

**Post Traumatic Stress:
PTS Disorder
to
PTS Growth**

**Auburn University
Center for Governmental Services**

**November 3 - 4, 2011
Mobile, Alabama**

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**Companioning:
The Power of Peers
to
Support Each Other**



Faculty

**Bonnie Carroll
Tragedy Assistance
Program for Survivors
Washington, D.C.**

TAPS Mission Statement

- **TAPS is the national non-profit Veterans Service Organization providing support to everyone who has lost a loved one serving in, or in support of, the military mission**

TAPS Mission

- **The mission of TAPS is to honor our men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to America both in, and in support of, the military mission by caring for all those who they loved and left behind**

Meeting the Mission

- **Four core services**
 - 1. Peer-based emotional support providing comfort and care for all who are grieving a death**
 - 2. Case work assistance, including pro bono legal assistance, emergency financial resources, information on state and federal survivor benefits**

Meeting the Mission

- 3. Community based grief support, including connection to unlimited free clinical counseling**
 - **Trauma resources**
 - **Local area support groups**

Meeting the Mission

- 4. Help and Resource Line**
 - **24/7/365 with comfort and care from peer professionals**
 - **Case work follow-up**
 - **Community based response**

TAPS History

- **1994**
 - **TAPS founded with the support of SECDEF and SECVA, benchmarking the best peer based support programs in America**

TAPS History

- **1997**
 - **TAPS is recognized as a Veterans Service Organization**
 - **The Chairman, JCS Shalikashvili directs the Services to connect all surviving families with TAPS**

TAPS History

- **2001**
 - **TAPS is the only private organization at the Pentagon Family Assistance Center with the Red Cross**
- **2008**
 - **TAPS reaches 25,000 survivors in its care**

TAPS History

- **2009**
 - Chairman, JCS Mullen calls TAPS the “Gold Standard” in care for the surviving military family
- **2010/2011**
 - TAPS and USMC, USAF, USN sign MOAs

TAPS – Distribution of All Survivors



TAPS Peer Support

- Through harnessing the power of peer based support, TAPS allows surviving families to grow in their grief and continue their healing
- First, all survivors (including extended family, significant others and friends) are given a comprehensive base of support

TAPS Peer Support

- After a year beyond their own grief, survivors are invited to become part of the mentor program, where they can help others based on relationship and circumstance
 - i.e. father who lost son to suicide would support a newly bereaved father who lost a son to suicide

500+ Trained Peer Mentors

- Survivors are connected with a Peer Mentor, another widow or sibling or mother or father, who has been trained to support another through grief
- Training includes an online course in military grief and support skills training, certified by the American Grief Academy

500+ Trained Peer Mentors

- Once complete, Peer Mentor candidates register for full day classroom training, conducted during TAPS Regional or National Survivor Seminar

500+ Trained Peer Mentors

- **Timeline**
 - “Apprentice” first six months
 - “Peer Mentor” for three years
 - “Senior Peer Mentor” which includes role as Care Group Facilitator and Online Community Monitor

TAPS by the Numbers

- **Call Center with staff responding 24/7/365 continuously since October 1994**
 - 203,260 calls to date
- **Average number of survivor calls per day in 2010**
 - 68 in
 - 264 out

TAPS by the Numbers

- **Average length of call with new survivor**
 - 96 minutes

TAPS by the Numbers

- **Number of direct support services provided for the new survivor**
 - 24
 - Including peer mentor, counseling appointment, case work assistance, personalized bereavement resource report, care package

TAPS by the Numbers

- **TAPS Staff**
 - 42
 - Military survivors or family members with advanced degrees

TAPS by the Numbers

- **Number of contacts TAPS has with each survivor, if they do nothing else**
 - 32 per year
 - Including the magazine, cards, invitations, eNewsletters, chats

MOA with USMC and TAPS

- Memorandums of Agreement signed with USMC in February 2010, with USN in May 2011, with USAF in September 2011, and with NG in December 2011

MOA with USMC and TAPS

“The Parties, having complementary resources, capabilities, experience, personnel, and skills desire to enter into a written agreement setting forth their mutual understandings and express agreements with respect to cooperation and the provision of services and support for individuals grieving the death of a loved one who died while serving in the U.S. Marine Corps.”

