

For the Loved Ones of Those Who Served and Died

T★A★P★S®

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

TAPS MAGAZINE | FALL 2021



WHAT'S INSIDE:

- ★ UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF
- ★ HOW DO WE START AGAIN?
- ★ GRIEF GRAPPLING: FIGHTING FOR A NEW NORMAL
- ★ LOVE IS NEVER FORGOTTEN
- ★ TENDING THE GARDEN OF GRIEF WITH MINDFULNESS MEDITATION



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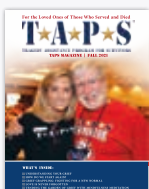
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TAPS PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- ★ 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline
 - ★ Peer-Based Support Network
 - ★ Survivor Care Team
- ★ Community-Based Care Connection
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- ★ Youth Programs: Good Grief Camps
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- ★ Publications: Magazines, Newsletters, & Blogs



ON THE COVER

TAPS Survivors Kim Ruocco and Andy Weiss attend the 2017 TAPS National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp.

Photo By Susan Thrumston

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 field 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 life of our military loved ones and celebrate military survivors as the living legacies of their service and sacrifice.

Empower: We empower survivors with health 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.

**TAPS MAGAZINE
VOLUME 22 ISSUE 3**

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**TAPS IS A TOP-RATED
NONPROFIT CHARITY**

TAPS exceeds industry standards for financial accountability— we remain committed to fiscal integrity. We are proud to have received many of the top nonprofit charity ratings available and are devoted to enhancing our support of all those grieving the death of a military loved one.



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Here for You, Now and Forever



Dear TAPS Family,

Welcome to the Fall Issue of the TAPS Magazine, our quarterly hug in the mail from your TAPS Family! This magazine is full of resources, support, and comfort. But most of all, it might just provide you with hope and healing as you navigate the loss of your military loved one. You may hear the voice of a fellow military survivor experiencing some of the same feelings that you are, letting you know that you are not alone. Think of our TAPS Magazine as your family newsletter, where we come together as a TAPS Family to share, learn, and grow.

Your fellow military survivors created our loving services to help guide you along your grief journeys. They developed programs within TAPS to support needs that they felt themselves, filling gaps and expanding grief resources for the military community. We work closely with the government and other private organizations to ensure that you have access to everything that could be helpful for you. Our TAPS Family is forever, and whether you need a hug today or help tomorrow, we will be here for you.

As we head into a new season, we may find that we are bracing ourselves for the fall cold and feeling a sense of loss for the summer warmth. Instead, try taking just a moment to enjoy the beauty of nature, breathe in the refreshingly crisp air, and enjoy the magnificent change in leaf colors.

The fall season can seem busy with school busses back on the road and stores preparing for holiday shoppers. On the other hand, it can seem quiet with neighbors staying inside to avoid the cold or to watch sports on TV. Fall can highlight that while life activities go on for others, we may not feel like they go on for us. Time may feel as though it is standing still, as though we are frozen, unable to move. I know that I believed that way after my husband died, and that is why having TAPS as your support system can be incredibly helpful.

We are here to inspire hope and healing, now and in the years ahead. Available 24/7, our network of peer professionals offer comfort and care for all those grieving the death of a military loved one. Call the TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline or attend a TAPS Event, virtual or in-person, to connect with us, build peer connections, and find support!

We are looking forward to seeing you soon, and in the meantime, we are sending you much love and a big hug.

With Care,

Bonnie Carroll | TAPS Founder and President

MILITARY LEADERSHIP



“The Department of Defense does a great job, from the time we recruit to retire, from the time we induct to inter, if someone dies on active duty or in retirement. But they stop at that point. Not because they want to stop, but because at that point, it’s really hard for the federal government to keep track of where a surviving family goes when they’ve lost a loved one. And that’s where TAPS comes in, an organization that helps survivors overcome tragic circumstances– the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. That’s why TAPS is so important.”

**Retired U.S. Army General
Martin E. Dempsey**

18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



“We deployed knowing that if something happened to us if we were wounded, we would come back, and we would receive first-class medical care. We knew that, and we could take it as an article of faith. We also knew that if something happened to us, there would be somebody there to take care of our families. We didn’t have to check our six o’clock, so for 14 years, our men and women have deployed, focused on the mission, paid attention to what they had to do, and they knew that back home they had the support network there and whatever their families needed, there were people there to take care of it. But I have to tell you that no organization is probably as responsible for that sense of confidence that we have had, that our families would be taken care of, than TAPS.”

**Retired U.S. Marine Corps
General Joseph F. Dunford Jr.**

19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

HONORS OUR TAPS FAMILY

“There is nothing more sacred than taking care of our families of the Fallen. As Airmen, we rarely fly into combat alone. We almost always do so in formation, and everyone in the formation has a responsibility and has to get their job done. I can think of no better example than flying in formation and taking care of each other than what you do with TAPS.”

Retired U.S. Air Force General David L. Goldfein

21st Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force



“What is unique about TAPS is the level of commitment of all survivors. Your loved one may have not died on the battlefield, they might not have died in line of duty, you may not be officially recognized as the next of kin, but TAPS has built a sanctuary that transcends those distinctions, honoring all service members who’ve lost their lives and supporting loved ones they left behind. The National Guard Bureau hopes to raise awareness of this vital organization so we can connect survivors with the comfort and hope they deserve. I know every National Guard survivor connected with TAPS will receive the one-of-a-kind support that only the TAPS Family can offer.”

U.S. Army General Daniel R. Hokanson

29th Chief of the National Guard Bureau



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[youtube.com/c/tapsorg](https://www.youtube.com/c/tapsorg)

As we forward our mission to care for the families of America’s fallen heroes, TAPS is honored to be supported by the Department of Defense. We invite you to watch our YouTube video, Military Leadership Who Support TAPS, to hear more about how military community leaders support our TAPS Family.



Understanding Your Grief: TEN TOUCHSTONES FOR FINDING HOPE AND HEALING YOUR HEART

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

PART 1 OF 4

INTRODUCTION

As you well know, grief is as old as humankind. Yet, every time we as humans lose someone we love or suffer any significant loss, it is a freshly painful, singular experience. By engaging with your grief when you're hurting, you're taking one small but oh-so-important step toward integrating the loss into your life. I often say that grief waits on welcome, not on time.

So here's a good rule of thumb: Whenever you're feeling your grief, I suggest you take a few seconds or minutes to tend to it in some way. I say this because your grief will keep trying to get your attention until you give it the attention it deserves. Your grief needs you right now. And as difficult as it is, you need your grief — because it is now an essential part of your life and who you are.

The Ten Touchstones

In this article series, I will review ten “touchstones” that are essential physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual signs for you to seek out in your journey through grief:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| TOUCHSTONE ONE | Open to the presence of your loss |
| TOUCHSTONE TWO | Dispel misconceptions about grief |
| TOUCHSTONE THREE | Embrace the uniqueness of your grief |
| TOUCHSTONE FOUR | Explore your feelings of loss |
| TOUCHSTONE FIVE | Understand the six needs of mourning |
| TOUCHSTONE SIX | Recognize you are not crazy |
| TOUCHSTONE SEVEN | Nurture yourself |
| TOUCHSTONE EIGHT | Reach out for help |
| TOUCHSTONE NINE | Seek reconciliation, not resolution |
| TOUCHSTONE TEN | Appreciate your transformation |

Perhaps you can think of your grief as a wilderness — a vast, mountainous, inhospitable forest. You are in the wilderness now. You are in the midst of unfamiliar and often brutal surroundings. You are cold and tired. Yet you must journey through this wilderness. To find your way out, you must become acquainted with its terrain and learn to follow the sometimes hard-to-find trail that leads to healing.

In this wilderness of your grief, the touchstones are your trail markers. They are the signs that let you know you are on the right path. If you strive to follow these ten touchstones, I believe you can and will find your way out of the wilderness of your grief, and you will learn to make the most of the rest of your precious days here on earth.

Finding Hope

What is hope? Hope is an expectation of a good that is yet to be. It's an expression of the present alive with a sense of the possible. It's a future-looking expectation felt in the present moment. In grief, hope is a belief that healing can and will unfold, and that despite the loss, there will surely be many meaningful, engaging, fun, happy, and even joyful times to come. In honoring the ten touchstones, you are making an effort to find hope for your continued life.

The Path of Your Heart

Perhaps the most central truth I have learned over the years is that integrating grief into your life is heart-based, not head-based. Did you know that the word “courage” comes from the Old French word for heart (coeur)? Your courage grows for those things in life that impact you deeply. In many ways the path of the heart is an individual exploration into the wilderness, along unmarked and unlit paths. I hope this article series will shine some light along your path.



A Word About Faith and Spirituality

I believe that grief is first and foremost a spiritual journey because it forces us to examine our most fundamental beliefs and feelings about why we are here and what life means. To me, spirituality means engaging with these big questions and the deepest, most meaningful stirrings of your heart in whatever ways you choose. Whether you are deeply religious, agnostic, or atheist, pondering the meaning of life and love and the possibilities of the mysteries we do not and cannot fully understand is an essential part of your journey. Regularly spending time on spiritual practices — whatever that means to you — will help you embrace your grief and come out of the dark and into the light.

TOUCHSTONE ONE OPEN TO THE PRESENCE OF YOUR LOSS

From my own experiences with loss, as well as those of the many grieving people I have companioned over the years, I have learned that the pain of grief is both normal and necessary.

In opening to the presence of the pain of your loss, in acknowledging the inevitability and appropriateness of the pain, in being willing to gently embrace

the pain, you in effect honor the pain. Yes, as crazy as it may sound, your pain is the key that opens your heart and ushers you on your way to healing. Simply put, the capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn.

You have perhaps been taught that pain, in general, is an indication that something is wrong and that it's your job to find ways to alleviate the pain. You may also think of pain and feelings of loss as experiences to avoid, suppress, or deny. But over time you will learn that the pain of your grief will keep trying to get your attention until you have the courage to gently, and in small doses, open to its presence. You will also learn that the alternative — denying or suppressing your pain — is in fact more harmful in the long run.

What is Healing in Grief?

To heal in grief is to become whole again, to integrate your grief into yourself and to learn to continue your changed life with fullness and meaning. Healing is a holistic concept that embraces the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual realms. Note that healing is not the same as “curing,” which is a medical term that means “remedying” or “correcting.” You cannot remedy your grief, but you can reconcile it. You cannot correct your grief, but you can heal it.

Dosing Your Pain

You cannot embrace the pain of your grief in one sitting. If you were to feel it all at once, you could not survive. Instead, you must invite yourself to “dose” your pain — to feel it in small waves and then allow it to retreat until you're ready for the next wave. In other words, I encourage you to remember to embrace your pain a little bit at a time, then set it aside and give yourself a break, allowing time for you to restore yourself and rebuild your energy to attend to your grief again. Of course, you won't be able to completely escape your pain; even when you're not giving it your full attention, it will always be there, in the background.

Setting Your Intention to Heal

When you set your intention to heal, you make a true commitment to positively influence the course of your journey. You choose between being what I call a “passive witness” or an “active participant” in your grief. I'm sure you have heard this tired cliché: Time heals all wounds. Yet time alone has little to do with healing. To heal, you must be willing to learn about the mystery of the grief journey. It can't be fixed or “resolved,” it can only be soothed and reconciled through actively engaging with and expressing your many thoughts and feelings.

