthen and grow. And then, Sunday rolls around, and with it comes the real world — and some of us need that armor back. We don't want to send you home with your same heaviness. We want you to find safety and hope with us, and we want to help you create this in the worlds to which you must return — with fresh tools in hand.

It's the shared experience of grief, and the easy nature of our seminars, that facilitate open communication during our time together. We get to stop "faking it," let go of suppressed emotions, and — most importantly — we can say what we actually mean without the impulse to censor for the audience, for manners, or for time. We get to, in many ways, let go of the small talk.

It's repeated comments like, "I'm fine" and "One day at a time" that wear us down in our daily lives. These are the casual exchanges that are further complicated by distractions, scarcity of time, and lack of emotional energy.

You are tired of having to answer big questions during small talk. When we're grieving, it's an even larger drain on our emotional reserves. Instead of using energy to heal and process, we're using those resources to manage small talk. We associate small talk with not really caring, but with just being polite. It's an exchange of pleasantries, not a real connection.

It's not just us. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, T.S. Eliot famously laments about small talk. The character in his poem, Prufrock, finds small talk tedious, stifling, and isolating. He fantasizes about injecting meaning into conversations. When faced with the grind of repetition, shallow interactions, and people who just aren't trying, he considers shock value as a way to actually connect — a way to force communication.

Haven't we all thought about the potential shock value of what we're really thinking? How many times have we been saying one thing while our brains start screaming, "Do you really want to know how I am?" Or maybe someone asks about another family member, a child, or a spouse, and

"HOW ARE YOU DOING?"

"THE WEATHER TODAY..."

"MY SON JUST..."

"DID YOU SEE THE NEW ...?"

Instead of using energy to heal and process, we're using those resources to manage small talk. We associate small talk with not really caring, but with just being polite. It's an exchange of pleasantries, not a real connection.





that's when it happens. Your mouth answers with pleasant words, while your brain replays meltdowns, nightmares, and a widowed-parent experience on the first day of school. And since that feels like too much, we go through the motions of small talk.

The problem is that grief longs for connection, even though real communication often requires emotional energy we might not have. But when we leave an interaction that consists of nothing but small talk, do we feel any more connected to the world? More cared about or more detached? Have we allowed unburdening, compassion, or empathy? Even if it's easier, is it what we really need when we are struggling with hopelessness and loneliness?

Prufrock dreams of interrupting the exchange of pleasantries, even at the risk of alienating other people. He imagines that, even if other people turn away angered or uncertain, they will at least have seen a glimpse of his intense inner life. And haven't we all been there, too — wanting to rip the mask off, to show people what it's really like, to stop wearing the grief game face just long enough for someone to get that we're not okay?

Despite temptations to yell everything from "I hated your casserole!" or "Stop complaining about your husband!" to "Only tell me one to two things about your exceptional children!" we really do risk alienating our support system. We're stuck trying to find the easiest way out. The things we often most desperately need to express are the very things that are most difficult to say. What grief wants us to own is hard to say and hard to hear.

However, yelling our deepest, most vulnerable thoughts at an acquaintance in front of the meat counter at the Piggly Wiggly may not be the most constructive route. It may feel good for a minute, but (and I really hate to say this) venting is not communicating. So, we're back to feeling isolated, separate, embarrassed, and probably a little bit wistful for the time when we weren't the crazy people yelling in the Piggly Wiggly. Moreover, your acquaintance did not deserve that (even if she did have makeup on, or even if his son did get assigned to fly fighters). If others don't know what's screaming in our minds, how do we know what's racing around in theirs? Small talk leaves everyone a little worse for the wear — a little more tired, a little more run-down, a little lonelier.

So what is the alternative? It's big talk. Great Talk. It's in-depth and honest. Great Talk demands vulnerability and requires conveying feelings, not just descriptions. Great Talk feeds our souls, helps us understand, yet move beyond our own pain, and keeps us invested. You know what this feels like if you've ever been to a TAPS event. This is part of what makes it difficult to come home — to face again that the Great Talk that is so easy around your TAPS family yields to timid small talk.

Why is this? Because Great Talk can be difficult to undertake during a parking lot chat, a church hallway hug, or a grocery store encounter. This is why metaphors can be useful to bridge the gap between small talk and Great Talk.

Metaphors give us a way to explain how we feel without explaining why. They create an instant connection with the other person

in the conversation because you're asking them to be a part of the story, to find a way to relate to you.

Most people can understand the feeling of being on a roller coaster or imagine the last time they felt their stomachs jump into their throats. Most people can develop a mental image, or even a movie reference, for being scared and seasick and looking for a lighthouse, or the shore.

As Dr. Frank Campbell, a grief professional and TAPS Advisory Board member, explains, the use of metaphors creates common ground. It not only starts a conversation, but it continues it. And, it creates congruence — what you're thinking is what you're saying. Instead of feeling isolated and misunderstood, we create space for empathy, compassion, and connection.

Imagine the possibilities, if each of our encounters felt like Great Talk — if we were able to take off the armor and live instead in the truths and triumphs of our grief. With each metaphor, we gain new possibilities to express, explain, and even invite. Come join us, and expand your own emotional language. We want to hear you say, "Great Talk."



Hershel Woodrow "Woody" Williams

AN AMERICAN HERO AND FRIEND TO GOLD STAR FAMILIES



Chad Graham, Woody's grandson, has been tirelessly supporting the mission of the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument, and has worked closely with TAPS to bring hope and healing to the families of our nation's fallen heroes.



From the Medal of Honor citation for Woody Williams:

For his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as demolition sergeant serving with the 21st Marines, 3d Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima, Volcano Islands, 23 February 1945. His unyielding determination and extraordinary heroism in the face of ruthless enemy resistance were directly instrumental in neutralizing one of the most fanatically defended Japanese strongpoints encountered by his regiment and aided vitally in enabling his company to reach its objective. Cpl. Williams' aggressive fighting spirit and valiant devotion to duty throughout this fiercely contested action sustain and enhance the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

This summer, our community lost a hero who had become a familiar face to surviving military families. Hershel "Woody" Williams was a Marine whose uncommon valor was equaled by his uncommon kindness. A Medal of Honor recipient, his compassion and his peer-based understanding of loss and grief were learned at a young age and only grew during World War II, through both his Western Union work delivering life-shattering telegrams to Gold Star families and his military service fighting in the Pacific.

During the eight decades that followed the war, Woody continued to embrace the loved ones of our nation's fallen heroes with his

compassion and understanding. And across the nation, through the Woody Williams Foundation, he has placed Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments to honor all those who served and died and remember the families they loved and left behind. Initially the foundation's goal was to establish a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument in Woody's home state of West Virginia. Once that monument was complete, a new mission became clear to Woody and those at the Woody Williams Foundation: Establish these monuments in as many communities as possible in all 50 states and U.S. territories. Today, there are 106 Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments all across America, with 70 more in progress.

"Woody carved in stone that which he always carried in his heart. And in our hearts, we carry him now too—an uncommon hero with an unending legacy."

Bonnie Carroll, TAPS President and Founder



Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments are a two-sided tribute made of black granite. One side bears the words: Gold Star Families Memorial Monument, a tribute to Gold Star Families and Relatives who sacrificed a Loved One for our Freedom. The other side tells a story through the four granite panels: Homeland, Family, Patriot, and Sacrifice. At the center of this tribute, is a silhouette of a saluting service member which represents the Legacy of the Loved Ones who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for our Freedom. Together, these features tell each community's unique story based upon the pillars of the foundation.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF

Ten Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart

PART 4 of 4

Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD ★ TAPS Advisory Board

*This article is the fourth installment of a four-part series excerpted and greatly condensed from Dr. Wolfelt's classic book, *Understanding Your Grief*, first published in 1992. This series covers Dr. Wolfelt's Ten Touchstones: essential physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual signs for mourners to seek out on their journey through grief.*

THE TEN ESSENTIAL TOUCHSTONES:

1. Open to the Presence of Your Loss
2. Dispel Misconceptions about Grief
3. Embrace the Uniqueness of Your Grief
4. Explore Your Feelings of Loss
5. Understand the Six Needs of Mourning
6. Recognize You Are Not Crazy
7. Nurture Yourself
8. Reach Out for Help
9. Seek Reconciliation, Not Resolution
10. Appreciate Your Transformation

TOUCHSTONE EIGHT REACH OUT FOR HELP

I've said that the wilderness of your grief is *your* wilderness and that it's up to you to find your way through it. That's true. But paradoxically, you also need companionship as you journey. You need people who will walk beside you and help provide you with divine momentum. You do not need people who want to walk in front of you and lead you down the path they think is right, nor do you need people who want to walk behind you and not be present to your pain.

It's true that sharing your pain with others won't make it disappear. You have probably



learned that already. But I promise you that it will, over time, make it more bearable. What's more, reaching out for help also connects you to other people and strengthens the bonds of love that make life seem worth living again.

WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

Friends and family members can often form the core of your support system. Seek out people who encourage you to be yourself and who acknowledge your many thoughts and feelings about the death. What you need most now are caring, nonjudgmental listeners.

You may also find comfort in talking to a **spiritual leader**. If you belong to a faith tradition, you may want to make an appointment with a leader at your

church, temple, mosque, or other place of worship. If your spiritual beliefs are more eclectic or secular, you might find it helpful to talk to a humanist clergyperson or seeker dedicated to spiritual growth and higher consciousness.