How the MOA Works

- Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO) informs the surviving family that support is available for them that is peer based, long-term, free of charge
- Survivor signs a consent form authorizing information to be given to TAPS
 - Almost all families request this support and care

How the MOA Works

- Upon receipt of information, TAPS immediately:
 - Sends a handwritten condolence note
 - Schedules time to personally talk with the family
 - Sends a care package filled with important resources and items offering comfort

How the MOA Works

- TAPS carefully documents all contact with the survivor in our secure data base
- Comprehensive reports of these contacts are sent to HQ USMC Casualty for their records after initial contact and periodically to provide update

How the MOA Works

- All special needs the family may have are immediately resolved, whether with USMC, USN, USAF, USA, VA, Social Security or other federal or state agency
- TAPS care and support extends forever or until the survivor requests to be removed from contact

What Newly Bereaved Survivors Receive

- **Trained Peer Mentor for personal support**
- **Resource Kit of grief materials to help cope**
- **Connection with free/unlimited grief counseling**

What Newly Bereaved Survivors Receive

- **Lifetime subscription to TAPS magazine with articles about coping and healing**
- **Invitations to regional/national support programs**
- **24/7/365 access to peer based support and care**

What Newly Bereaved Survivors Receive

- **Case assistance with federal, state and local issues**
- **Access to emergency financial assistance**
- **Anniversary and holiday cards**
- **eNewsletters offering inspiration**

What Newly Bereaved Survivors Receive

- **Online community resources including chat rooms, blogs, list serves, social networking**
- **Personally researched community based support group listing**

Accreditation

- **Trained, educated and accredited 'Peer Clinicians'**
- **Certified by the American Grief Academy**
- **TAPS Chairs the Military Committee and is on the Board of the Association of Death Education and Counseling**

Accreditation

- **Member, Div 19, American Psychological Association**
- **Member, International Conference of Police Chaplains**
- **Member, International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies**
- **Member, National Alliance of Grieving Children**

Accreditation

- Co-Chair, DoD Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide
- Member, DoD Military Family Readiness Council
- Partnerships with Johns Hopkins, GW University and Univ. of PA
- Advisory Board, Sesame Street

83 Regional Survivor Seminars Have Been Held with over 16,000 Attendees in Communities Across America

From a Teen...

"My peers in the room weren't tearing up because they felt bad for me, they were misty because they could relate. Through this we built a connection. We formed some sort of bond that was protective and sibling-like toward each other. Though it was never said, it was understood that we looked out for one another. . . ."

From a Teen...

. . . Thank you TAPS. Not only do you help to heal the hearts of individuals and form bonds that can never really be broken, you teach life lessons that can't be taught or received quite like they are in this environment. Thank you for taking a chance on me. You really are a wonderful organization."

Understanding Grief

- The four tasks of grief
 - Acknowledge the reality of the death
 - Experience the pain of grief
 - Adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing
 - Form a new identity and reinvest energy without forgetting the past

Is Traumatic Death Different?

- Sudden, violent death differs dramatically from anticipated death
- Information is absolutely paramount in order to understand what has happened
- Bereaved survivors are their own best experts

Is Traumatic Death Different?

- An important rule for helpers is predict and prepare
- Trauma shatters the way we look at the world

How Do We Recover?

- Helpers can really assist in this area by giving survivors as much control over their environment as possible
- Even when as healed as they are going to be, those directly affected by a tragedy will never be the same people they were before

Companioning

- The New Psychology on Helping Those Who Are Grieving,
by Dr. Alan Wolfelt
- Companioning is about honoring the spirit
 - It is not about focusing on the intellect

Companioning

- Companioning is about curiosity
 - It is not about expertise
- Companioning is about learning from others
 - It is not about teaching them

Companioning

- Companioning is about being present to another person's pain
 - It is not about taking away or relieving the pain
- Companioning is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence
 - It is not about filling every painful moment with talk

Companioning

- Companioning is about listening with the heart
 - It is not about analyzing with the head
- Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others
 - It is not about judging or directing those struggles

Companioning

- **Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being**
 - **It is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out**

TAPS

- **Honors our fallen by ensuring that the loved ones they may leave behind are not forgotten**
- **Together, we can help each other heal**

TAPS

**www.taps.org
800 – 959 – TAPS**