No Rewards for Speed

Reconciling your grief does not happen quickly or efficiently. “Grief work” may be some of the hardest work you ever do. Because mourning is work, it calls on your physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual reserves. And it takes time. A long time. And there are no rewards for speed. Consequently, you must be patient with yourself. When you come to trust that the most intense pain will not last forever, it naturally becomes more tolerable.

The Importance of Presence

To be present is to notice and give your attention to whatever is happening around and inside you in each moment. It is to honor and mindfully experience the now. Especially in the early parts of your journey, your grief needs your mindful attention. In addition to being an always-there, background reality in your life, your grief will sometimes strongly tug at you and ask for your attention. For example, on any given day you may feel especially sad. It is in such moments that your grief requires your presence. It is asking for your full attention and self-compassion. It would also benefit from a good dose of expression, as well.

TOUCHSTONE TWO DISPEL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GRIEF

A misconception is a mistaken notion you have about something — in other words, something you believe to be true but isn't. Misconceptions about grief are common in our culture because we tend not to openly mourn or validate or talk about grief and mourning.

The misconceptions, in essence, deny you your right to hurt and authentically express your grief. They often cause unrealistic expectations about the grief experience, and they may make you doubt or judge yourself unfairly.

Following are just a few of the most common grief misconceptions:

Misconception: Grief and mourning are the same thing

Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies. In other words, grief is everything we naturally think and feel on the inside after a loss. Mourning, on the other hand, is when we take our inner grief and express it outside of ourselves in some way.

Talking about the person who died, crying, expressing our thoughts and feelings through art or music, and celebrating special dates that held meaning for the person who died are just a few examples of mourning. Grief comes naturally, but mourning usually takes intentional effort and commitment. It's worth it, though, because the only way to move toward fully integrating loss into our lives and eventually healing is not just by grieving, but by mourning.

Misconception: Grief and mourning progress in predictable, orderly stages

You have probably heard of the “stages of grief.” The world latched onto this concept because it's appealing to feel like there's a knowable structure to such a difficult life experience and to have some sense of control over it. If only it were so simple! The truth is that grief is typically not orderly or predictable. Do not try to determine where you “should” be in your grief. Just allow yourself to be naturally where you are and present to whatever you're experiencing in each moment.

Everyone mourns in different ways. Personal experience is your best teacher, and you and only you are the expert of your own grief. Don't think your goal is to move through prescribed stages. Your journey through the wilderness will be totally unique to you.

Misconception: The goal should be to “get over” your grief as soon as possible

You may already have heard the question, “Are you over it yet?” Or, even worse, “Well, you should be over it by now!” To think that as a human being you ever “get over” your grief is a misnomer. You don't “get over” grief, you learn to live with it. You learn to integrate it into your life and the fabric of your being.

No, you will never “get over” your grief. As you actively engage with your grief, however, and do the work of your mourning, you can and will become reconciled to it. Unfortunately,

if people around you expect you to “get over” your grief, they set you up to fail.

Misconception: Nobody can help you with your grief

We have all heard people say, “Nobody can help you but yourself.” Or you may have been told since childhood, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” Yet, the truth is that the most self-compassionate thing you can do for yourself at this naturally difficult time is to reach out for help from others.

Sharing your pain with others won't make it disappear, but it will, over time, make it more bearable. By definition, mourning (i.e., the outward expression of grief) requires that you get support from sources outside of yourself. Grieving may be a solo activity, but mourning is often not. Reaching out for help also connects you to other people and strengthens the bonds of love that make life seem worth living.

A longtime TAPS supporter, Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (coauthored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll), *Understanding Your Grief*, and *The Understanding Your Grief Journal*. Visit centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.

Editor's note: This four-part series is excerpted and condensed from the second edition of Dr. Wolfelt's classic *Understanding Your Grief*, first published thirty years ago. The new edition, just published in September 2021, retains the original bestseller's compassionate content but adds concise passages on more topics, ranging from vulnerability, soulmate grief, and complicated grief to mindfulness, the power of ritual, and more. It also features a fresh, updated look. This book is accompanied by a journal, a support group facilitator's guide, and a daily reader version. For more information go to centerforloss.com

LOSING WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

THE CHALLENGE OF MOVING BEYOND OUR SORROW

Judy Tatelbaum | Psychotherapist | Public Speaker | Author

A tolling weight on our shoulders after the death of a loved one is the sorrow that we must endure knowing that they can no longer be part of our futures. As we grieve, reminders of our lost hopes and dreams, ones that we wished to celebrate with our loved ones, can be excruciatingly painful.

THE PAIN OF LETTING OUR HOPES AND DREAMS GO

Just three years younger than my brother David, I never thought that I would have to live my life without him. However, when David died at 20 years old, I was acutely aware that I had just lost my whole future, our whole future. Everything that we had planned to do together, all the dreams we had for and with each other, were killed off the moment David died. My future felt blank.

Whenever a loved one dies, we feel the added ache for what is no longer possible. Lost to us are the conversations we never had and the wonders of growing old together, watching our families expand. With the loss of a child, also lost to us are graduations, weddings, grandchildren, and every other milestone we had hoped they would cross. The women in my grief group have also talked about missing the little things, parts of their everyday lives that they previously took for granted. Throughout the rest of our lives, we will feel the intense pain of losing what might have been.

THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING MEANINGFUL FUTURES

All of this points to a very human quality— as we live today, we are always subtly designing an imagined future for ourselves and our loved ones. And since

death destroys our dreams, we may feel at a loss to move forward beyond our sorrow to create meaningful lives.

I encourage survivors, when they are ready, to create something in memory of their loved ones. I have often said that one of the best ways we can honor our loved ones is by living great lives and keeping their spirits alive. Crafting pieces of writing or art, volunteering in our communities,

and making donations are just a few of the many things we can do to forward their memories. We can honor our loved ones by helping and inspiring others to move with us into better, brighter futures.



How Do We Start Again?

SMALL STEPS TO RECONNECT WITH OURSELVES

Erin Jacobson | Director, TAPS Women's Empowerment | Surviving Fiancé of U.S. Army Corporal Jason Kessler



What comes into your mind when you read the words health, body, self-care, fitness? How do these words land emotionally? Notice what comes up for you. Maybe you feel positive emotions, and that is fantastic. But maybe, you have a different experience. Maybe, feelings of exhaustion, shame, or defeat come over you. If this is the case, know that *you are not alone*

GRIEF CAN BE EXHAUSTING

Under the best circumstances as a society, we have a complicated relationship with our bodies. Countless articles discuss the effects social media, films, magazines, and more have on our self-image. This topic isn't new. For us who have gone through grief and loss, another layer attaches to it all. Loss affects many layers of our lives— and our relationships are at the top of the list. Yes, loss impacts our relationships with friends and family. But, our relationships with ourselves go through a tremendous transformation as well. We take stock of our lives and reevaluate our choices. We want to make sure that we are living the best versions of our lives after seeing the lives of our loved ones end. What can be incredibly challenging, confusing, and debilitating is when the intentions of our minds don't seem possible because of the amount of energy required to accomplish them.

As time goes on, maybe we have poured ourselves into achieving goals, serving others, or even just making it through the day, so much so that we feel depleted. Functioning on grit and heart will take you far, but if we neglect to devote time towards nourishing ourselves, there is a point where we can hit a wall. When all

of our energy goes outward, we don't have anything left for us. Maybe we have begun to hate looking in the mirror or feel like we are on the paper-thin edge of holding it all together. When we get to places like this, our health is one of the things to suffer most, and our minds may race with thoughts. "Tomorrow I'll deal with it, today x, y, and z are more important," or, "What does it matter?" We may get to a place where the mountain of choosing ourselves, choosing our health, can feel like an almost impossible mountain to climb. The starts and stops of beginning and then feeling like we are "failing" can be even more challenging. We might experience self-loathing. Sometimes, we may go as far as asking ourselves questions that are harsh and judgment-filled. "Why can't I just get it together? Why am I such a failure?" For those of you who have gotten to a place where you don't recognize yourself in your own body— *you are seen, and you are not alone.*

KNOW THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE

How do we begin again after feeling like this? What does success look like when it comes to our health journeys? What places do the effects of grief have in our trajectory towards disregarding our health and the challenge to reclaim it?

One of the most impactful parts of transformation is knowing you are not alone. Whether that is by finding other survivors who have gone through a similar loss or knowing that many of us struggle with our relationships with our physical bodies after the death of our loved one, knowing you are not alone can make all of the difference.



**DISCOVER SELF-GRATITUDE
AS YOU HEAL**

So how do we begin again? One important first step is to look at ourselves with kindness and appreciate what we have gone through. If we can approach our bodies with the lens of gratitude, we can begin to change our perception. Our bodies are worthy of compassion and care, regardless of what they look like or perform like right now. We all have different capabilities, but there is always something to be grateful about with them. Our arms have held our loved ones tightly. Our lips have spoken words of power, love, and truth. Our legs have taken us step by step through the hardest days of our lives. Our hearts have expanded to take in the heart of another. Our eyes have looked upon beauty and tragedy and continue to see.

You can begin again. Change is possible. How things are now is not how they will stay, and sometimes they can change for the better. You can rewire and redirect the way you think about health and form new habits. Changing our thought process is always the first step in changing our physical progress.



ERIN JACOBSON

YOU CAN BEGIN AGAIN. CHANGE IS POSSIBLE.

☆ What are you grateful for about this body of yours today? Write a list of the ways your body has supported you after loss.

☆ Look in the mirror. What are the first three thoughts that come into your mind? Are they kind? Are they harsh? Notice what you think, and write it down. Consider if there is a way that you could reframe your assessment.

☆ Take stock of what you HAVE done. Often times, we default to thinking that we are at zero, but that simply isn't true. You have walked through the desolate land of grief and gotten back up, again, and again, and again.

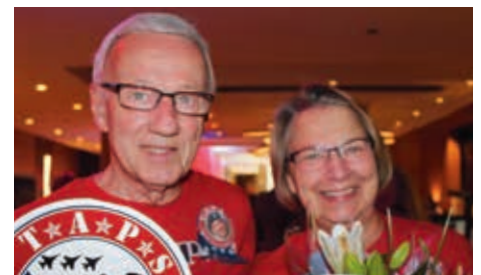
GRIEF GRAPPLING

FIGHTING FOR A NEW NORMAL

Sandra Egts | Surviving Mother of U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Adam James White



“Every day, there is some part of grief we must face in order to prepare for the next weeks and months.”



There is tremendous shock, confusion, and even denial that accompanies sudden death. It is equally traumatic to watch the prolonged suffering of those you love. Regardless of how grief comes for you, it will come— it is the great, dark hunter. You can't ignore grief. It tracks you down and demands its rightful share of your life, no matter what the circumstance.