For many grieving people, **support groups** are one of the best helping resources. In a group of fellow travelers, you can connect with others who have had similar experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

A **professional grief counselor** may also be a very helpful addition to your support system. In fact, a trained counselor can be something friends and family members often can't — an objective listener. A counselor's office can be that safe haven where you can let go of any feelings you're afraid to express elsewhere. What's more, a



good counselor will then help you constructively channel those emotions.

Remember, help comes in different forms for different people. The trick is to find the combination that works best for you and then make use of it.

REACHING OUT WHEN YOUR GRIEF IS COMPLICATED

Complicated grief isn't abnormal or pathological. It's simply normal, necessary grief that has gotten amplified, stuck, or off track somehow. It has encountered barriers or detours of one kind or another, and as a result has become stalled, waylaid, or denied altogether.

You might be at risk for complicated grief depending on:

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DEATH

Your grief might naturally be complicated if the person you love died suddenly or unexpectedly, if a younger person died, or if the death was violent, self-inflicted, or ambiguous (such as an uncertain cause of death or an unrecoverable or missing body).

Your personality and mental wellness

If you are carrying unreconciled grief from previous life losses, or if you have a tendency toward depression, anger, or low self-esteem, you may be more susceptible to a complicated grief experience.

Your relationship with the person who died

An intensely close relationship to the person who died can trigger complicated grief, as can ambivalent relationships and relationships marked by dysfunction, abuse, mental-health issues, and separation.

Your use of drugs or alcohol

Drugs or alcohol overuse may suppress your feelings connected with the loss, thus short-circuiting what might otherwise be a normal and healthy grief journey.

If you feel like you're experiencing complicated or traumatic grief, you simply need some extra help encountering the six needs of mourning. I recommend you see a grief therapist for a few sessions, then take it from there. Grief counselors can range from clinical therapists to clergy, hospice caregivers, funeral home aftercare staff, and even laypeople. Grief therapists, on the other hand, have specific clinical training, experience, and interest in grief therapy. For people challenged by complicated grief, I recommend looking for a grief therapist.

TOUCHSTONE NINE SEEK RECONCILIATION, NOT RESOLUTION

"Reconciliation" is the term I find most appropriate for the healing that develops as you work to integrate the loss. We as human

beings don't resolve or recover from our grief but instead become reconciled to it.

With reconciliation comes full acknowledgment of the reality of the death. Beyond a cognitive working through of the death, there is also an emotional and spiritual accommodation. What had been understood at the head level is now understood at the heart level. Energy and confidence are renewed, and the desire to become reinvolved in the activities of living is reawakened. There is also a deepening wisdom about the fact that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary, parts of life.

But keep in mind that reconciliation doesn't just happen. It's an active, intentional process. You reach it through deliberate mourning, by:

- Talking it out
- Crying it out
- Writing it out
- Thinking it out
- Playing it out
- Painting (or sculpting, etc.) it out
- Dancing it out
- Etcetera!

SIGNS OF RECONCILIATION

- » A recognition of the reality and finality of the death
- » A return to stable eating and sleeping patterns

- » A sense of release from the person who died. You will have thoughts about the person, but you will not be preoccupied by these thoughts
- » The enjoyment of experiences in life that are normally enjoyable
- » The establishment of new and healthy relationships
- » The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect
- » The drive to organize and plan your life toward the future
- » The serenity to be comfortable with the way things are rather than attempting to make things as they were
- » The versatility to welcome more change in your life
- » The awareness that you have allowed yourself to authentically, fully grieve and mourn — and you have survived
- » The understanding that you do not get over your grief but instead learn to live with the new reality
- » The acquaintance with new parts of yourself that you have discovered in your grief journey
- » The adjustment to new role changes that have resulted from the loss of the relationship
- » The acknowledgment that the pain of loss is intrinsic to the privilege of giving and receiving love
- » A sense of renewed meaning and purpose

MANAGING YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Movement toward reconciliation in grief is often draining and exhausting. It also can take a very long time. Many grieving people have unrealistic expectations about how readily they should be feeling forward momentum, and when it takes much longer and involves a lot more hard work than they ever imagined, they sometimes experience a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.



If you're feeling doubtful or hopeless, consider if you've consciously or unconsciously set a timetable for reconciliation. Ask yourself questions like, "Have I mistakenly given myself a deadline for when I should be 'over' my grief? Am I expecting myself to heal more quickly than is possible?" If the answer to such questions is yes, recognize that you could be hindering your own healing by expecting too much of yourself too soon.

CHOOSING HOPE FOR YOUR HEALING

In addition to grief work, permitting yourself to have hope is central to achieving reconciliation. As we've said, hope is trust in a good that is yet to be.

Refusing to give in to despair may be the greatest act of hope there is. Yes, you have gone to the wilderness. Darkness may seem to surround you. But also rising up within you is the profound awareness that the pain of your grief is an inextricable part of the love you shared with the person who died. Your love is still there. You are still here. You have an unknown number of precious days left on this earth to honor that love and find ways to love others—and yourself—even better. And so you choose to hope and to work on.

TOUCHSTONE TEN APPRECIATE YOUR TRANSFORMATION

Especially if you've made it through the early days and are a few months or

more into your grief journey, I'm certain you are discovering that you are being transformed by the experience. Your inner form is changing. You are likely growing in your wisdom, understanding, and compassion.

Don't get me wrong. I understand that any growth you may be experiencing resulted from something you would have preferred to avoid. While I have come to believe that our greatest gifts often do come from our wounds, these are not wounds we masochistically go looking for. I often call it "enforced life learning."

CHANGE IS GROWTH

We as human beings are forever changed by the death of someone important to us. You may discover that you are developing new attitudes. You may be developing new skills. You may be learning to fix your own technology problems or cook a nice meal. You may be arriving at new insights and decisions about how to live your new life. To the extent that you are different, you can say you have grown.

BEFRIENDING IMPERMANENCE IS GROWTH

Life is constant change, which means the circumstances in which we love and are attached to things are also constantly changing. No matter how hard we try to manage risk and control our destinies, things inevitably happen that turn our lives upside-down. The journey through grief is in part a reckoning with the transitory nature of life. The more you come to reconcile yourself to the constancy of change, the more conscious you become.

FINDING A NEW NORMAL IS GROWTH

While your work of mourning will help you regain some sense of normalcy, it is a new normal. Grieving people sometimes remark to me that they never would have predicted their current life. As they set off to find a new normal, they got caught up in new interests and met new people. But even for those griever whose lives look more or less the same from the outside, there is a shift to a new normal inside. There is a new inner balance.



EXPLORING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LIFE IS GROWTH

Your loss experiences have a tendency to transform your values and priorities. What you may have thought of as being important may not matter any longer. You may also find yourself questioning your religious and spiritual values. Exploring these questions is hard but can ultimately make your assumptions about life richer and more life-affirming.

EMBRACING VULNERABILITY IS GROWTH

When we learn to embrace vulnerability in grief, we learn to be OK with expressing our deepest, truest feelings. We learn to openly share our souls with others. We learn to be genuine and authentic. And when all of this happens, miracles unfold. To be vulnerable is to take risks to reach for what we want in life. There is no other way to get where we want to go. And even though we sometimes make mistakes and things don't always unfold as we wish they would, the rewards of wielding vulnerability are ultimately so much greater than the deadening missed opportunities of staying closed-up and safe.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO LIVE

Sorrow is an inseparable dimension of our human experience. We suffer after a loss because we are human and we are privileged to love. And in our suffering, we are transformed. While it hurts to suffer the loss of someone we love, the alternative is apathy. Apathy literally means the inability to suffer, and it results in a lifestyle that avoids human relationships to avoid suffering.

Yes, you have to do your work of mourning and discover how you are changed. You have to live not only for yourself but also, I believe, for the precious person in your life who has died — to work on their unfinished work and to realize their unfinished dreams. What if the person who died could return to see what you are doing with your life? What if they are somehow watching you right now? Would they be proud of you? Would they believe that their life and death brought meaning and purpose to your life? Or would they see you dying before you are dead?

No matter how deep your grief or how anguished your soul, bereavement does not free you from your responsibility to live until you die. The gift of life is so precious and ephemeral. Choose life!

DOING THE WORK — TODAY AND TOMORROW

Depending on where you are in your grief journey, you may not be ready to fully engage with or feel inspired and encouraged by the contents of this section on transformation. Yet even if this is the case for you, I believe it can help you hold onto hope for what can and will be if you continue to do the hard work of active, intentional, hopeful mourning.

If you're beginning to experience and embrace glimmers of the transformations we've been discussing in this touchstone, I want you to know I see you and applaud the work you have no doubt done. Either way, you are where you are today, and there is more work to be done tomorrow. The sun will rise again, and with the new day will come new opportunities and miracles.

Editor's Note

This article is the fourth installment of a four-part series excerpted and greatly condensed from the second edition of Dr. Wolfelt's classic *Understanding Your Grief*, first published in 1992. Recently published in September 2021, *Understanding Your Grief — Second Edition* adds brief passages on topics ranging from vulnerability, soulmate grief, and complicated grief to mindfulness, the power of ritual, and more to the original best seller.



Visit taps.org/magazine to visit the first 3 parts of this series:

- Part 1: Fall 2021 Issue
- Part 2: Spring 2022 Issue
- Part 3: Summer 2022 Issue

While this article series will give you a taste of *Understanding Your Grief — Second Edition*, you will find the entire book a helpful companion at centerforloss.com. It is also available in a daily reader version titled *365 Days of Understanding Your Grief*.

About the Author

An internationally noted author, educator, grief counselor, and TAPS Advisory Board Member, Dr. Wolfelt serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the University of Colorado Medical School Department of Family Medicine faculty. He has written many books that help people mourn. Visit centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to find Dr. Wolfelt's books.





