



LOSS OF A LOVED ONE FROM WAR

Your worst fears become reality when you are notified of a loved one's death as a result of war in a far away place. You undoubtedly hoped and prayed for the safety of this special person since his/her departure for military service. Dreaded thoughts of dangers he/she would face in the line of duty probably increased as peace efforts failed and the world moved closer to war. Now you must face the fact that your life is forever changed because of their death.

One of the many things you need after the funeral is information about grief – life's most painful emotional adjustment to loss. Grieving is a normal, healthy activity. Although grief is a universal experience, no two people grieve the same, even in the same family. Like a fingerprint, each person's grief has characteristics all its own. You must grieve in order to survive.

Grief is a process that takes place over a span of time. Expressing your feelings honestly and openly to supportive family and friends will help you to feel better. Be sure to include children and young adults in discussions. Be gentle and truthful about what happened and encourage children to share their feelings. Hug each other and together reach out to those who want to help you.

It is difficult to begin grieving when there is uncertainty about the circumstances of death. In war situations, there can be a scarcity of information for varying periods of time. Seek answers to all your questions. If and when you want to hear from those who were around at the time of your loved one's death, you could write his/her friends in the unit. Ask them to share with you their story of what happened. It is better to know what the truth than to imagine what might have happened.

Undoubtedly you will ask "Why war?" "Why was my loved one killed while others were spared?" Searching for answers is a normal part of the grief process. At some point you may need to accept that fact that some questions cannot be answered.

You may feel incredible anger. This anger may be directed toward Saddam Hussein, war, the military, elected officials, God or even those who seem unaffected by your loss. Hating the enemy is also understandable, yet their loved ones are being killed too. Families on both sides suffer terrible losses in war. Do recognize it is okay to have these feelings and to express them to some understanding person. However, try to channel the energy from your anger into some positive activity. Physical exercise is a great way to dissipate anger. Involve yourself with projects and people. Make a commitment to some action that will help someone else. In helping others you will help yourself.

It will seem as if the horror of war is inescapable. Graphic television coverage will bring the war into your living room. Newspapers will be filled with pictures and descriptions of each day's losses and victories. Everyone will be talking about what is happening. There may be no respite from hearing about war. It may comfort you to know so many people care about all the details. On the other hand, and solitude you need. Do whatever you know is right for you.

Find others in your community who have been touched by this war. Attend the support groups that have been established for the families of military personnel. Talk with them and share your story. They will listen and understand. You will find that grief shared is truly grief diminished.

Most people believe that military service is the ultimate expression of patriotism. When your community learns of your loved one's death, you will undoubtedly receive support, even from strangers. Your grief is a part of the collective grief of a nation. You need not suffer in isolation if you accept the strength of human solidarity.

Recovering from the loss of a loved one from war will require patience, work and courage. Grief often takes much longer than you or others in your life expect. As you adapt to life without this person, strive to remember the best from the past. Know there can be a time when your sorrow will be replaced by an affirmation of life. The ultimate lesson to be learned from any tragedy is that life is precious. Each and every day is a gift and each and every person is special. Peace in the world may not be possible, but finding peace within yourself is. Make that your goal.

For additional military assistance, contact your casualty assistance officer or Family Assistance Center. Other help may be available from the Red Cross, your funeral director and clergy person.