Back in my early grief days, I was simply learning how to tell my story, struggling to put into words what had happened to my loved ones and to explain what had happened to my life. I felt as if each day was a long tournament, because I never knew exactly how the opponent, grief, would present itself. Every day, there is some part of grief we must

face to prepare for the next weeks and months. I might as well understand that I'm in a match where grief is my lifetime opponent. But my life can still be happy, hopeful, and full of love.

Grief Is An Equalizer

The Olympic Games open doors for us to see different styles of training, competition and triumph. People come from all around the world and bring different cultures, traditions, languages, politics, faiths, obstacles, and ideas as they compete. We can consider how this thought ties in with our personal views of grief.

By now, we've learned that death does not discriminate— everyone experiences

it at some point. When it finally touches our lives, we don't all grieve the same way; therefore, we don't always speak the same grief language. But our objective is the same— to get healthy and learn how to live fully again in the shadow of our losses.

Step On The Mat

There will be days when you will feel strong, as if you can take on grief with no training. Maybe your grief shows up for an early workout session, and it seems easy. However, there are plenty of days when grief waits for us with a surprise training round late in the day when we are tired and weak. Some days, we will beat it, but other days, it may get the best of us. This is OK.

The larger point is that we step onto the mat. We get stronger every time we learn to face the way our lives have changed. And, we increase our stamina by knowing that while grief changed us, it only won the round and not the tournament.

Finding Inspiration

Olympic training takes absolute commitment, strength, and courage—it is inspirational. What an example of wanting something so badly that you spend hours every day training? Olympic athletes train tirelessly for their success and make sacrifices for the opportunity to compete. Can we do any less to honor our heroes?

Nope. That's exactly what we have to do. Now, we need to focus on daily training because grief grappling is not for the faint of heart.

TAPS Is On Your Team

Olympic training takes absolute commitment, strength, and courage—it is inspirational. What an example of wanting something so badly that you spend hours every day training? Olympic athletes train tirelessly for their success and make sacrifices for the opportunity to compete. Can we do any less to honor our heroes?

Nope. That's exactly what we have to do. Now, we need to focus on daily training because grief grappling is not for the faint of heart.

It's OK To Take A Knee

Special dates, memorable occasions, and holidays can leave us depleted and tired. These feelings are why we need to work daily on our grief and build our stamina for the times when the loss and heartache wash over us. It's alright if there are days when you need to take a knee. In these moments, carve out just a bit of time for personal reflection and affirmation. In this event, there is a prize for just waking up to face another day.

Take The Round

Loss will be with us forever. But, our loved ones are also with us forever. This assurance helps us continue to commit to making our days better, even when they're hard. Is our training regimen helping us improve and reach our personal best? Hopefully, with regular grief work, you will find more days when you take the round. But, as I've found, sometimes the punches just keep coming. As soon as we face one loss, another seems to come. It's OK to acknowledge the difficult times as well as the ways you've found basic coping skills. Pretty soon, you'll be refreshed and

ready to face the next layer of thoughts, hurt, and uncertainty.

In the TAPS family, you'll see people at all stages in the grief process. It may be overwhelming to know how deep the field goes. We might start to lose hope, or we may be newly encouraged when we can step back, lower the pressure, and take it one round, or day, at a time.

A New Understanding of Victory

Grief has no finish line, so we must commit to establishing a pace that is comfortable and sustainable. The goal is to be present, participate in the journey, and strive alongside other survivors. We'll become more mentally, spiritually, and emotionally fit, and all the hard work will be worth it. Our spirits will feel lighter and more joyful as we reevaluate what it means to triumph through grief, to cope with it rather than to "over" it.

So, if we see each other grappling with grief and it looks as if we're having trouble, reach out. The support of our team guarantees that we'll keep trying. The most painful events we experience can motivate us to become stronger, wiser, and more resilient. Isn't that victory?

SWEEPING OUT THE COBWEBS

THOUGHTS FROM THE AUTHOR

I tend to spend part of the fall season looking over the past year and taking stock. I reflect on this crazy existence by writing, sweeping out the cobwebs in my mind, and reflecting on what I have learned about life, love, and loss.

Years ago, my husband kissed me for the last time before succumbing to complications of lung cancer. It seems like it was yesterday—it seems like forever ago. I miss him more as time goes by.

I found this to also be true after losing my dad and grandmother, who both suffered for a period before their deaths. My dad suffered debilitating strokes in the last year and a half of his life. Grandma's decline was over about three years. It took some time for all the good, pretty memories to overcome the sadness, pain, changes, and suffering that were present at the end.

And, on the other hand, the very sudden deaths of my mother and son cut like a

knife from the start. My mother showed no signs of illness when she died from sudden cardiac arrest at 62. My son was 33 when he died unexpectedly from service-related injuries.

These multiple rounds of grief have driven me to face my grief in a new way and formulate a plan to deal with this new normal. Weary with loss, I'm still working hard to embrace grief, give it its due, and move past changes I never anticipated.

LOVE IS NEVER FORGOTTEN

DEALING WITH TRAUMA RE-TRIGGERED BY CURRENT EVENTS

Briana Hobbs | Surviving Daughter of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Brian S. Hobbs

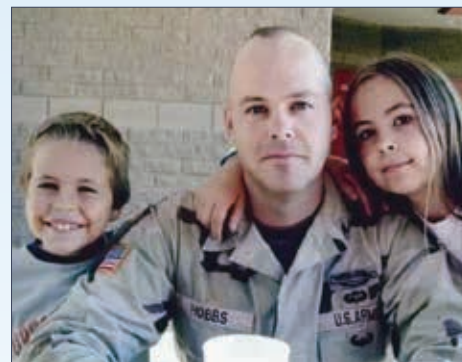
My dad embarked on a journey to fight for Afghan freedom in 2004. Journey best describes anything my dad did. He didn't just do things— he embodied them. In everything he did, he was all in. As a unique renaissance man, he had a charisma that drew people in and made them fall in love. He was a creative weirdo, philosophical, musical, a fantastic writer, brave, and a natural leader. As a child, I felt like there was nothing my dad couldn't do. My dad was good at everything.

BEFORE OCTOBER 14, 2004

Flashback to 2004 in Afghanistan, there were no video calls or emails. During my dad's deployment, he could barely speak on the phone. So, we mostly exchanged letters. He embraced the Afghan culture, people, and landscape, admiring their beauty. He made profound memories as he found ways to make Afghan people feel seen.

With a giant heart, my dad helped all Afghans as much as he could. He fought beside Afghan people and found ways to make his fellow soldiers smile. In the limited packages my family could send overseas, he asked for pens and paper for the kids. They craved the opportunity to learn, but they couldn't go to school. My dad was determined and believed in helping people.

My family was lucky— my dad was able to come home on mid-tour leave. He shared pieces of the Afghan culture with us, bringing tea sets, dolls, and outfits from local businesses in Afghanistan. He shared stories, both good and bad, of his experience there. Afghan life was hard, especially for women and children.



My dad wanted freedom and education for all Afghans. He believed in this cause, but he never saw it happen.

ON OCTOBER 14, 2004

On October 14, 2004, my dad's life was cut short by an improvised explosive device (IED) as he attempted to deliver voting ballots to Afghan civilians. This bomb, destroying my dad's body and ending his ability to live, simultaneously went off in my life, fragmenting it into pieces. Irrevocably, my life changed from that point on. Everything that I had known and understood had broken. My deeply wounded soul ached to heal.

AFTER OCTOBER 14, 2004

Flash forward to 2021, to now— to seeing everything that my dad yearned for Afghan people seemingly destroyed. What was the point? Why did my dad lose his life? Frozen in fear with emotions swirling through my brain, I ponder these thoughts. **I remember that love is never pointless.** The seeds of love that my dad planted were not pointless. Freedom and education for 15 years were not pointless efforts. They mattered to the Afghan people, and they still matter.

Although I don't understand the complexities of war, I understand love. As I hear awful news of the horror happening in Afghanistan, I focus on remembering the seeds that my dad and our nation planted. The pens and paper that my family sent to my dad, the ones that he donated to Afghan children, turned into schools. Evil wants to say that it's gone, but good is still there—growing and blossoming. And one day, good will outshine evil, once again.

FINDING MEANING IN AFGHANISTAN

“The true lessons of war are not in what our warriors died for but for what, and for whom, they lived for.”

Bonnie Carroll | TAPS President and Founder

Since 1994, TAPS has provided a wide range of services to military and veteran survivors who are grieving the loss of their loved ones who served as Americans or American allies. The last several weeks have been especially heartbreaking for the people of Afghanistan, the military men and women who served, their families, our nation, and the world. News coverage of recent events has revealed shocking images of violence and destruction, which have awakened feelings of hurt, grief, depression, anxiety, anger, or confusion for those who have served in the Armed Forces and their loved ones.

Now more important than ever, TAPS is supporting Gold Star Families who are reeling from the chaos in Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover. TAPS hosted Finding Meaning in Afghanistan, a panel discussion featuring personal accounts from military loss survivors, veterans, and veteran families on how the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is affecting them. Panelists and special guests shed light on various perspectives of those powerfully impacted by the devastation in Afghanistan. It explored how each of us can hold onto hope—how we can honor both the lives and the service our loved ones gave to our great nation.

WATCH THE PANEL ONLINE
taps.org/video/2021/afghanistan



HEALING HEARTS. EMPOWERING WOMEN

Creating hope through the stone of heaven, the Afghan Lapis Lazuli Collection brings together two countries with broken hearts and lost loved ones by creating hope and stability for grieving women. Each piece is handmade and packaged with love by women affected by war.



T*A*P*S | Store

Our Artisan jewelry is crafted together by American and Afghan military families and are available for purchase. shop.taps.org

“Does Afghanistan have a struggle in front of them? Undoubtedly so. Will I, my children, and the TAPS family continue to miss our loved ones? Unequivocally, yes. Yet I hold a ray of hope that good triumphs over evil. I am thankful my husband and the loved ones of others heard that call and answered it. They lived extraordinary lives and went to extraordinary measures for us. They’ve impacted countless lives for good, and for this, their service sees no end.”

Jennifer Stratton | Surviving Spouse of U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Mark E. Stratton II

PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES

After-Death Communication

Evidence That Life and Love are Eternal

Bill Guggenheim and Judy Guggenheim, | Co-authors of *Hello From Heaven!* (Bantam Books, 1995)

Have you been contacted by a loved one who has died? After-death communication (ADC) experiences are not a new phenomenon. These spiritual experiences are extremely common, and in many other parts of the world, they can be discussed openly and freely with relatives and friends.

Between 1988 and 1995, we interviewed 2,000 people who live in all fifty American states and all ten Canadian provinces. Ranging in age from children to the elderly, they represent diverse social, educational, economic, occupational, and religious backgrounds. We conservatively estimate that at least fifty million Americans have had one or more ADC experiences – and the actual numbers may be closer to double these figures!

We collected more than 3,300 firsthand accounts of ADCs from people who have been contacted by a deceased family member or friend. These are spontaneous and direct communications that may occur anytime and anywhere, but no third parties such as psychics, mediums, hypnotists, or devices of any kind are involved. Based on our research, the following are the twelve most frequent types of after-death communication people report having with their deceased loved ones:

Sensing A Presence: This is the most common form of contact. But many people discount these experiences, thinking, "Oh, I'm just imagining this." It's a distinct feeling that your loved one is nearby, even though he or she can't be seen or heard. Though most often felt during the days and weeks immediately

after the death, you may sense his or her presence months and even years later.