TAPS Sports & Entertainment

SEEING MY SON SMILE

A LETTER OF THANKS

Dear teams4taps,

I would like to thank you for organizing yesterday's event.

My wife, kids and I went to the New England Patriots training camp event yesterday not knowing what to expect. I know that the NFL was so gracious to allow us a "VIP" status, and that you are never sure exactly what is going to happen, so we went with no expectations other than to watch our favorite team practice.

What happened when we got there was nothing short of magical! We were able to observe a group from the United States Navy re-enlist their Chief Petty Officer. The ceremony was led by the Patriots' Joe Cardona, who is not only a naval officer, but also the player that represented my fallen sailor, Ben, during the NFL's Salute to Service.

We know that it's fairly random which player comes to say hi or sign autographs, but the fact that BOTH teams came to our end of the field to watch the re-enlistment and then stayed around was absolutely amazing.

I am attaching a photo that I took of my son Dan and the Pat's quarterback, Mac Jones. For days he had been talking about "taking a photo with Mac." He knew it was actually only a very remote possibility for Mac to come over to our end of the field, let alone let Dan pose with him.

I haven't seen my son smile like that since his big brother died. My wife, Teri, and I were going over the pictures, and we both started to cry when we saw Dan's expression. It was so beautiful to see joy in my son's face. I don't think his grin could get any larger!

I know that this will sound really corny, but if anyone at TAPS ever questions themselves about the work that they are doing, please just remember Dan's smile.

Thank you,

Sam Norman ★ Surviving Father of U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Benjamin Edward Norman

teams4taps works with sports teams across the country to bring joy to surviving military families and to honor the lives of their fallen heroes. Through teams4taps, TAPS families have been able to honor their loved ones with teams across America, and even in Canada and England. If your loved one had a special story or connection with a sports team or professional athlete, we would love to hear it. Submit your stories and photos via email to teams4taps@taps.org.



Model & Teach Healthy Coping

Andy McNeil, MA ★ Senior Advisor, TAPS Youth Programs

“Children are keen observers but poor interpreters.”
Rudolf Dreikurs

Children are like sponges, absorbing the world around them. They watch our actions during and reactions to situations as they occur. They hear the words we say in various settings and circumstances. They are paying attention to the way we react to them — when they play, when they are upset, and when they are afraid. Children are observing us and learning from us how to be in the world. They are learning how to solve problems, how to self-regulate, and how to manage stressful situations.

At the same time, children are not always the best at interpreting things they are seeing and hearing. They do not always understand the context in which things are happening. Children also do not have the same life experience as the adults in their lives, and so, interpret things they are seeing with their limited knowledge of the world. All of these things are true for

children when they are grieving the death of a person in their life.

Parents and caregivers for children have a unique opportunity to model and teach healthy ways to cope with grief. Grief is not a problem we can fix for our children, nor is grief something we can remove from their lives. Grief is an experience we all live through, and this is no different for our children. **One of the ways we can help our children after loss is to give them tools to cope with the thoughts and emotions that accompany grief.** Here are some ideas of ways we can model and teach healthy coping to our children and teenagers.

Model Self-Control and Self-Regulation

Children learn how to manage their reactions to situations from observing the adults in

their lives doing this themselves. **We can model for our children how to choose our actions to situations rather than to simply react to a situation.** We choose our actions when we slow down and recognize what is going on within us physically, mentally, and emotionally during a situation. Self-awareness is the first step to being in control of actions, learning to regulate, and choosing how we will react to our circumstances.

Try these steps the next time you are in a stressful situation or when you are experiencing your grief in an intense way. Like you would in a science experiment, observe your own thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions. Rather than trying to push them away, pay attention to how you are reacting in all of these ways. Remind



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/TAMARA LUIZA, BSD555, HISA NISHIYA

yourself that you are OK and that the reactions you are having will pass. Take a few deep breaths, and as you do, begin to consider how you will outwardly express the thoughts and feelings you are having.

Practice these steps, and in time you will find that you have choices about how to react to your grief or to other stressful situations. Though we cannot control our circumstances, we are able to choose the attitude we will take in the midst of that circumstance. As you learn to do this you can model and teach this to your children.

Practice Gratitude

There are many values we can teach our children including patience, forgiveness, kindness, and humor. These are all important in their own way. **However, one value we can teach them that will help them through challenging times is gratitude.** The ability to find things we are grateful for even when we are facing difficult circumstances can help us live more balanced lives. The reality is that

both good and bad things can happen to us at the same time. This is true almost every day in both big and small ways. The challenge is that when bad things happen, this often casts a shadow over all of the positive things we still have in our lives.

This is the reason we are suggesting to “practice” gratitude. When we are grieving or going through a difficult situation, it is not always our first thought to find things for which to be grateful. As challenging as it may be, take a few moments at the start or end of each day to consider at least three things for which you are grateful. Write them down each morning or evening no matter how hard it might be to do so. This routine discipline can, in time, help you to be more balanced in your thoughts, perspectives, and overall reactions. This is an activity you can do as a family on a daily or weekly basis. Make it a morning or evening ritual — perhaps at the breakfast table or at bedtime.

This gives us insight into the struggles of others around us and the opportunity to be empathetic to the needs of others. **TAPS has story after story of survivors who, after receiving support and care, turn around and give that same support and care to others.** Children learn empathy from us when we recognize the pain of others and demonstrate caring and kindness. This also enables us to step outside of our own situation for a moment and experience the healing that comes with helping others.

While you can do this individually, you can also do this as a family. Find opportunities to do kind things for people, such as making a batch of cookies and sharing them with neighbors or volunteering to help a local charity. We all have different amounts of time we can give to this. Decide what will work for you and your family and make doing things for others a priority—in time you will see the positive change this makes within you and your children’s lives.

Demonstrate Empathy

If we learn anything from our own tragedies and grief, it is the depth of suffering that we can experience as human beings.



KLINGER, A STORY OF HONOR AND HOPE

Based on *Klinger*, a real horse that serves in the Caisson Platoon in Arlington National Cemetery, Betsy Beard’s *Klinger* is an endearing story written for TAPS honoring all of America’s beloved fallen heroes. The children’s book illustrates a young horse dreaming of fame as a racehorse, struggling to achieve his dreams, and then finding fulfillment in honoring fallen heroes and bringing comfort to their families. A journey of loss, grief, and hope, *Klinger* is a wonderful and helpful book for young children experiencing grief over the death of a military loved one. To learn more about *Klinger*, visit taps.org/publications/2010/klinger.



TAPS YOUTH PROGRAMS

TAPS offers support programs for children and teenagers grieving the death of a military family member. Led by caring professionals in child development, grief support, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for military children to be supported in their grief while also experiencing fun, adventure, mentorship, and camaraderie. We invite you to visit taps.org/youthprograms to explore available TAPS Youth Programs events, including Good Grief Camps, Family Camps, online groups, and online workshops.



Healing After A Suicide Loss

Carla Stumpf Patton, EdD, LMHC, FT ★ TAPS Senior Director, Suicide Postvention Program
Surviving Spouse of U.S. Marine Corps Drill Instructor Sgt. Rich Stumpf

Excerpt is from pages 29 - 31 of *From Grief to Growth: Healing After a Suicide Loss*

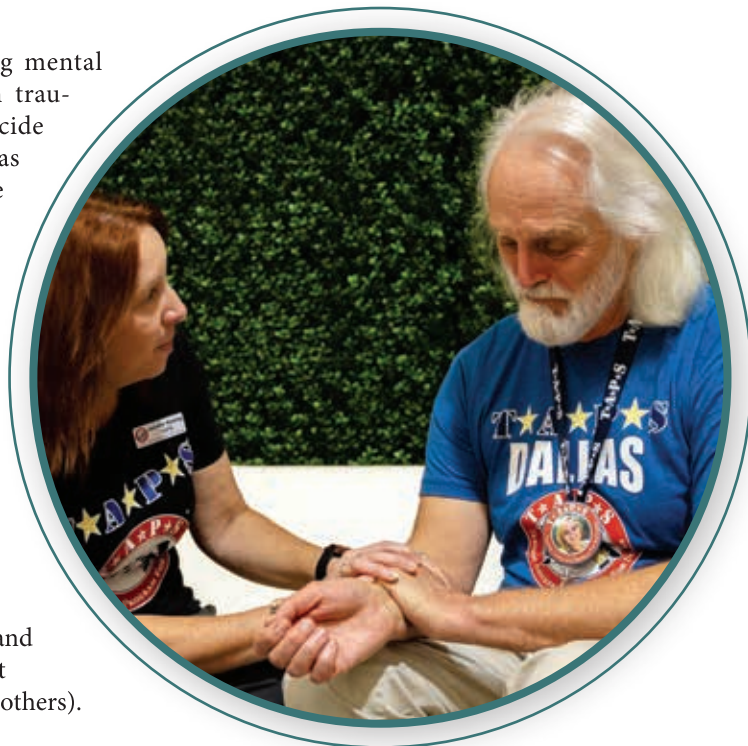
For those who are grieving a loved one who died by suicide, TAPS is here to support you. The grief one experiences after a suicide can differ from other kinds of loss, with many challenging factors. The intense sorrow and pain can feel overwhelming, and the mixed emotions can be conflicting and confusing.

To help, we created the valuable resource, *From Grief to Growth: Healing After a Suicide Loss*. Written by us as both subject matter experts and survivors — for survivors, this roadmap can guide your journey on a pathway toward healing.