Hearing A Voice: Some people state they hear an external voice, the same as when a living person is speaking to them. However, the majority of communications are by telepathy – you hear the voice of your relative or friend in your mind. When you have two-way communication, it is usually by telepathy. In fact, it's possible to have an entire conversation this way.

Feeling A Touch: You may feel your loved one touch you with his or her hand, or place an arm around your shoulders or back, for comfort and reassurance. You may feel a tap, a pat, a caress, a stroke, a kiss, or even a hug. These are all forms of affection, nurturing, and love.

Smelling A Fragrance: You may smell your relative's or friend's favorite cologne, after-shave lotion, or perfume. Other common aromas are: flowers, bath powders, tobacco products, favorite foods, and personal scents.

Visual Experiences: There are a wide variety of visual experiences, which we have divided into two broad categories: partial visual and full visual ADCs. Appearances range from "a transparent mist" to "absolutely solid" with many gradations in between. You may see only the head and shoulders of your relative or friend, or someone you love may make a full appearance to you, and you will see the entire body as well, which will appear completely solid. Loved ones virtually always appear healed and whole regardless of their

cause of death. Verbal communication may take place but not always.

Visions: You may see an image of a deceased loved one in a "picture" that is either two-dimensional and flat or three-dimensional like a hologram. It's like seeing a 35 mm slide or a movie suspended in the air. Visions are usually in radiant colors and may be seen externally with your eyes open or internally in your mind. Communication may occur, especially during meditation.

Twilight Experiences: These occur in the alpha state – as you're falling asleep, waking up, meditating, or praying. You may have any or all of the above types of experiences while you are in this state of consciousness.

ADC Experiences While Asleep: Sleep-state ADCs are much more vivid, intense, colorful, and real than dreams. They are very common. Both one-way and two-way communications are typical. You usually feel your loved one is with you in person – that you're having an actual visit together. These experiences are not jumbled, filled with symbols, or fragmented the way dreams are. Sleep-state ADCs are similar to those that occur when you are wide awake. Your relative or friend can come to you more easily, however, when you are relaxed, open, and receptive, such as while you are in the alpha state or asleep.

Out-Of-Body ADCs: These may occur while you are asleep or in a meditative state. They are dramatic experiences during which you leave your body and often visit your loved one at the place or level where they exist. These are extremely vivid, intense, and real – some say, "more real than



physical life." The environments usually contain beautiful flowers and butterflies, colorful bushes and trees, radiant lighting, and other lovely aspects of nature – that are filled with happiness, love, and joy.

Telephone Calls: These ADCs may occur during sleep or when you are wide awake. You will hear a phone ringing, and if you answer it, your loved one will give you a short message. Two-way conversations are possible. Their voice will usually be clear but may seem far away. If you are awake, you will probably not hear a disconnect sound or a dial tone when the call is completed.

Physical Phenomena: People who are bereaved often report receiving a wide variety of physical signs from their deceased relative or friend, such as lights or lamps blinking on and off; lights, radios, televisions, stereos, and mechanical objects being turned on; photographs, pictures, and various other items being turned over or moved; and a long list of "things that go bump in the night."

Symbolic ADCs: People frequently ask a Higher Power, the universe, or their deceased loved one for a sign that they still exists. Many receive such a sign, though it may take some time to arrive. Occasionally these signs are so subtle they may be missed, or they may be discounted as mere "coincidences." Common signs include: butterflies, rainbows, many species of birds and animals, flowers, and a variety of inanimate objects such as coins and pictures.

According to our research, the purpose of these visits and signs by those who have died is to offer comfort, reassurance, and hope to their parents, spouse, siblings, children, grandchildren, other family members, and friends. They want you to know they're still alive and that you'll be reunited with them when it's your time to leave this physical life on earth – and they'll be there to greet you when you make your transition. You may be asked to give a message from your loved one to somebody else. We urge you to write down the message verbatim and to deliver it, if possible, because it may help the recipient far more than you realize.

Nearly all ADCs are positive, joyful, and uplifting encounters that reduce grief, provide lasting comfort and hope, and accelerate emotional and spiritual healing. We encourage you to trust your own experiences and to accept them as being real for you. Unfortunately, some people react with fear when they have an ADC. This is usually because they are startled by the suddenness of the event, or they may have never heard of one happening to anybody else. Such people may assume they are "losing their mind and going crazy." And others find it difficult to reconcile after-death communications with their philosophical or religious beliefs.

Not all people are contacted by their deceased loved ones. We don't know for certain why some are and some aren't, but it seems that fear, anger, and prolonged heavy grief inhibit the possibility of having an ADC. Based on our research, we suggest the following: Ask for a sign that your relative or friend continues to exist. Pray for them and others who are affected by their death, including yourself. We recommend that you learn how to meditate, especially if you are currently bereaved or have unresolved grief. Meditation will enable you to relax and soften any fear or anger you may have. It will reduce your depression, improve your ability to eat and sleep, and facilitate your healing process. These deep relaxation exercises will also allow you to unfold your inner, intuitive senses. In fact, you may have an ADC experience while you are meditating.

Our research indicates that after-death communications are a natural and normal part of life. Therefore, we feel ADCs deserve the same public awareness and acceptance that near-death experiences (NDEs) have already received. For most people, an after-death communication from a deceased family member or friend is valued as a sacred and profound experience that will be cherished for a lifetime. ADC experiences usually expand one's understanding of life and offer a deeper awareness of life after death. They consistently communicate an essential spiritual message: "Life and love are eternal."

For more information visit:
after-death.com

We Are Here for You!

TAPS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR HELPLINE

202-588-TAPS (8277)

Grief knows no boundaries. Challenging moments, when survivors may need extra support, can come at any -time. The TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline is answered live—24/7/365— with gentle care for all those grieving the loss 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 SUPPORT

taps.org/peermentors

Survivors helping survivors is the foundation of TAPS. We bring survivors together to find strength and hope through our TAPS Peer Mentor network. Survivors who are at least 18 months out from their loss volunteer their time and receive training to become Peer Mentors, who are paired with newly bereaved survivors to help them navigate 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

On top of the exhaustion of grief, survivors often become overwhelmed by the complexity of managing benefits, finances, paperwork, and other unexpected issues. TAPS Casework assist surviving military families during these difficult times. Our casework team strivaeas diligently to align with partners and third-party resources address the individual needs of each family, 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. If survivors wish to pursue post-secondary education, TAPS Education Services empowers survivors to enter the next phase in their lives. We serve as a guide to scholarship information and benefits resources. Our education support coordinators work with survivors to explain benefits, align available resources and educational goals, and determine the best options for financial assistance.

COMMUNITY-BASED GRIEF SUPPORT

taps.org/griefcounseling

Military survivors may benefit from individual grief counseling. Skilled therapists can help those grieving work through difficult questions, changes in relationships, and secondary losses. The right counselor can guide survivors to discover their strengths and develop coping skills that work for them. With the support of our network of strong community partners, TAPS connects survivors to free, unlimited grief counseling, trauma resources, and local support groups. We perform careful research and compiles resources with love and care to locate support for survivors near their homes.

SURVIVOR CARE TEAM

taps.org/survivorcareteam

At the heart of our survivor support, the TAPS Survivor Care Team compassionately connects survivors with all the resources that TAPS offers. Members of our Survivor Care Team are surviving military family members who have been through extensive professional training on emotional, peer-based support, traumatic death, and grief. They are proud to serve as advocates, attentive listeners, and companions for their fellow survivors. Through personalized support, our peer professionals create safe spaces where survivors feel heard and empowered to develop their long-term support systems.

SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT

taps.org/suicide

TAPS has supported thousands of military suicide loss by offering them hope, healing, and renewed opportunities for growth. We understand that suicide grief is different—death by suicide can leave behind a wake of powerful, complicated emotions and questions. Our special programs and resources provide compassionate support 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 survivors towards a path of “healthy grieving” and growth.

ILLNESS LOSS SUPPORT

taps.org/caregiver

TAPS is a leader in ensuring that surviving military families whose loved ones died from illnesses are recognized, cared for, and aware of all benefits they are eligible for. We compile relevant legislation, medical studies, expert testimony, literature, and reports to create reference manuals that serve as the foundation of future advocacy work. We critically raise awareness about the effects of toxic exposure, help families navigate the benefits process following a military loss, and provide connections for survivors who have lost their loved ones after having been their caregivers.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

taps.org/empowerment

The pain of loss ushers in hard questions: Why are we here? What is our purpose? TAPS Womens' Empowerment helps 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've imagined. Through in-person and virtual events, we bring together a vibrant, compassionate community and supportive sisterhood of surviving women— who treasure opportunities to be each other's teachers, confidantes, cheerleaders, and friends.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

taps.org/youthprograms

Though their lives are marked by grief, young TAPS survivors know that their lives will also be marked by camaraderie, mentorship, emotional maturity, adventure, and fun. Led by experts in the fields of child development, mental health, and education, TAPS Youth Programs provides safe spaces for military children to explore grief and embrace healing, such as Good Grief Camps, summer campouts, teen adventures, and family retreats.

YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMS

taps.org/youngadults

Designed for surviving military children and siblings between ages 18-25, the TAPS Young Adult Program helps children graduating from the TAPS Good Grief Camp transition into a more mature program. Our dynamic curriculum focuses on five pillars of growth: personal development, financial stability, communication, career development, and service to others. We provide young adult survivors with tools to help them 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 nation and worldwide leader in training and education for bereavement professionals, bereaved individuals, grieving families, and civilian families. Useful information on grief and bereavement support is available to all through webinars, webcasts, and other events. The Institute offers programs focused on understanding suicide; understanding children's grief; practical tips for coping with grief; 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. 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, offering both valuable inspiration and information. In collaboration with subject matter experts, we have designed a series of pocket-size guides— available at no cost to survivors and readily accessible online— that provide information on available resources and services for grief and bereavement support. 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, Ph.D.; the children's book *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope*; and the TAPS Magazine.

A CAREER AND LEGACY OF DEDICATED SERVICE



KIM RUOCCO | SURVIVING SPOUSE OF U.S. MARINE CORPS MAJOR JOHN RUOCCO

CELEBRATING SURVIVOR **KIM RUOCCO**

KIM RUOCCO HAS BROUGHT ENERGY, CARE, AND CREATIVITY TO HER WORK WITH TAPS, COMMUNITIES, AGENCIES, AND ORGANIZATIONS NATIONWIDE. KIM HAS BEAUTIFULLY BECOME THE LIVING LEGACY OF HER LOVED ONE, AND WE HOPE HER ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THEIR IMPACTS INSPIRE YOU!

Throughout more than a decade of dedicated service, survivor Kim Ruocco has inspirationally reduced the silence and stigma surrounding suicide. As a fellow survivor, she has brought empathy, compassion, and creativity in developing comprehensive, peer-based programs within TAPS that offer comfort and care to those grieving the loss of a military loved one to suicide. Kim is a world-renowned subject matter expert on suicide bereavement, and she has beautifully become the Living Legacy of her late husband Marine Major John Ruocco. Here at TAPS, we celebrate Kim's career of selfless service and honor her extraordinary accomplishments and their life-saving impacts!

KIM ELEGANTLY EXEMPLIFIES POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

There comes a time along the journey for survivors when we may begin to ask ourselves challenging questions. Who am I now? What is next for me? How can I make meaning after what has happened?

After we have stabilized complicated issues and processed intentional, focused grief work, this concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG), may arise as we move away from our past pain towards our lives ahead. Kim Ruocco elegantly exemplifies PTG by combining her personal suicide loss experience, educational background, and information gathered from thousands of survivors to help others better understand the complexity of suicide and reduce suicide in those at risk.

Kim often shared that at the time of her husband John's death in 2005, there was very little support or reliable information available on surviving, let alone on grieving, the traumatic, devastating loss of a loved one to suicide. As a military widow, mother of two young boys, and social worker, she recognized the tremendous need to help the rising number of military suicide loss survivors like herself and her family. Kim passionately took on this mission and created a program within TAPS to provide

compassionate care to all survivors of military suicide loss. By serving military families, service members, and veterans, she helped guide others along their grief journeys. Kim has become a leading advocate for best practices in suicide postvention, and she has done so while honoring John, enhancing the meaning and purpose of his life.

KIM IMPACTFULLY FORWARDS TAPS SUICIDE POSTVENTION

In 2009, Kim led the way in planning the TAPS National Military Suicide Survivor Seminar (NMSSS) and Good Grief Camp (GGC), the first of its kind. During the NMSSS, which is now in its 13th annual year, TAPS supports survivors of suicide loss by offering them hope, healing, and renewed opportunities for personal growth. Survivors have the chance to participate in activities, workshops, and small-group sharing sessions, where they can connect with leaders in the fields of suicide grief, trauma, and healing. Military mentors support suicide-bereaved children through



the GGC, where they learn how to honor their loved ones while connecting with other surviving kids. Through this program, Kim filled a tremendous need and helped bring survivors of military suicide loss together to share their stories, struggles, moments of reflection, bursts of hope, and loving support.

A comforting presence and role model, Kim has extended loving care and sound guidance at events at TAPS and beyond. She championed the development of the TAPS Suicide Postvention Model™: A comprehensive framework of healing and growth, an article published in *Death Studies*, the leading, peer-reviewed journal in the bereavement field. A three-phase approach to suicide grief, the Model™ offers a framework for survivors and providers in the aftermath of a suicide. It guides survivors on a journey of healthy grieving and towards achieving posttraumatic growth. Kim's unwavering dedication to suicide postvention has helped TAPS build a loving foundation to support all those seeking care following a military suicide loss. Along with Kim, TAPS is committed to providing a safe space for survivors to turn to for grief support, healing, and growth, to continuing our efforts on the front line of changing and saving lives.

KIM BEAUTIFULLY MODELS HOW TO MAKE MEANING AFTER TRAGEDY

Our TAPS family is blessed to provide a compassionate, welcoming space for survivors to share their love and legacies, empower fellow survivors, and transform their healing journeys. Leading by example, Kim has demonstrated hopeful ways of

“In my early grief, I looked outward for answers. I asked questions, read books, saw therapists, tried different churches, and met with mediums and psychics. I became a gatherer of healing knowledge. I was feeding an inward need to make sense of John’s death for my boys and myself. As I gradually became able to ground myself in even the smallest comforts and remembered certainties, I realized that my own search might be able to help other families who, like me, needed to make sense of it all.”

Kim Ruocco

grieving and recovering through loss. Her life’s work models how to make meaning after tragedy and how both growth and healing are possible after suicide loss. We are honored by Kim’s career of exceptional, heartfelt service, encouraging all survivors to seek out care and striving to become a loving light in the darkness along their grief journeys. Recognizing and filling an urgent need, Kim is truly a living legacy of a life lived with love, as she has laid a critical foundation for ongoing hope and healing.

“At TAPS, we have been able to raise awareness and show surviving families that they can consider the possibility of hope.”

Kim Ruocco

SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT

TAPS has created special resources and programs that provide compassionate care for survivors of military suicide loss. To learn more about our offerings and impact, **call our 24/7 TAPS National Military Survivor Helpline, visit our website, or send us an email.**

★ **1-800-959-(TAPS) 8277**

★ **taps.org/suicide**

★ **suicidepostvention@taps.org**

EMERGENCY RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please seek immediate help:

★ **Call 911**

★ **Visit your nearest emergency room**

★ **Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

★ **Contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741**

I THOUGHT I KNEW GRIEF...

TAPS HAS SET A NEW COURSE FOR MY FUTURE

John Wellington Huss II | Surviving Father of U.S. Army Private Christopher Wellington Huss

I don't need to learn about grief— I am living grief. The overwhelming waves of sorrow and raging undertows of fear pull me out to sea. When the waves rise, I can pop my head up and gasp for air, sometimes for an extended time. But, the waves inevitably crash. They spin me head over heels and drag me down. The riptides continue, wave after wave, forever. I have been grieving the loss of my son for two and a half years. I know grief.

I KNOW GRIEF

I already had my village— I had been in a 12-step alcohol recovery fellowship for many years. Through this program, I have become very close with several men who are now my anchors. They have held me up in my darkest moments, listening, supporting, and encouraging me

through my loss. I can be vulnerable and comfortably cry with them.

I also have my wife Janine, and no one understands the loss of Christopher better than his mother. We take turns along our grief journey, with one of us being the rock for the one who is falling apart. Yet, occasionally we both crash at the same time. Losing Christopher has strengthened our bond, for which I am deeply grateful. I don't know how I could do it without her.

Janine encouraged me to join her at the 2021 TAPS Southeast Regional Military Seminar in Jacksonville, Florida. I knew that it would be good for her to build a support village of her own, so I wanted her to make some connections at the seminar. Not expecting much, I agreed to go with Janine. Maybe I would make a friend or learn a thing or two. But as I said, I don't need to learn about grief. I'm a grief pro.

I DIDN'T KNOW IT ALL

On Friday, August 13, I arrived at the seminar. Janine could no longer attend Friday's sessions because of a conflicting event, and initially, I didn't want to go without her. However, that whole day, something inside me was urging me to go. I decided at least one of us should join the First Time Attendee Gathering. And so, I went, alone but not for long. I can't exactly explain the feeling I got as I walked up to check into the seminar. It was sort of like a cup of hot cocoa after a hard day in the cold rain. People smile and say hello all the time. But, this experience felt so different— genuine and warm. You're just going to have to experience it for yourself.

Dinner conversations with fellow survivors flowed naturally— sometimes light, sometimes heavy, but always real.



PHOTOS: TAPS ARCHIVES



At the First Time Attendee Gathering, we all introduced ourselves. We honored our loved ones by name and shared an interesting tidbit about ourselves. Before we broke for dessert, I knew I had been wrong. I didn't know it all. I was about to learn much more about my grief journey.

Session facilitators had a level of understanding, empathy, wisdom, and love that I have rarely ever seen. Janine joined me on the second day of the seminar, and we listened, shared, and learned. We shed tears for ourselves and others. We also smiled, even laughed, and grew. By Sunday, I found myself wishing that I could have attended every single session that was offered.

I DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE MY TAPS FAMILY

Janine and I met loads of wonderful people. People like us, learning to live through a difficult loss. Although stories, circumstances, and details varied, we were all the same. I had a feeling that this might happen. I mentioned my alcohol recovery fellowship earlier, and one of the most beautiful things about it is walking into a group of alcoholics and not needing to explain my problem. We all have the same problem. They understand me, and I understand them.



And TAPS is the same. You know my pain, and I know yours. We share the pain. We don't have to start from scratch. We have a fundamental understanding of each other. And it is beautiful. We are all members of a club that no one ever wants to join. I am, however, sincerely grateful for it. No one has to do this alone. I know that my wife and I will see many of the friends we made at the seminar again. I'm already looking forward to attending another TAPS Event. At the end of the weekend, I found myself not wanting to leave. It was hard to say goodbye to my new family.

YOU JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

I had so much to learn, and I still do. Grief is a journey without a destination—it is love with nowhere to go. Somehow, grief keeps me connected to my son. Christopher will always be a part of me,

even though he is not physically here with me. And there will never come a day where that doesn't hurt. I will carry both my grief and my love for my son for the rest of my life. That is how it should be.

Now, I won't share everything I learned from this seminar. But there's a reason for that; I want to meet you. I want you to come to a TAPS Event, share your loved one's story over dessert, hear from amazing mentors and teachers, and become a part of our beautiful TAPS family.

Now, I will tell you that TAPS has set a new course for my future. The seminar gave me hope. TAPS helped me understand. Most importantly, it helped me accept my grief. Today, my grief feels appropriate, necessary, and natural. I owe that feeling to my new TAPS family. Although I still have a lot to discover about my grief journey, I feel like I picked up a surfboard from TAPS. I can't stop the waves, but I can learn how to ride them. **And TAPS has made me want to learn.**

Tending the Garden of Grief

With Mindfulness Meditation

Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT | Author | Thanatologist

In my small, mid-Maryland farming town, autumn is a time of harvest and abundance. Farmers markets are in full swing, nourishing our bodies with healthy vegetables and filling our senses with vibrant colors and smells. And yet, it is also a time when nature's energy begins to wind down in preparation for winter, which I like to think of as nature's sacred pause. Autumn is further a time of transition and reflection—of letting go and receiving. It is not surprising that many cultures across thousands of years have associated autumn with the complex experience of human grief.

Autumn: A Time of Reflection and Transformation

Just like the wise farmer, we too can use this season as a reminder to reflect on the fruits of our grief work. We will find that some activities help us blossom. To name a few ideas, we can attend TAPS events, do charity work in honor of our loved one, walk in nature, or spend time with friends and family.

We may also decide to dig up some weeds—those pesky habits that are not so supportive to our health and wellbeing. But, remember to be kind to yourself. This is not the time to beat yourself up. The key to successful self-inquiry is self-compassion, or treating yourself as you would a beloved friend who needs support. Let go of the shame and blame to whatever extent it is possible. The work ahead is about empowerment and choice!

The Health Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation

Sound easier said than done? Fortunately, several, easy-to-learn meditative techniques



can help us weed out our mind chatter so that we can create space for our new harvest. One of my favorite tools is mindfulness meditation. You may have heard about mindfulness on the nightly news or from your doctor. A recent surge in mindfulness-based research has proven that its practice is effective in reducing anxiety, depression, and chronic pain as well as in improving brain and immune functioning. And that's a partial list of the benefits of mindfulness.

I love mindfulness meditation because it has taught me to relate to my thoughts differently. Rather than viewing my thoughts as permanent fixtures in my mind, I have learned that they come and go. I also have the power to shift or expand my attention when a thought tries to take over my experience. You have that power, too— it just takes a little practice.