The guidebook focuses primarily on the first phase of the TAPS Suicide Postvention Model™, which is the stabilization necessary after a suicide loss.

This includes addressing mental well-being, dealing with trauma, and coping with suicide specific issues (such as complex emotions, the question of “Why?,” talking to children about suicide, and navigating family dynamics). As heartrending, stressful, and isolating as your grief may be, please know:

- ★ You are not alone.
- ★ You can survive this.
- ★ Your feelings are valid and OK (as long as it is not harmful to yourself or others).
- ★ TAPS is here to walk beside you.



For an inside look at some of the topics covered in the guidebook, we offer you the following excerpts to consider:

Family Dynamics

Challenges or discord within a family are not unusual after a death by suicide. Military culture and lifestyle may complicate this because of the limited time that extended family members have spent together. They may not have had time to build relationships, establish trust, or develop ways of communicating and solving problems.

As the family struggles to understand how the suicide could have happened, it is easy to blame one another or unintentionally hurt each other's feelings. Intense feelings or misunderstandings about why suicide occurs can hamper effective discussions and problem solving. It is important for families to stay connected and find ways to communicate effectively with each other. Here are some observations about the nature of grief that might help you and your family work together in the aftermath of suicide:

Grief will likely unfold differently for each person.

Even though family members care deeply about one another, individuals commonly deal with emotional pain in ways that are all their own. One person may want to return to work within a day or two



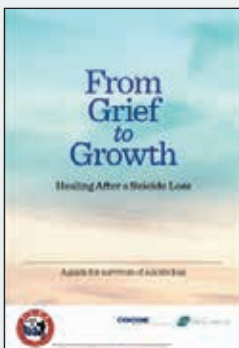
after the funeral, while another believes doing so is disrespectful to the deceased. One person may be greatly comforted by their faith, religious background, belief in God, and an afterlife, while another may question their faith because of the stigma associated with suicide.

Profound grief can be expressed outwardly or inwardly.

One person may experience grief just as deeply as another, even if one of them shows their feelings while the other is silent. One person may repeatedly look through photos and reminisce, while another is anxious about doing so or even resists sharing memories of the deceased. One person may feel that attending a support group is beneficial, while another doesn't see how a support group could be helpful and prefers not to attend.

Everyone in the family is often hurting at the same time and may also be emotionally vulnerable.

One person may need physical affection and closeness, but the other cannot readily provide it. One person may want to talk about their daily struggles with grief, but the other may be unable to tolerate conversations about the pain of loss. It is important to remember that every grief journey is different. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Encourage family members to share how they are feeling and ask directly for what they need.



NOTE: Scan the QR code to digitally access *From Grief to Growth: Healing After a Suicide Loss* or request your complimentary printed copy by reaching out to TAPS at info@taps.org.

It is common for family members to be angry or to blame others following a suicide.

Suicide is complicated, and can have many contributing factors. Very often, especially in military families, extended family members may not be aware of what others are experiencing because they live in separate states. Each member has their perspective on what happened to their loved one. This can lead to misunderstandings and directing blame at one another. If family discord is a challenge for you, it might be useful to bring in a third party, such as a faith leader, counselor, or family therapist. Open and effective communication can reduce relationship conflicts and/or challenges. TAPS can connect you with a professional counselor or locate resources in your local community.

Suicide Postvention

The TAPS Suicide Postvention Model™ is designed to help suicide loss survivors find healing, growth, and purpose in their lives. TAPS survivors have shared that this enabled them to discover new possibilities for their own future — achieving posttraumatic growth and the inspiration to help others — such as becoming a TAPS Peer Mentor. Many survivors come to realize that they are more resilient than they once thought, and have gained a greater appreciation for the little things in life. No matter where you are in your grief journey, TAPS is here to connect you with programs and services to support your healing and growth.

Additional Resources

TAPS provides a range of additional resources you may benefit from.

- ★ For suicide loss support, visit us at: taps.org/suicide
- ★ For TAPS services, like Casework, Education Assistance, or Community Care for counseling connections, please call us at 1-800-959-8277 or visit us online at taps.org/resources
- ★ For additional resources provided by TAPS partners, visit: taps.org/additionalresources





TAPS.ORG/PROGRAMS-SERVICES



For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

TAPS NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE 800-959-TAPS (8277)

The TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline is answered live — 24/7/365 — with gentle care for all those grieving the death of a military loved one. Our loving network of peer professionals ensures that each Helpline caller has open access to all that TAPS provides. Whether a survivor needs emotional support, connection to resources or programs, or to share what's in their hearts—we always have time, we always answer, and we always care.

PEER-BASED EMOTIONAL SUPPORT *TAPS.org/PeerMentors*

The foundation of TAPS is survivors helping survivors heal. Our Peer Mentor national network is where survivors are connected with unique and customized support from another survivor who shares a similar grief journey. Military Survivors who are at least 18 months out from their loss, volunteer their time and receive training to become Peer Mentors. As a Peer Mentor, they are closely matched with newly bereaved survivors by manner of loss and relationship to their loved one to help them navigate their unique needs in the aftermath of loss. This program provides comfort to survivors and lets them know that they are not alone. Peer Mentors also lend support at TAPS events throughout the year.

CASEWORK ASSISTANCE *TAPS.org/Casework*

TAPS Casework assists surviving military families with a variety of challenges. Our casework team strives diligently to align with partners and third-party resources to address the individual needs of each family. The support they offer is customized to each family and may include services such as pro-bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal benefits, and private social services support. Survivors receive compassionate and responsive support to guide them towards the path of long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES *TAPS.org/EDU*

Along the grief journey, experiencing a shift in occupational desires or goals is common for military survivors. TAPS Education Services empowers survivors as they seek to enter a new phase of life and pursue post-secondary education. TAPS serves as a guide to share scholarship information and benefits, align available resources with educational goals, and navigate the best options for financial assistance.

COMMUNITY-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT *TAPS.org/GriefCounseling*

Military survivors may benefit from individual mental health professional support. Skilled grief therapists and mental health professionals can help survivors work through such issues as coping with complicated emotions, navigating relationship difficulties, and exploring secondary losses. The right mental health professional can guide survivors to discover their strengths and develop helpful coping skills. TAPS performs careful research to provide connections for survivors to the right mental health professional, trauma resources, and local support groups, all within their local community.

SURVIVOR CARE TEAM *TAPS.org/SurvivorCareTeam*

The TAPS Survivor Care Team is comprised of surviving military family members who have received extensive professional training on peer-based support, traumatic death, suicide pre/postvention, and grief support. They are skilled listeners who help assess the needs of newly bereaved survivors. Through personalized support, these peer professionals compassionately create safe spaces where survivors feel heard and are empowered to engage in programs, services, and resources to develop their long-term support systems and healthy coping skills.

SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT *TAPS.org/Suicide*

TAPS has supported thousands of military suicide loss survivors. We understand that suicide grief is unique. A death by suicide can leave behind a wake of powerful, complicated emotions and questions. Our special programs and resources provide compassionate support and hope for all suicide loss survivors, and safe spaces to honor and grieve their loved ones. Our unique approach helps stabilize survivors and surviving families — guiding them towards a path of healthy grieving, healing, and growth.

**CAREGIVER TO
SURVIVOR SUPPORT**
TAPS.org/Caregiver

TAPS raises critical awareness about the effects of toxic exposure and the unique needs of military caregiving families. We ensure that surviving families whose loved one died from illness are recognized, cared for, and aware of all benefits for which they are eligible. We advocate for improvements in caregiver support before, during, and after their time as a caregiver. TAPS also provides healing connections to other caregiver survivors and programs that support healthy next steps for families who have lost their loved ones after having been their caregivers.

**ONLINE
COMMUNITY**
TAPS.org/OnlineCommunity

The TAPS Online Community allows for easy and meaningful connections with military survivors from across the country and around the world. TAPS online groups are peer-led, facilitated sessions where there's never pressure to share, but always an opportunity. TAPS workshops and online series are geared towards building supportive communities, and learning together as we process new information and share perspectives, to help all of us find inspiration, clarity and connection.

**WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT**
TAPS.org/Empowerment

TAPS Women's Empowerment programming helps female survivors incorporate concepts of identity and spirituality into transformative goal-setting. We provide survivors with tools to inspire confidence that help them move into the lives they are creating since their loss. Through in-person and online events, we bring together a vibrant, compassionate community and supportive sisterhood of surviving women who treasure opportunities to be each other's teachers, confidants, cheerleaders, and friends.

**MEN'S
PROGRAMMING**
TAPS.org/Men

The TAPS Men's Program was designed by men, for men, and helps pave the way for fathers, brothers, sons, battle buddies and all men to grieve in their own way, at their own pace. At TAPS, surviving men lean on each other to share their experiences, strength and hope while building powerful bonds of brotherhood. Together, men grow stronger by elevating one another to be the best versions of themselves and to honor the legacy of their military and veteran loved ones.

**YOUTH
PROGRAMS**
TAPS.org/YouthPrograms

Though their lives are impacted by grief, young TAPS survivors know their lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure, and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, children's grief and loss, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs provide safe spaces for surviving military children (ages 5-18) to explore grief and embrace healing at Good Grief Camps and Family Camps. Online programming is also available for parents and guardians of grieving children.

**YOUNG ADULTS
PROGRAM**
TAPS.org/YoungAdults

Designed for surviving military children and siblings ages 18-30, the Young Adults Program provides a dynamic curriculum focused on five pillars of growth. Through in-person, multi-day experiences, and online group discussions, we provide young adult survivors with tools to help them grow with their grief. The five pillars of growth that frame the programming include: personal development, financial stability, communication, career development, and service to others. TAPS young adult survivors connect with others and engage to create a well-rounded life full of hope, healing, and growth.