How to be Present in the Moment

Don't worry if you have never meditated before. Chances are, you have experienced moments of mindfulness in your life already. Do you remember a time where you felt totally present, alert, and awake? You were not thinking about the past or the future, but you were just paying attention to the moment at hand. Maybe you were gazing at a picture-perfect sunset, taking a bite of the most delicious dessert, focused on knitting, running, or fixing a vintage car. These are examples of informal mindfulness— paying attention on the spot. It's not so much about what you're doing but rather about the quality of attention and your attitude while you're doing it.

Formal mindfulness practice simply means that you have set aside a designated time to

pay attention to what is happening in the present moment. You may notice things you see, hear, smell, taste, or feel in or on your body, or you may carefully listen to your thoughts. You have probably seen pictures of meditators sitting on cushions on the floor, but it is perfectly acceptable to sit in a chair or even walk while meditating.

Ideally you will incorporate a blend of formal and informal mindfulness practice into your life each day. Start with five minutes of seated meditation. Over four weeks, work your way up to 20 minutes of meditation a day. Sprinkle in a little informal practice daily. Taste the first bite of your sandwich at lunch. Stop and literally smell the flowers on the way to work. Or, take 15 seconds to gaze at the sky as though you are looking at it for the first time.

Practice to Retain and Calm Your Mind

One of the pitfalls of practicing mindfulness is the myth that you need to have a clear mind to be “good” at meditating. In my professional opinion, the only requirement for being a “good” meditator is that you try to meditate! It is normal for the human mind to have ruminating thoughts about the past or future. Although it is abnormal to steady your human mind on the present moment, it is incredibly rewarding. Each time you bring yourself back to an object of focus— such as your breath— after catching yourself drifting towards distraction, you are retraining your brain to work with you rather than against you.

Ultimately, you are cultivating the quality of equanimity, of a steady, calm mind. Just as the autumn equinox gives equal attention to both day and night, the practice of mindfulness meditation sheds light on all aspects of our experience— pleasurable, unpleasurable and neutral. This, in turn, illuminates the sources of our habits and addictions, including what we do to seek pleasure and the measures we take to avoid pain. Once you unearth these patterns and discern what serves you, it is time to pull the weeds and plant new seeds. There is freedom in realizing that you are not your thoughts or your grief. You are much bigger than these things. You are awareness itself— the sun shining over your garden of experience— no matter what the season.



“One of the pitfalls of practicing mindfulness is the myth that you have to have a clear mind to be a “good” meditator.”

Mindfulness Meditation Activity

Set aside 10 to 20 minutes when you won't be disturbed and your environment is relatively quiet. Make sure to read through these instructions a few times before you practice.

1. Close your eyes, or softly gaze on a point in front of you.
2. Reflect on your intentions for this meditation practice. What do you hope to receive today? Do you hope to become more peaceful, cultivate self-compassion, or reset your anxious mind from this practice?
3. Locate the place in your body where you feel your breath rising and falling. Notice where you feel your breath moving in and out.
4. Exaggerate the next five rounds of breathing so that your breaths are bigger and more expansive.
5. Notice the places where your breath moves with ease as well as the places where it feels stuck or tight. Just notice the sensation— there is no need to change a thing.
6. Return your breath to a natural rhythm, focusing your attention on your exhales for the next five to 15 minutes. Each time you get distracted or realize that you haven't been paying attention to your breath, choose to refocus your attention on your next exhale. The practice of refocusing cultivates a calm, steady mind.
7. Notice any impulse you have to change your experience, and consider the possibility of simply letting things be just as they are for now.
8. Spend the last five minutes of this practice responding to the following self-inquiry questions, perhaps in a journal, and spend the rest of the day being kind to yourself.
 - What did you learn about yourself during this meditation practice?
 - How can you relate what you learned to your grief experience or the rest of your life?
 - Now that you have looked within yourself, is there anything you want to change, nurture, or increase your awareness of?



HIDDEN GEMS OF SERENITY IN THE OUTDOORS

Colleen McGinnis | Surviving Mother of U.S. Sergeant Scott Anthony McGinnis

This past spring, I ventured out to embark on the TAPS Hidden Gems Expedition in Southern Illinois. Since I had attended a few TAPS Events before, I had some preconceived notions about how the trip would go and how it would make me feel. However, I soon realized that the impact of this expedition was incredibly unique, and it greatly exceeded my expectations.

Initially, I decided to look into TAPS Expeditions out of all the wonderful TAPS Events to connect with survivors in the outdoors. After discovering the Hidden Gems Expedition, I was eager to sign up. It was close to home, which has been my comfort zone since losing my son. I was able to drive, avoid air travel, and not be away from home for too long. As such, Hidden Gems was a perfect choice for me.

My son Tony, Sergeant Scott Anthony McGinnis, died at just 22 years old while motorcycling home on July 4, 2016. A driver made a left-hand turn into oncoming traffic, never looked up, and instantly killed Tony, who was passing by in the opposite lane at the exact moment of the turn. Ever since then, TAPS has been a major part of my life.

THE ONSET OF FEARS

Although there was much to be excited about, I couldn't help but worry about what Hidden Gems would entail. Signing up for the event was straightforward: I was prompted to answer standard questions



about my previous experiences with TAPS, my background, my son's information, and my expectations for the trip. However, the application also asked about my fitness level. Responding truthfully, I noted how lazy I am most days; and although I began to doubt my ability to handle the physical demands of the expedition, I submitted my application.

Before setting out on the expedition, the TAPS Outdoors Engagement Team hosted a Zoom meeting for everyone attending Hidden Gems. TAPS Team Leaders, Rachel and Tony discussed event logistics, and my peers shared reservations similar to mine about the expedition's exercise requirements. Knowing that my peers were also nervous motivated me not to cancel the trip, but I refrained from expressing some of my other worries with the group.

I feared rejection because my son's death didn't result from combat. I feared ridicule because Tony was on his way home to see his "Momma" on a motorcycle. Strangely enough, I also feared not fitting in because he served in the Army Reserve; and although he was very active in the Reserves, I felt like other people's losses would be more noble and patriotic than mine. I was nervous that I wouldn't be able to connect with military survivors grieving losses other than their children. *Little did I know, all of my fears would soon disappear.*

THE FLEEING OF FEARS

In preparation for the trip, I worked my way up from reading or watching television while riding a stationary bike to exercising outdoors. After losing my



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son Tony, I withdrew from many of my interests, particularly from my enjoyment of the outdoors. You see, I was hiking down the side of a canyon when I received the call notifying me of Tony's accident. Things just changed from that point on, and nothing motivated me to sweat and ache. That was until I signed up for Hidden Gems, which inspired me to get back into fitness. After training, I became more confident in myself and felt better about leaving for Hidden Gems.

My TAPS Team Leaders connected me with another survivor to carpool with who lived nearby, and we had plenty to share on our road trip. Not only did we talk about our lost loved ones, but we also voiced our anxieties about having no phone service, showers, or toilets for the next five days. I had not yet met another TAPS Survivor from Alabama; but now, by what I feel was strategic planning, I now have an incredible friend from my TAPS family close to home.

Once we arrived at Hidden Gems, we were no longer worried about spending the trip with strangers. Everyone attending the event quickly realized that we were, in fact, not strangers, not in the slightest. Although our lives, personalities, losses, and habits were unique, we were all unified with a shared focus. *We were all determined to make it through the expedition— and we were going to do so together.*

Only if and when we wanted to, we opened up to each other during the first few nights, shared stories of losing our loved ones, and cried. We soon knew each other's loved ones thoroughly and

bonded closely as a group. My fears of being "different" and of my story being "wrong" entirely faded!



THE THIRD DAY WAS KEY

On the third day, we were fully present in the moment. I climbed cliffs, with help of course, and many of us squeezed through a crack in a rock that seemed as long as the state of Illinois but as wide as a beetle. One of my peers remarked that she heard the most amazing sounds ringing through the trees—the sounds of our laughter. Needless to say, our minds were at rest. From that point on, only happy stories were shared and not a single, negative thought crossed my mind. I even found myself enjoying the coffee that I wished had sweetener or milk just two days earlier. We were all simply happy to be among our fantastic group surrounded by the smiling faces of our peers.

Our TAPS Guides had told us that the third day would be key. Without technology, work, or stress, our quieted minds allowed us to rest and recharge. We often struggle to keep up with our fast-paced world; but on this third day, weights were lifted off our shoulders, allowing us to appreciate the nature around us. That night, we saw each other wholly and authentically.

We did not see broken, sad people coping with tremendous loss. Instead, we saw beautiful, outgoing, smart, contagiously silly, and genuine personalities. We saw beyond the scars left by life and the circumstances of our losses. Campfire stories and laughter gave us warmth, memories that we will never forget, and the push to be carefree. I let go of all my pre-trip worries about my grown daughter, pets, home, and job. *I finally realized that it was OK not to worry.*

After hiking and wandering through rock mazes for several days, our group came out of the expedition together. We came out bleeding, with our fingers jammed, our bodies covered in mud, and our clothes torn, but we came out together. We came out laughing, high-fiving, and unified.

PRESENT IN THE HERE AND NOW

Being back home and in my own headspace, there's still part of me that recognizes the importance of calmness and being present in the moment. I can now appreciate stillness—times that I used to believe needed to be filled with business. I can now hike and not be preoccupied with what is going on at home or at work. I can now sit by my fire pit, enjoy the flames and smoke rolling off the wood, and just be still.

I am forever thankful that I powered through my fears and attended the TAPS Hidden Gems Expedition. I am incredibly grateful for the amazing people who devote their lives to TAPS and help inspire healing among military loss survivors. *My life has been eternally changed by the TAPS Hidden Gems Expedition, and I imagine that the lives of my peers have too been changed for the better too.*

BUILDING YOUR RESILIENCE

CARING FOR YOUR MIND, BODY, AND SOUL



The last couple of years have brought many new challenges: working and learning from home, isolation from loved ones, canceled activities, mask mandates, and for many, sudden illness and loss. While the pandemic may not be completely over, we may finally be seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

Each of our stories is different, but we all have something in common— we seek ways to remain resilient. Adapting in the face of adversity, trauma, grief, or other significant sources of stress takes mindful action to cultivate resiliency.

Families who suffer the loss of a loved one frequently turn to their funeral director, like Dignity Memorial®, or trusted others, like TAPS, for help coping and to draw strength and support. It is also important to foster habits that establish a healthy environment for yourself. The following four powerful recommendations from Dignity Memorial® can help you to build resilience and care for yourself while you grieve and mourn.

Self-care is an important activity to do every day because it nourishes your mind, body, and spirit and allows you to thrive. None of these habits require a great amount of time but can increase your productivity and energy levels for a happier, healthier life. As the country and the world start to reopen and we find some new routines, remember that caring for yourself is vital. Maintain a healthy relationship with yourself as you grieve by setting realistic expectations and by being kind, gracious, and patient with yourself.

Dignity[®]
MEMORIAL

TAPS[®]
TRUSTED ADVISORY PARTNER FOR SERVICES

SELF-CARE TIPS

1. Build Connections with Others

After months of solitude, it may be difficult or awkward to find yourself back in social settings. However, finding time to create intentional and thoughtful moments with loved ones and others who share similar experiences can have a profound impact on your well-being. Embrace moments with your loved ones and friends by being present with them, and give yourself time to adjust to being in-person again.

2. Unwind and Unplug

Take a break from technology to recharge your brain, and get rid of mental clutter. Use this time to reprioritize tasks, contemplate next steps, engage in a favorite or new hobby, decompress, or slow down.

3. Get Outdoors

Spending time in nature is a natural mood booster. Exercise, garden, take a stroll, or simply listen to the sounds of nature. Studies have shown that spending time in nature has a wide range of health benefits— including lowering your stress hormone levels, blood pressure, and heart rate. It is important to give yourself space to simply breathe and be.

4. Practice Healthy Habits

Grief is physically exhausting, so it's important to eat well, stay hydrated, rest as well as you can, get some physical movement, and surround yourself with positive, encouraging people. These things feed your body and your spirit.

DIGNITY MEMORIAL® GRIEF LIBRARY



To help guide us along our journey, a wonderful list of resources is available for us online via the Dignity Memorial® Grief Library. A TAPS partner and team of local funeral service professionals, Dignity Memorial® has designed recommendations to help us build our resilience and take care of ourselves while we grieve. Remember that this is your unique grief experience, and with Dignity Memorial® and TAPS, you will always have support for the road ahead. dignitymemorial.com/support-friends-and-family/grief-library



JOIN YOUR TAPS FAMILY

VIRTUALLY, DOMESTICALLY, & GLOBALLY

CONNECT WITH TAPS PROGRAMS

taps.org/programs

In grief's darkest hours, we ask ourselves the hard questions: What do we do now? What does this new life look like? Who are we without our loved ones? We write the questions as though we're trying to squeeze out wisdom or answers; we twist and stretch them as we face the everyday realities of our loss.

Although the path to peace and purpose is different for everyone, TAPS programs can be signposts—pointing the way toward comfort, camaraderie and companionship. Through our TAPS programs, we gather to heal, console, and explore. And, we start to answer those hard questions. Every TAPS program is designed to help you feel companioned as you grieve, supported as you rebuild and united as we choose to hope.

- ★ SEMINARS
- ★ YOUTH PROGRAMS
- ★ YOUNG ADULT PROGRAMS
- ★ EXPEDITIONS
- ★ PEER MENTORS
- ★ SUICIDE LOSS SUPPORT
- ★ TEAMS4TAPS
- ★ STARS4TAPS
- ★ ONLINE COMMUNITY
- ★ CARE GROUPS
- ★ TAPS TOGETHERS

TAPS TOGETHERS

Wherever You Are—TAPS Is There
taps.org/tapstogether | tapstogether@taps.org

Community is important! That is why we create a broad variety of opportunities to bring the TAPS Family together. TAPS Togethers are one-day, organized, social events across the country, led by TAPS Staff or a survivor like you, with the goal of expanding our peer support community. Powerful experiences, meaningful conversations, and growing in relationship with other military survivors encourages hope and healing. We draw both strength and inspiration from coming together.

Whether sharing time over a cup of coffee, getting outdoors, attending a local event, sharing a therapeutic experience, working on a service project together, or coming together for another one day event, TAPS Togethers are the local answer to the age old question— is TAPS in my community? The simple answer is yes!

CARE GROUPS

Local Survivor Support
taps.org/caregroups | caregroups@taps.org

TAPS Care Groups bring the feel of TAPS into your community. TAPS Care Groups are available across the country for surviving military family members, friends and loved ones who want and need the friendly, informal support of the TAPS family in between larger events.

These local survivor support groups provide emotional support and camaraderie for military survivors. Lasting relationships can be built on common threads. Local survivor support groups are encouraging and enlightening. Many find they learn new coping skills and stress-relieving strategies by talking to others who can relate.

ONLINE COMMUNITY

Find Comfort and Healing Online
taps.org/onlinecommunity

TAPS online grief support groups are here for you wherever you are in the grief process— and wherever you are in the country or the world. The TAPS Online Community allows easy, yet meaningful, connections among survivors. Whether you want to share your story or just read how other survivors are sharing and coping, this online grief support community is a way for you to develop and strengthen your connections with your TAPS family from the comfort of your home.

As a gathering place for survivors, the TAPS Online Community hosts chat sessions for real-time conversations, message boards that provide space for questions and comments, and peer-based sharing groups to drive conversation and connection.

UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENTS

TAPS INSTITUTE FOR HOPE AND HEALING™

Empower Yourself Through Education

taps.org/institute | institute@taps.org

The TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing™ empowers the bereaved and enhances the expertise of professionals caring for the bereaved through grief, resilience, and wellness education. Through workshops, seminars, panel discussions, and more, the Institute trains professionals and helps both individuals and families thrive after the loss of a military loved one. Visit the Institute to access the Event Calendar, register for upcoming webinars, and watch recorded webinars!

UPCOMING LIVE WEBINARS



WHERE FAITH MEETS GRIEF

October 19, 2021 | 12:00 PM-1:00 PM EST
Jerome G. Weaver, M.Div., D. Min | Bereavement Services Manager, Vitas Healthcare



THE POWER OF SOUND HEALING

October 26, 2021 | 12:00 PM-1:30 PM EST
Janie Keilwitz, RN, MN, BSN | Soundtouch Healing Arts | Acutonics® Practitioner



NAVIGATING CONVERSATIONS AROUND GRIEF AND THE HOLIDAYS

November 2, 2021 | 12:00 PM-1:00 PM EST
Rachel Kodanaz | Author | Speaker | TAPS Advisory Board Member



HELPING GRIEVERS DRAW BOUNDARIES

November 16, 2021 | 12:00 PM-1:30 PM EST
Joy Berger, DMA, FT, BCC, MT-BC | Founder and CEO, Composing Life Out of Loss

ONLINE TODAY

“You Don’t Know How I Feel”
–Navigating Conversations Around Personal Loss

Asking for Help When You Are Grieving

Grieving While You Work, Working While You Are Grieving

Coping with Sibling Loss

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EDMR) Demystified

Music of the Soul— What Music Teaches Us About Coping with Grief

Shifting Tides— From Caregiver to Survivor

Grief Leadership— Examples from the Life and Service of Captain America

WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

Discover Purpose and Community after Loss

taps.org/empowerment | empowerment@taps.org

The TAPS Women’s Empowerment program brings together a vibrant, compassionate community of surviving women. We are a place of support and inspiration— we treasure opportunities to be each other’s teachers, confidantes, cheerleaders, and friends. 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 virtual offerings.

WE CONNECT: WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT CIRCLE
Every Thursday

WE PAUSE, BREATHE, AND JUST BE
Every Other Wednesday

WE CREATE
Every Other Wednesday

UPCOMING IN-PERSON EVENTS

TEAMTAPS

Rediscover Traditions and Memories

taps.org/teams4taps | teams4taps@taps.org

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.

BANK OF AMERICA: CHICAGO MARATHON

October 10, 2021
Chicago, Illinois

ARMY TEN MILER

October 10, 2021
Arlington, Virginia

MARINE CORPS MARATHON, 10K, AND KIDS RUN

October 29-31, 2021
Arlington, Virginia

TCS NEW YORK CITY MARATHON

November 7, 2021
New York City, New York

TAPS SEMINARS

Find Inspiration and Hope

taps.org/seminars

No matter where you are in your grief journey, support and connection await you at a TAPS Seminar. Both regional and national seminars are inclusive, discussion-based events that include workshops for understanding and processing grief and small-group sharing sessions where you can connect with peers. TAPS Seminars are held in conjunction with TAPS Good Grief Camps for young survivors.

14TH ANNUAL NATIONAL MILITARY SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

October 8-11, 2021 | Dallas, Texas

NORTHEAST MILITARY SUICIDE SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

January 28-30, 2022 | Hershey, Pennsylvania

28TH ANNUAL NATIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

May 27-30, 2022 | Arlington, Virginia

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

July 8-10, 2022 | Denver, Colorado

WESTERN REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

2022 | California

SOUTHERN REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

2022 | Texas

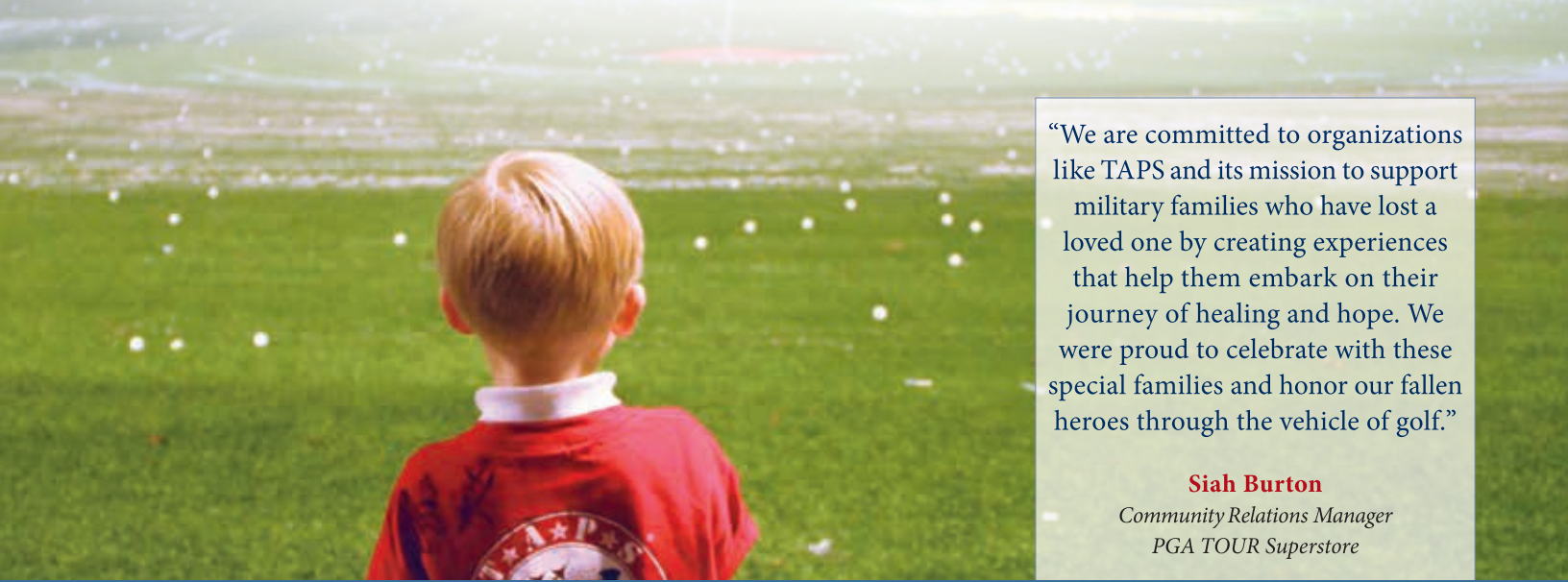
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL MILITARY SURVIVOR SEMINAR & GOOD GRIEF CAMP

2022



PGA TOUR SUPERSTORE BRINGS TAPS FAMILIES TOGETHER

SURVIVORS SHARE PAST AND PRESENT MEMORIES AT SPECIAL GOLF EXPERIENCES



“We are committed to organizations like TAPS and its mission to support military families who have lost a loved one by creating experiences that help them embark on their journey of healing and hope. We were proud to celebrate with these special families and honor our fallen heroes through the vehicle of golf.”