**TAPS INSTITUTE
FOR HOPE
AND HEALING®**
TAPS.org/Institute

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® is a national and worldwide leader in training and education for grief and loss professionals, and bereaved individuals and families, both military and civilian. The Institute provides programming on grief and bereavement at no cost to all through webinars, webcasts, and other events. Topics focus on a variety of topics, such as understanding and responding to suicide; children's grief; practical tips for coping with loss; wellness workshops; and creative ways to keep the memories of lost loved ones alive. For professionals, the Institute hosts academic programs instructed by field experts, and a wide range of health and social service professional boards offer continuing education credits for these programs.

PUBLICATIONS
TAPS.org/Publications

TAPS has created several proprietary publications to serve the survivor community, offer valuable inspiration, and share information on resources and services to support grief, suicide loss, children's grief, and navigating benefits and finances after loss. All resources are available at no cost to military survivors. Our other publications include the book, *Healing Your Grieving Heart after a Military Death: 100 Practical Ideas for Families and Friends* by Bonnie Carroll and Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD; the children's book, *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*; and, the *TAPS Magazine*.

ARE YOU READY TO RUMBLE...

WITH TAPS AND DARE TO LEAD™?

"I HAVE WATCHED OVER 300 TAPS SURVIVORS GRADUATE FROM OUR DARE TO LEAD™ PROGRAM. THEIR GROWTH, CONNECTION, AND COMMITMENT TO LEARN AND HELP ONE ANOTHER IS A DEMONSTRATION OF THE HEART OF THE TAPS COMMUNITY."

Terri L. Williams ★ TAPS Senior Advisor and Dare to Lead™ Facilitator,
Survivor of the 9/11 Attack on the Pentagon

More than 300 TAPS Survivors across the nation had the courage to rumble with their vulnerability and are now graduates of the Dare to Lead™ program. The Dare to Lead™ program is a courage-building program based on the most significant findings from Dr. Brené Brown's latest research that defines courage as a collection of the following four skill sets that are teachable, measurable, and observable:

- RUMBLING WITH VULNERABILITY
- LIVING INTO OUR VALUES
- BRAVING TRUST
- LEARNING TO RISE

All of our Dare to Lead™ cohorts consist of weekly workshops that include interactive and intuitive facilitation, small group discussions with fellow TAPS Survivors, practical exercises and self-reflection to guide groups through the four courage skill sets of daring leadership.

The courage gained through the Dare to Lead™ program has enabled our graduates to be brave within their communities, jobs, and families. Since March of 2020, TAPS has hosted 10 cohorts of the Dare to Lead™ program for TAPS Survivors

across the nation. Several TAPS Survivors are super-alumni and have completed multiple cohorts (version 1, 2, and 2.1) of the Dare to Lead™ program. They include: Luann Rodgers (Texas), Wendy Hazlett (California), Ken Naglak (Pennsylvania), Angela Oey (New Jersey), Dominic Macaya (California), Kizzy Zinnermon (Virginia), Linda Moore (Maryland), Brianna Dozier (Florida), Denise DeRamus (Alabama), Sandra Indrathaher (Virginia), Susan Rogers (Florida), and Laurie Whitham (Oregon). The courage and commitment demonstrated by all of our graduates is an inspiration.

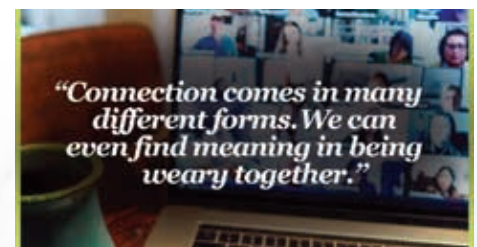
"The Dare to Lead™ program helped me to reduce the level of shame I was carrying and to feel more comfortable with being vulnerable. I was carrying a lot of heavy emotions when I signed up for Dare to Lead™. And, the burden of all this was exhausting. But the lessons we did in Dare to Lead™ — and the discussions with others in our weekly sessions — helped me to put things into better perspective."

Sara Wilson ★ Surviving Spouse of
CAPT David S. Wilson, U.S. Navy, Ret



"As a 6th grade teacher, Dare to Lead™ has been a pivotal part of my life. I learned so many things that prepared me to engage today's world. I wish I had learned these skills 30 years ago."

Susan Rogers ★ Surviving Daughter of
U.S. Army SGT Dolphus Rogers

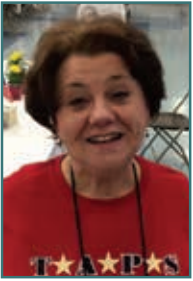


WE WELCOME YOU TO JOIN US IN 2023 FOR DARE TO LEAD™ COHORT 11 AND COHORT 12!

CONTACT US AT TAPSTOGETHERS@TAPS.ORG WITH ANY QUESTIONS.

DARE TO LEAD™: A SURVIVOR'S EXPERIENCE

Luann Rodgers ★ Surviving Spouse of USMC Cpl Monte Glenn Rodgers



In the spring of 2020, we all experienced the terrible reality of how quickly life can change once again. As if our loved ones' deaths hadn't affected our quality of life enough, now fear and isolation hit our worlds in a new way. After having become a widow in 2018, I handled the first month of Covid isolation OK; but as word came out it was going to be longer, I yearned for contact with people.

TAPS began listing lots of interesting "Zoom" gatherings on their event calendar, and one of them was a workshop series titled Dare to Lead™ by Dr. Brené Brown. I had heard of her books, and even planned to read one of them eventually. When I saw the class advertised by TAPS, I registered because it would give me something to do on a Friday. At the time, I wasn't able to focus enough to hold down a job. But I knew the information shared in this workshop series would be interesting and applicable, as I do a lot of volunteer work. And, learning new skills, especially communications skills, is always a plus.

I was fortunate enough to be in the very first TAPS cohort led by Terri Williams, and there were often 50 to 60 people in attendance. We broke out into online discussion rooms twice per session, to get to know one

another a bit and to hear Dr. Brené Brown speak on each subject. There were slides, a book to view, and always discussions on the material at hand. While some students were in the corporate world, many of us were stay-at-home moms or dads, some were still active-duty service members, and a few of us were there just for the sake of learning something new, fellowship, and to "Break Bread" as Terri would refer to it. What a fabulous experience to get to know others from around the country and their views and tips on handling situations.

I learned to ask myself:

- WHO IS IN MY ARENA?
- DO I WORK TO "FIT IN" OR DO I "BELONG" AND WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?
- IS IT THE CRITIC THAT COUNTS?
- DO I LIVE INTO MY VALUES AND IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY?
- WHAT ARE THE MYTHS OF VULNERABILITY AND HOW ARE WE TAUGHT WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE?
- DO I BRAVE TRUST OR HIDE INSTEAD OF ADDRESSING ISSUES?
- WHAT STORY DO I TELL MYSELF WHEN CONFLICT ARISES AND IS IT CORRECT?

These questions and more showed me quickly that perhaps I wasn't as self-aware as I had presumed I was. Next, we moved into learning to rise and walking into our hard places after a failure or disappointment has been experienced: How do I write the

ending to my own story of setbacks, hurts, or failures? Do I own it or does it own ME?

This can of worms opened, and I discovered quickly that I have so much to learn. Realizing I had winged it thus far during my grief journey, I began then, in Dare to Lead™, to discover what type of leader I was and to evaluate the best choice to get the most productive results.

As if this wasn't enough to challenge me, later in the course we started discussing "feelings" and how different generations are taught to make decisions, create boundaries, and resolve conflict at work and home so that all parties feel heard.

I am confident you now realize there is a wealth of knowledge in this course, and so much more than I have listed here. To date, I have taken Dare to Lead™ with TAPS four times and am still amazed at how much I have yet to learn. It is very meaty, and there are skills to be implemented by each of us—skills that will help us through our grief, and skills that help us to grow and be aware of how the loss of our loved one has changed us and our perspectives.

If you are still unsure about this course, I encourage you to take a chance, sign up, and attend at least three sessions in a row. By then, I think you will find you are making new friends, learning more about yourself, and gaining new insights from other survivors.

"Dare to Lead" ...has completely changed my life. It's about leadership; and when you get right down to it, leadership is about connecting with people — learning about them and how to care for them. And, really the first person you need to connect with is you — similar to our grief, you need to understand yourself and what it is you are going through to be able to care for yourself.

It's so incredible that TAPS and Dare to Lead™ are here to give people hope — grounded confidence, yes — but grounded hope. We know that our grief journey is going to be a long and arduous one, but slowly and surely we have grounded hope in the knowledge that we're going to make it through."

Ken Naglak ★ Surviving Father of U.S. Navy ABHAN Joseph Min Naglak

PACT ACT

SIGNED INTO LAW!

Candace Wheeler ★ TAPS Director of Government and Legislative Affairs

“The passage of the Honoring Our PACT Act ensures that veterans who have selflessly served in defense of freedom and the families who have stood by their side know now that America will stand with them as they fight for their lives, and stand with their families should they not survive this final battle,” said Bonnie Carroll, TAPS President and Founder.

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) was proud to have staff and surviving families of toxic exposure in attendance at the White House on Wednesday, August 10, 2022, to witness President Joe Biden sign the **Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act** of 2022 into law. This historic bill ensures veterans of multiple generations who were exposed to burn pits, toxins, and airborne hazards while deployed are provided immediate, lifelong access to VA health care, and their families, caregivers, and survivors receive critical benefits.

As the leading voice for the families of those who died as a result of illnesses connected to toxic exposure and a founding member of the Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Coalition, TAPS worked tirelessly over the past nine years to bring awareness of toxic exposure and to introduce and pass comprehensive legislation.

TAPS testified before Congress and submitted written statements for the record, educated congressional members and their staff on the impacts of toxic exposure to our veterans and their survivors, worked with fellow veteran service organizations and advocates to introduce toxic exposure legislation, participated in press conferences and rallies, and helped build a strategy to secure House and Senate passage of the PACT Act.



“As a Nation, it is our moral obligation to care for our veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors,” said Candace Wheeler, TAPS Director of Government and Legislative Affairs and Co-Chair of the Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Coalition. “With the passage of the Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, we have finally kept that sacred promise!”

PACT ACT: A TEAM EFFORT

TAPS is grateful to Chairmen Jon Tester (D-MT) and Mark Takano (D-CA) and Ranking Members Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Mike Bost (R-IL) of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans’ Affairs for their leadership on the bipartisan PACT Act, which passed the U.S. Senate with an overwhelming majority vote of 86-11 on August 2, 2022, and the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 342-88 on July 13, 2022.

We thank the leadership of the House and the Senate, the Biden Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and more than 60 veteran and military organizations who joined together to advocate for this critical legislation. We are also grateful to Jon Stewart, John Feal, and veteran and survivor advocates for their tireless work to ensure passage of the PACT Act.

TAPS recognized Chairmen Tester and Takano, and Ranking Members Moran and Bost with our TAPS Honor Guard Congressional Award this past year for their leadership on comprehensive toxic exposure legislation and steadfast support of our military survivors. TAPS was also honored to present Speaker Nancy Pelosi with our prestigious TAPS Guardian Angel Award at our Annual Honor Guard Gala for her extraordinary support and personal engagement with the surviving family members of America's fallen military heroes. This is only the third time TAPS has presented the Guardian Angel Award in its 28 years of service to families of our nation's fallen heroes.

TAPS is also working with fellow Veteran Service Organizations to host a PACT Act Congressional Reception this fall celebrating this monumental achievement.



SURVIVORS IMPACTED BY TOXIC EXPOSURE

TAPS is grateful to all of the surviving military families who so courageously shared their stories to help advocate for others. Illness loss is the leading cause of military death, and each year more survivors whose loved one died due to toxic exposure illness connect with TAPS for grief support and resources. Their lessons learned and powerful testimonies effected change and enabled this legislation to come to fruition. Because of them, other families will have hope when facing a similar journey, and lives will be saved.

For survivors like Coleen Bowman and her late husband Sergeant Major Robert Bowman, early detection may have provided precious family time and produced a different outcome.

“Had we known Rob had been exposed, and to what toxins, we could have shared the information with doctors, and it wouldn't have taken six months of misdiagnoses before we learned he had stage 4 inoperable cancer. Had we known earlier, he might still be alive today,” said Coleen. “That is why my family and I are extremely grateful for the passage of the PACT Act. Simply put, this bill will save lives.”

The bill signing coincided with Agent Orange Awareness Day, the 61st anniversary of when the deadly compound was first used in Vietnam and American troops were first exposed.



“A key component of this legislation was using the lessons learned from our Vietnam veterans and their surviving families,” said Claire Henline, surviving daughter of LTC William Henline IV, who died from cancer related to Agent Orange exposure. “It's extremely meaningful to know our experiences played a role in making a difference for the current generation of veterans and their families as well as the generations to come.”

“The PACT Act will provide the care our veterans and their families, and survivors deserve,” said Kimberly Hughes, surviving spouse of U.S. Army Major Gary Hughes who died from stage four stomach and liver cancers after being exposed to open burn pits while stationed in Afghanistan. “Because of this important legislation, our veterans who came home sick or have died can now have some peace.”

TAPS IS WORKING FOR YOU

For nearly three decades, TAPS has provided hope, healing, and resources to all those grieving the death of a military loved one — of all relationships and causes of death — and has been the leading organization for those who lost a loved one to service-connected illnesses. In 2021, more than 9,200 newly bereaved military survivors came to TAPS for care. Thirty-one percent were grieving the death of a loved one to illness, surpassing all other circumstances of death, including hostile action. TAPS has been committed to promoting a better shared understanding of illnesses that may result from exposures to toxins. Our desire is to ensure eligible veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors have access to all available benefits they have earned and deserve.



taps.org/casework

TAPS Casework is available to help all surviving families with understanding and accessing benefits. To request casework assistance, please call 800-959-TAPS (8277) or email casework@taps.org.



SHARE YOUR STORY

What policy issues matter the most to you? Share your story with us. You can be the voice of positive change in legislation affecting surviving families. Learn more by contacting us at policy@taps.org.

"Being at the White House to witness the president sign the PACT Act into law was an honor. I felt proud to have been a small part of the creation of this bill. My daughter asked me as we walked out of the White House, "Mom, how did you think this would all end all those years ago when you started to advocate for Dad? What would you have done if the bill didn't pass?" I answered, "This is exactly how I thought it would end because I wasn't quitting until something like this bill became law."

Coleen Bowman ★ Surviving Spouse of U.S. Army SGM Robert Bowman

"It feels good to know Mike's life and service had an impact on how others will be taken care of in the future. I think his story not only opened hearts, I believe it opened minds to the reality of this critical issue of toxic exposure and the impact it is having on our service members and veterans. I was at the White House for the signing with TAPS, and I am grateful to have had that opportunity. It was a little bittersweet because I was grateful this bill was being signed into law, but sad that we have all been impacted by toxic exposure. The PACT Act will not only impact the lives of 3.5 million military members, but it will also help family members. This will make a difference in so many lives."

June Heston ★ Surviving Spouse of U.S. Army National Guard Brigadier General Michael T. Heston



TAPS
Legislative
Priorities:
Pass Landmark
Toxic Exposure
Legislation



TAPS Institute
for Hope and
Healing® Webinar
on Policy &
Legislative
Advocacy

THE PACT ACT AND YOUR BENEFITS

The PACT Act is the largest healthcare expansion and benefits coverage in history and covers veterans from Vietnam, Gulf War, and post 9/11 eras.

The PACT Act:

- ★ Ensures health care for 3.5 million veterans exposed to burn pits and airborne hazards
- ★ Provides toxic exposure screening for every veteran enrolled in VA health care
- ★ Streamlines VA's review process, and requires medical exams and opinions
- ★ Concedes exposure to airborne hazards and burn pits
- ★ Establishes presumption of service connection for 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers related to burn pits and airborne hazards
- ★ Expands presumptions of Agent Orange exposure to veterans who served in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, and American Samoa
- ★ Permanently extends eligibility for compensation based on Gulf War Illness
- ★ Allows Camp Lejeune veterans and families exposed to toxic water to file new tort claims
- ★ Requires VA to publish and update a list of benefits and health care resources available to toxic exposed veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors
- ★ Invests in VA's claims processing, workforce, and health care facilities "The passing of the PACT Act is acknowledgement by our government of how my husband died and what caused his illness.



The VA is urging all veterans and survivors to file a claim for PACT Act-related disability compensation or apply for VA health care now. If you are a veteran or survivor, you can see a full list of new presumptive conditions and locations, review your eligibility, and file claims for PACT Act-related benefits.

Honor the Legacy, Support the Mission

REMEMBERING OUR NATION'S FALLEN HEROES AT TAPS NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

* Personalize these tiles with a picture and an inscription.

100% OF YOUR DONATION SUPPORTS TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

taps.org/tribute

The TAPS National Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia is America's home for all those grieving the death of a military loved one. We honor all of our military loved ones, support the TAPS mission, and commemorate lives lived in selfless service with our Hero Wall. Our heroes' legacies and love lives on.

We invite all military survivors to honor the legacies of their fallen heroes by purchasing a tribute tile on our Hero Wall, including pictures of loved ones and personalized inscriptions. They will be proudly and permanently displayed by the entry of the TAPS National Headquarters. 100% of donations will support TAPS Programs and Services.



Remembrance: \$250

Remember your loved one with this 4" x 5" tile.



Tribute: \$500

Create a tribute to your loved one with this 8" x 5" tile.



Salute: \$1,000

Salute your loved one with this 8" x 10" tile.



Honor: \$2,500

Honor your loved one with this 16" x 10" tile.

Grateful Nation Memorial Hero Wall

As surviving families, we are connected by a common thread. We are part of a larger American legacy of grief and loss. The Grateful Nation Memorial Hero Wall is an online home where surviving military families everywhere can honor and share stories about their loved one, at no cost to survivors. You can share the legacy of your fallen hero by adding your loved one to the virtual Grateful Nation Memorial Hero Wall with our supporters on social media.



THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO GET INVOLVED AND TO SUPPORT THE TAPS MISSION.

LEARN MORE AT [TAPS.ORG/SUPPORT](https://taps.org/support)



Learning, Growing, and Healing Through Peer Mentoring

Audri Beugelsdijk ★ TAPS Vice President, Survivor Services
Surviving spouse of U.S. Navy Seaman Jason Springer

When I was a teenager, I vividly recall a tense conversation with my mom in which I was no doubt being self-centered and selfish. While the full context has long left me, one thing she said still rings in my ears, “Audri, you need to get over yourself — not everything is about you.” But I was a strong, independent young woman determined to make my own way or, maybe in that moment, get my own way.