Siah Burton

*Community Relations Manager
PGA TOUR Superstore*

Jon Burud, the surviving grandfather of CPL Benjamin S. Kopp, tested out new golf clubs with a PGA TOUR Superstore associate during an in-store experience in Minnetonka, Minnesota.



In honor of Military Appreciation Month, teams4taps and the PGA TOUR Superstore joined forces to create events for survivors to honor their military loved ones through their favorite sport— golf! Survivors attended a wide range of events all across the country, where they attended PGA tournaments, got fit for new golf clubs and attire, hit some golf balls at Topgolf, and even played a round or two of golf.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Following a morning visit to the PGA TOUR Superstore in Boston, Massachusetts, surviving families headed to the Hanscom Air Force Base, where they played nine holes of golf on the Patriot Golf Course. PGA TOUR Superstore associates from all three of its Boston locations joined the families and offered golf tips. While out on the course, the group also had the opportunity to try out their new clubs.

MINNETONKA, MINNESOTA

The PGA TOUR Superstore hosted a VIP experience for two surviving families in Minnetonka, Minnesota. During the group's in-store time, store associates provided their expertise and insight on what items would suit the families best. Survivors later headed to Topgolf for a fun afternoon of food, entertainment, and golf. For Jill Stephenson, the surviving mother of CPL Benjamin S. Kopp and TAPS Peer Mentor, the event was a welcome time to connect with her father, Jon Burud, as they remembered her son.

PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

The surviving family of Cpl Ian Thomas Zook enjoyed a once-in-a-lifetime experience at the PGA National Golf Club and PGA TOUR Superstore in Palm Beach, Florida. After a one-on-one experience with the store's general manager, the family joined store associates for lunch. Mark Zook, the surviving father of Cpl Ian Thomas Zook, capped off the day by joining his new PGA TOUR Superstore friends for a round of golf on the Palmer Course, named in honor of golfing legend Arnold Palmer.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JILL STEPHENSON; ANDREA SCHAUB; TAPS STAFF



The PGA TOUR Superstore hosted the family of Fallen Hero TSgt David Allen Schaub, Jr. at the AT&T Byron Nelson Tournament in McKinney, Texas.



At the PGA TOUR Superstore experience in Denver, Colorado, Titus and Matthew Kallander, the surviving nephews of SGT Benjamin Edward Kallander and Cpl Brian Carl Kallander, picked out new golf shoes.



At the PGA National Golf Resort in Palm Beach, Florida, Mark Zook, the surviving father of Cpl Ian Thomas Zook, joined a PGA TOUR Superstore General Manager and Associate.

MCKINNEY, TEXAS

Hosted by the Bunker hospitality area in McKinney, Texas, surviving families enjoyed watching their favorite PGA golfers at the AT&T Byron Nelson golf tournament. Included in the group was another Byron Nelson, the surviving brother-in-law of TSgt David Allen Schaub, Jr., named after the golfer Byron Nelson.

DENVER, COLORADO

At the PGA TOUR Superstore shopping experience in Denver, Colorado, many survivors opted for golf balls, bags, gloves, or even new golf clubs. Titus and Matthew Kallander, the surviving nephews of SGT Benjamin Edward Kallander and Cpl Brian Carl Kallander, had their eyes set on new pairs of shoes. Since they grew up in a large family, most of their clothes and shoes were hand-me-downs from older siblings. The PGA TOUR Superstore experience offered them their first opportunity to pick out new pairs of shoes.

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

While growing up, SPC Wyatt Joseph Martin loved sports and began playing baseball. A knee injury meant that he needed to change to a new sport— and he chose golf. By learning to play golf from his Granpa Joe, Wyatt improved his skills and made the varsity golf team at his high school. During the PGA TOUR Superstore event in Scottsdale, Arizona, Julie Martin, the surviving mother of SPC Wyatt Joseph Martin and TAPS Peer Mentor, was inspired to play in honor of her son with a new set of golf clubs.

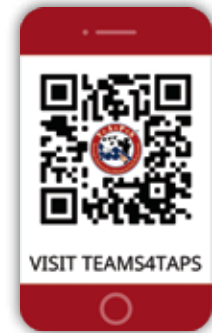


Julie Martin, the surviving mother of SPC Wyatt Joseph Martin and TAPS Peer Mentor, received a new set of golf clubs in honor of her son, thanks to the PGA TOUR Superstore in Scottsdale, Arizona.

“We are so thankful that TAPS and the PGA TOUR Superstore support TAPS Families. It restores our soul when we are able to honor David’s memory. It gave my family the opportunity to share memories both past and present. Thank you PGA TOUR Superstore and TAPS for being part of our journey as we live a GREAT story!”

Andrea Schaub

Surviving Spouse of TSgt David Allen Schaub Jr., U.S. Air Force; TAPS Peer Mentor



HONORING OUR FALLEN HEROES THROUGH SPORTS | TEAMS4TAPS

teams4taps works with teams across the country to bring joy to surviving military families and to honor the lives of their fallen heroes. TAPS Families have been able to honor their loved ones through golf, football, basketball, baseball, hockey, soccer, tennis, and more.

Was a certain team a favorite of your Fallen Hero? Did you and your loved one watch or attend games together?

Do you have a story about your Fallen Hero and a favorite player? If your loved one had a special story or connection with a sports team or professional athlete, teams4taps would love to hear it. Submit your stories and photos on our website or by email.

SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US! | TEAMS4TAPS@TAPS.ORG

TIPS FOR PARENTS

TO HELP TEENS AND CHILDREN



Anyone who has children understand, “If my kids are OK, then I will be OK.” This statement resonates with us parents— we’re wired to protect our children. Our wellbeing depends on their well beings, particularly when they are grieving a loved one. The sorrow we feel for our children may intensify our feelings of loss, but we must keep in mind that the death of a parent, sibling, or family member doesn’t dictate our children’s futures or derail ours.

Over the past three decades, TAPS has walked with grieving families, and we know this fact to be true. We have witnessed families grow through their losses, with their children maturing into healthy, successful, well-functioning adults. There are many things we can do as we support our kids along their grief journeys and guide them towards a hopeful path of healing.

PRACTICE AND MODEL HEALTHY SELF-CARE

When raising grieving children, caring for ourselves should be our top priority. Although this may be challenging with the demands of our kid’s schedules, meeting their needs, running a household, and working, self-care is essential not only to our own health but also to our children’s health. The sentiment, “If my kids are OK, then I will be OK,” also holds true conversely— “If I am OK, then my kids will be OK.”

Children are more likely to follow suit if their parents make healthy choices and take care of themselves. As challenging as it may be, asking for help and accepting help from friends and family will benefit both you and your kids. We can find opportunities to enhance our well-being by attending a bereavement care group meeting or participating in any other activity that we enjoy.

SPEND QUALITY TIME ON OUR CHILDREN'S TERMS

We can connect with our children through things they enjoy. One of the best ways we

can learn about their worlds, thoughts, and well-being is by spending quality time with them— on their terms. When our children lead us, they often feel empowered because they are doing something they enjoy. As we partake in activities with our children, it’s helpful to share stories, talk about what we’re doing together, and discuss what we’re looking forward to in the upcoming week.

When our children open up to us, listening to them, rather than judging them, is essential for gaining their trust. Once they feel heard, we will have the opportunity to share our thoughts and insights on what is on their minds. Kids will often reciprocate and share information after we do, so we can refrain from asking too many questions. Those who may be socially isolating themselves will appreciate our undivided attention and the opportunity to share their feelings. We may better understand our children’s actions by being thorough, patient listeners.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY, SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Those who our children look up to can influence their lives. And so, taking the time to introduce ourselves to their friends and role models is critical in ensuring that their friendships and relationships are positive.



While our kids may initially be upset with us, discussing any concerns we may have about these people may guide them towards making good, healthy decisions about who they let into their lives on a regular basis.

In the long run, helping our children nurture genuine relationships will enhance their overall mental and emotional health—which is essential for “healthy grieving.” Encouraging supportive relationships is especially important for older children who are going into middle school and finding their “peers” or “friend groups,” those who will centrally be in our children’s lives, likely into young adulthood. Although there are many things in their lives that we cannot control, we can do our best to positively influence them in whatever challenges they may face as children, teens, and young adults.

BALANCE THE NEED FOR “ALONE TIME” AND SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT

Our children, especially teenagers, may face several social challenges, such as bullying, complicated relationships, and school performance. The death of a parent, sibling, or other loved one can pile onto everything already on their minds. A common reaction to this added trauma for children is to isolate themselves socially. While we all may benefit from some alone time, too much of it may be a symptom of other underlying health issues.

You may share your observation that your children are not spending as much time with family and friends as they used to. We may ask our children if they are having trouble with something in particular and let them know that we want to understand what has

led to changes in their social behavior. By doing so, we can gain a better idea of how to help them navigate challenges.

Since research confirms that children involved in extracurricular, organized activities fare better than those who are not, you can encourage them to become involved in a social setting. You can explore social involvement options with your kids, who likely have many opportunities available to them. Setting an expectation that they need to partake in an organized activity outside the home may be helpful for them to build peer connections.

ACTIVITIES

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

FOR PARENTS, TEENS, AND CHILDREN

WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR PERSON WHO DIED

Along with your family, you have the opportunity to write a letter to your loved one who died. It can be helpful to write down things that you wish you could share with your person on a piece of paper. Whether these things are thoughts you didn’t get the chance to share with your loved one or updates in your life, many people have found that expressing their thoughts can be healing

WRITE A LETTER FROM YOUR PERSON WHO DIED

Along with your family, you have the opportunity to imagine what your loved one who died might say to you. Each family member may consider what their person would say to the, in a letter. All of your letters will be as unique as the relationship each individual had with the

person who died. Children may benefit from help to dictate what they would like their letter to express.

Materials: You will need paper and writing utensils, such as pens, pencils, crayons, or markers, to complete these activities.

Instructions: Each family member can write their own letters. After you have all finished writing, set aside time to share your letters with each other. You can read them out loud or pass them



KLINGER: A STORY OF HONOR AND HOPE

A children’s book written by Betsey Beard, *Klinger: A Story of Honor and Hope* tells the story of a young horse dreaming of fame as a racehorse. When his life is disrupted when he must leave his parents and start a new life, he is faced with difficulty and disappointment. Klinger’s dream of significance seems unattainable. Yet, he then discovers that fame is not necessary as he finds fulfillment in honoring fallen heroes and bringing comfort to their families and loved ones.

Dear (Your Person’s Name),

I want you to know _____

If I could, I would _____

I wish _____

Sometimes I feel _____

When I think of you _____

I miss _____

I’m sorry for _____

You would be proud that _____

I am grateful for _____

Thank you for _____

I hope that _____

Sincerely,
(Your Name)



202-588-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

TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS

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"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 ENEVITABLY, WE WILL
FEEL ABOUT US THEIR ARMS,
THEIR SYMPATHY,
THEIR UNDERSTANDING."

-HELEN KELLER

Your #TAPSFam is Here 24/7
800-959-TAPS (8277)