Like most Americans, I valued independence. And while independence can drive motivation, there are times when it can turn to isolation. Grief is one such time when insisting on “going it alone” can set us up for more difficulties by isolating us from others who could bear witness to our lives, speak into our struggles with wisdom, and provide encouragement and a listening ear. It may go against our culture to embrace interdependence, but I’m convinced that we are truly stronger together.

When my husband Jason died, I tried to hold it, contain it, control it — my grief, that is, and all the turmoil it was creating. The inner chaos was like a hurricane pounding at my soul. So overwhelming were the unrelenting waves of conflicting emotions and sheer exhaustion, that I couldn’t begin to express what felt at the time to be an undefinable anguish. How could I allow, much less invite someone into that storm? Frankly, it didn’t occur to me that it would even be appropriate to share, so I held it close. It was my own personal burden. Besides, who in their right mind wouldn’t run away if I told them what was really happening to me on the inside? It might even be described as a kind of premeditated guilt I felt as I even



considered leaning on a friend or anyone else, so I didn’t.

Eventually, when the tears would not stop flowing and it felt like I would not survive, I reached a point of surrender and cried out to God, “Please take this away from me. I can’t do this anymore.” A peacefulness filled the room and I looked over at something my casualty officer had given me — a TAPS card with the Helpline number. Without even thinking about it, I dialed the number, and though I was numb, the words purged out of my mouth to Bonnie Carroll on the other end of the line. As we shared those painful moments and bonded over our widow stories, I began to see the value of the “we” as opposed to just the “me.” And while I cannot recall all the things we both said, I do recall saying, “If nothing else good comes from Jason’s death, this will be a way I can relate to someone else in the future and help them — and that will just have to be good enough.”

Even then, I was a Peer Mentor in the making, though it took a few years of being on the receiving end before I felt ready to let my story be in the background enough to support other survivors. I had to reach a point where my compassionate curiosity outweighed my need to still process my own grief. Once I was ready, embracing becoming a Peer Mentor was an active and intentional choice. Supporting others with military loss was the way I chose to create meaning from Jason’s death.

While I initially thought I would be helping others, I quickly realized how much being a Peer Mentor gave back to me — we call this “reciprocal peer support.”

WE INVITE YOU TO
BECOME PART OF THE
TAPS PEER MENTOR
PROGRAM.



[TAPS.ORG/PEERMENTORS](https://TAPS.org/PeerMentors)

Peer mentoring is the perpetual gift that we give one another — the gift of grief companionship. TAPS will always need people who want to make a difference in another person’s life — and whether becoming or receiving a Peer Mentor — that person could be you.

Because of my connection with Peer Mentors and others in the TAPS family over the years, I have gleaned three notable lessons about healing through grief.

1. Passive Healing: *We sometimes need to choose stillness. We can't control our grief anymore than we can hold a storm in our hands. So rather than create more stress by actively resisting or stuffing it, we can try to relax into it or "make friends" with our grief.*

2. Active Healing: *We sometimes need to move to think and heal. Being active requires our presence, participation, and commitment. Creating active distractions is a healthy tool we can use to combat unhealthy rumination.*

3. Mindful Healing: *Leaning into mindfulness — being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment — can help ground us when we are feeling out of control on the grief rollercoaster. This is especially helpful when we are feeling overwhelmed. Being grounded helps us reconnect with our mind and body and find more stable footing in the moment.*

These lessons, and so many more, only came through engaging others as I explored the impact of Jason's death. Loss, and having the support of a Peer Mentor as I navigated it, became a catalyst for change and growth. Learning about grief, and who I am in relation to it, will be a lifelong exercise. And while I could have pushed on alone, reaching out to TAPS and receiving the compassionate support of Peer Mentors who knew how to meet me in my darkest moments has yielded wisdom, hope, and friendships I could never have imagined. TAPS allowed me to stop struggling against myself and relax into a community where I could learn to thrive again.

Over the years, my mom's words have continued to ring true. While still certainly personal, in order to honor and remember Jason, I had to make my grief about more than just my own pain. Becoming a Peer Mentor opened the door for me to finding purpose in the pain. And there is a special kind of magic when you surround yourself with people leaning into their purpose.



FIVE YEARS — INTO THE — AFTER

A Letter to Owen

Kelly Lennon Fitzpatrick ★ Surviving Sister of Sgt. Owen J. Lennon, U.S. Marine Corps Reserves

Hello Little Brother,

I think about you every day. I know you know that. Each year around your anniversary, the thoughts become strings of words, and I've tried to record my changing feelings around the times "Before" and "After." This year, the words have changed and are less for me and more for you — my conversation with you. We feel you all around us, and are reminded of you each time we see a hawk or another Godwink sent our way, and I want to tell you how much you have impacted us, even in your absence.

So what's new, you wonder? What is different since you left us? We've grown and changed and, although it's still heartbreakingly sad, I am proud of us. You would be too, I think.

Five years into the After I say "died." I say, "when my brother died..." Well, I usually do. I've never written it before, so that's new and jarring all over again. What I mean, though, is that my voice stops trailing off mid-sentence, and I don't always just go with "when the accident happened." So, that's different.

A lot of things are different. The life we all lead is almost unrecognizable. There are new places, players, and partners. I've gained weight, lost it, and gained it again. Grief and varying circumstances have commingled with weddings and funerals, and births and deaths. There was a pandemic, and the world turned upside down. Since our world had already somersaulted in 2017 when we lost you, it seems we weren't even surprised. Nothing will ever really surprise us again.

So, there are all of these changes. In some ways, they are great, a mixture of blessings and grief distractors. When I don't see the same people or go to the same places, it may not be as obvious that you are not here. It doesn't sneak up and surprise me anymore, the way that it used to: when I would search for you in the uniforms, or in each tall man with Oakleys on, in every beat-up Jeep, or Cole Swindell song.

We have made a new family in the Mississippi family that has supported all of the crew's family members since the accident. The Yanky 72 family has only gotten closer over the years, first at memorial events, and then slowly building our own connections outside of the organized days.



Some things haven't changed, though. I still miss you. We still miss you. There are usually coins or signs on your headstone each time I visit, reminding me of how many people I don't know that miss you too. I still haven't gotten a tattoo as a symbol of how I carry you and your loss with me, but quite a few people carry your memory with them in that way. I struggle with how I'd hold you in art — you the Marine, but really, mostly, you my brother. But, I do still stop at David's for bagels when I am on the right side of the river. I still keep your cap in my closet. I still think of you on sunny days, and every day.

Five years later though, I'm beginning to see how people live with only the memory of a person, how the loss integrates into the living of life. In my desperation to remember all the moments, I have started creating journals for many of life's pivotal moments, a lesson in appreciation unknowingly taught by you. My lifetime of half-started journals has transformed into prompting myself and others to record loved ones in blank spaces. I'm making them in memory of you, and to finally take a step forward in thinking about how I want to honor your life and your legacy.

In the early days, I was a participant in memorials and special events. I searched for you in the pageantry of the Marine Corps. I appreciated it, of course, but I also thought about the twenty or so years you lived prior to making that commitment. What I remember most are video games and nights with your friends at our house, you helping me move, telling stories on the deck, and eating pizza in the Poconos. I remember your humor and your wit, your long gait, and the way you shook your head. I remember you coming back from Ireland with long hair and a new taste in music.

This person, my brother, is the person I have been trying to find the best ways to honor and remember; but slowly, I have come to realize that I have always been honoring you, and will only continue to do so. And you will live in us, just as important in the After as in the Before.

Love you.

In Their Own Words:

Surviving Women Share About Their Experience and the Impact
Of Women's Empowerment Online and In-Person
Programming On Their Grief Journey



The TAPS Women's Empowerment program uses both in-person and online events to bring surviving women together. When we gather in person, the effect is magical, and we cherish our time together. We also know, however, that distance doesn't silence the heart of our sisterhood — and so we're also just a few clicks away with online offerings that focus on connection, creativity, meditation and movement.

In 2021, TAPS Women's Empowerment welcomed more first-time attendees than any other TAPS Program, with 2,231 women attending nearly 160 online events.

Women's Empowerment programming equips surviving women with the tools needed to move forward with resilience, joy, and gratitude. Our vibrant, compassionate community of surviving women is a place of support and inspiration, where we treasure opportunities to be each other's teachers, confidantes, cheerleaders, and friends.



"The sessions we had each day made me feel like the leaders were talking directly to me. I am going through such a big transition in my life and I had a major breakthrough at the retreat. I was so depressed for months, and I couldn't pull myself out of it. Coming to this retreat was like a light switch. I feel like just my own internal communication and reflection was so important during the week, but it wouldn't have happened if they didn't ask the questions."



"I returned home with newfound energy and confidence that I can keep going and have the strength for myself and my sons. I needed the reassurance that I am doing a great job, and I have so many women to reach out to now as well. I've felt like I've been treading water for a very long time, mostly because I can't figure out what changes will move me forward. I feel much closer to figuring that out now. I think the small changes I'm making, based on what I've learned at the Women's Empowerment Retreat, will get me there."



"At first, I was hesitant about being with a group of women that were not all widows like me. I wasn't sure how much we would have in common. But, I found that it was really helpful to get different perspectives from fiancées, mothers, and daughters, as well as other widows. I think I am now more equipped to identify with and understand my other loved ones' perspectives."



"Thank you, TAPS, for providing me with a safe place, resources, tools and new friends for support. I left the Women's Empowerment Retreat carrying less guilt, anger and pain, while taking with me hope for a healthier and more meaningful life."



"I was hesitant to attend an event like the TAPS Women's Empowerment Retreat. I wasn't ready to open up or let strangers in. I decided I'd go, but not share. My plan was to learn as much as possible, but not let anyone in. I quickly realized that these amazing women were just like me. They understood my pain and were willing to open up. I realized that I was in a safe place and that maybe I too could help someone else by sharing. It was the best decision, and it opened up a new path to healing. I learned so much and gained new friends — women that I still communicate with regularly. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity. It was the blessing I asked for but didn't realize just how much I needed."



"I haven't felt this good in a long time. I'm finally hopeful again."



"I am so excited for life now. This retreat prompted me to have the hard conversations with loved ones, and I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I can no longer not take up space, I must live."



"This experience was like no other. It was tough, but it was so worth it. I haven't felt this great in years. Thank you TAPS for all you do. There are no words to fully capture what your support has done for me in my grief journey."



"The Women's Empowerment Retreat does exactly that. It helped me find the strength within to realize that I was carrying around a lot of guilt, regret and pain. While I know the pain will always be there, I know that I deserve to live a life that is full of joy and purpose. This retreat helped me know that I am capable of living a healthy, happy and meaningful life with the tools I now have for my journey!"

WE CONNECT

MEETS THURSDAYS

12:00 PM
-OR-
7:00 PM ET

Connect with other surviving women and explore ways to feel empowered, inspired, and engaged

WE FOCUS & FLOW

MEETS THE
1ST & 3RD
TUESDAY

12:00 PM ET

Mix of strength, mobility, and mind/body work intended to help cultivate steady hearts, steady minds, and steady nerves

WE CREATE

MEETS THE
1ST & 3RD
WEDNESDAY

12:00 PM ET

Join us for a time of peace, inspiration, and creation



TAPS Women's Empowerment Online Programming Schedule

Join our supportive community online for creative sessions, meditation, and movement offerings, as we support each other and explore ways to grieve with courage and to live with intention.

If you have any questions about online or 2023 in-person Women's Empowerment programming, please email empowerment@taps.org.

Fishing AND Fresh Air

LEADS TO FRESH PERSPECTIVES



Partnership with the National Park Trust and Trout Unlimited Helps Create Connections and Coping Skills Close To Home For Surviving Families

At the heart of TAPS' mission is peer support, TAPS Outdoor Programs is working to ensure that every survivor knows that they are not alone in the wilderness of their grief through the expansion of our accessible experiences in nature.

In partnership with the National Park Trust, an organization designed to advance public parks, lands, and waters as spaces that are welcoming and accessible to every person in every community, TAPS is connecting our surviving military families to the very lands their loved ones swore to protect and defend.

With events in both our nation's National Forests and National Parks, our families have a wide variety of opportunities across the nation to heal alongside each other and the landscapes that we call home.

In 2021, TAPS and the National Park Trust brought families to the trails of California's Sierra National Forest, to the rivers of Illinois' Shawnee National Forest,

and to the majestic landscapes of Alaska's Chugach National Forest.

Expanding our reach in 2022, TAPS and the National Park Trust fostered stronger bonds in the Coconino National Forest during our spring and fall Women's Empowerment retreats. The team hosted the Visitor Information Services and Heritage Supervisor from the Red Rock Ranger District who presented on the connection between the landscape's geology and what artists call the negative space around it, drawing attention to what created the changes shapes of geology. Through learning about the impact of wind, water, and time on the environment, survivors explored who they are in the present moment, what life was before, and the journey that brought them to where they are today.

Through TAPS Outdoor programming, survivors, their peers on staff and our partners and volunteers work together to create spaces to explore connections made

through ecological metaphors and both the experiences of being in and doing activities in nature. When we disconnect from our daily thoughts and routines, we allow space for new thoughts, new patterns and new relationships to blossom. This purposeful time in nature opens our minds and hearts to perspectives our daily lives cannot provide.

"The National Park Trust is honored to work with TAPS not only because of their incredible impact and life-changing programs," says Ivan Levin, the Director of Strategic Partnerships and Communications at National Park Trust, "but also because of the innovative ways they are embracing our country's public parks, lands, and waters to help with a survivor's grieving process. Thanks to TAPS, military survivors have the opportunity to experience some of America's most amazing natural places while fishing, camping, paddling, and more."

Through the rest of 2022 and into 2023, families will engage in our nation's national parks through a series of fly-



“The National Park Trust is honored to work with TAPS not only because of their incredible impact and life-changing programs, but also because of the innovative ways they are embracing our country’s public parks, lands, and waters to help with a survivor’s grieving process.”

Ivan Levin ★ The Director of Strategic Partnerships and Communications at National Park Trust

fishing activities, provided in partnership with both the National Park Trust and Trout Unlimited.

Trout Unlimited (TU) Chapters across the country are volunteering their time to both educate and guide survivors in fly-fishing experiences from TAPS Togethers in the Upper Chattahoochee Recreation Area of Georgia and on the National Mall in Washington, DC, to multi-day experiences in Olympic National Park and Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and more to come this fall and next spring!

Trout Unlimited has been a long-time supporter of TAPS, including guiding our surviving men in Montana on fly-fishing experiences on retreats. Trout Unlimited works to engage communities across the nation in repairing and renewing our rivers, streams and other waters to ensure future generations can experience the joy of the wild and native trout and salmon and the majesty of our nation’s natural environments.

“TU’s volunteers are a service-minded, fishy crew,” says Beverly Smith who works as TU’s Vice President of Volunteer Operations. “As anglers, we understand that there’s just something magical that can happen when standing in a cold, clean river with a rod in hand. As volunteers, we love nothing more than sharing that with others, but especially with TAPS participants.”

One surviving mother, who took part in the TAPS Togethers fly-fishing event in the Upper Chattahoochee Recreation Area of Georgia, shared: “This was my son’s favorite pastime and he always talked about taking us fly-fishing with him. I had so much fun here today with my daughter and granddaughter, his sister and niece. It really felt like he was here with us, right here close to home.”

Through this partnership with the National Park Trust and Trout Unlimited, TAPS is designing experiences that immerse families in both nearby nature and wild landscapes in our nation’s National Parks and Forests, providing meditative and recreational

opportunities — both therapeutic and to foster skill building — that can translate into regular leisure activities, and become coping skills for a lifetime.

Peer-to-peer connections, a healing and supportive community, and meaningful experiences in nature can be found closer to home than you might think, and TAPS Outdoors is here to help you find them.

For more information on upcoming TAPS Outdoors events or events with our partners from the National Park Trust and Trout Unlimited, please email expeditions@taps.org or refer to the TAPS Event Calendar:



**FULL TAPS
EVENTS CALENDAR**



**OUTDOOR
EVENTS CALENDAR**

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



Calendar of Events

2022



taps.org/nmsss

**14th Annual National
Military Suicide
Survivor Seminar
and Good Grief Camp**

OCTOBER 7-9, 2022

Dallas, Texas



[taps.org/
youth/2022/
california](https://taps.org/youth/2022/california)

California Family Camp

NOVEMBER 3-7, 2022

Julian, California



[taps.org/
seminars/2022/
western](https://taps.org/seminars/2022/western)

**Western Regional Military
Survivor Seminar
and Good Grief Camp**

NOVEMBER 18-20, 2022

Los Angeles, California

2023



JANUARY

TAPS 7 Night Mexican Riviera Cruise

Los Angeles, California

SURVIVOR SELF-FUNDED EXPERIENCE

taps.org/travel/2023/mexican-riviera

FEBRUARY

Southeast Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Destin, Florida



Women's Empowerment Retreat

Sedona, Arizona

MARCH

Alaska Iditarod Survivor Experience

Anchorage, Alaska



Mountain Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Denver, Colorado



Women's Empowerment Retreat

Savannah, Georgia

APRIL

TAPS 7 Night Women's Empowerment Color & Flow Caribbean Cruise

Miami, FL

SURVIVOR SELF-FUNDED EXPERIENCE

MAY

29th Annual National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Arlington, Virginia

JUNE

Women's Empowerment Retreat

Boone, North Carolina

JULY

Northwest Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Spokane, Washington

AUGUST

Northeast Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Buffalo, New York

SEPTEMBER

Southern Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

San Antonio, Texas

OCTOBER

15th Annual National Suicide Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Boston, Massachusetts



Women's Empowerment Retreat

Sedona, Arizona



Western Regional Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp

Long Beach, California

2024

JANUARY



Aconcagua Expedition

Mendoza, Argentina

SURVIVOR SELF-FUNDED EXPERIENCE

taps.org/expeditions/2024/aconcagua



taps.org/institute

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING®

WEBINAR:

OCTOBER 4, 2022

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM ET

Understanding The Healing Powers of Recreation, Leisure, and Play

Presenter: Rachel Hunsell, TAPS Manager of Outdoor Engagement

TAPS PORTAL

TAPS is excited to announce the recent launch of our TAPS Portal, an enhanced version of our survivor event management area. This platform will improve your ability to register yourself and your family for TAPS events.

All survivors registering for events, must create a TAPS Portal Account. Scan the QR Code to create your account today.

Send additional questions about the TAPS Portal to info@taps.org.



TAPS Portal



TAPS Portal FAQ



TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

3033 Wilson Boulevard, Third Floor
Arlington, VA 22201

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PAID
Stevens Point, WI
PERMIT NO. 272

800-959-TAPS (8277) ★ TAPS.org

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors offers comfort, care, and resources to all those grieving the death of a military loved one.



TAPS is a participant organization in the Combined Federal Campaign, No. 11309



"When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance, and inevitably we will feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding."

~ Helen Keller