

Requirement:

This module, as mandated by public law, is included in CNO/CAO training to prepare Soldiers to deliver death notifications and/or work with Survivors following a death notification. Soldiers must be able to recognize and respond appropriately to the grief and bereavement reactions in the Survivors with whom they are working and within themselves.

Definitions:

Grief is a multi-faceted response to loss, particularly the loss of someone or something to which a bond was formed. Survivors will probably react to the news of the loss of a loved one with numbed disbelief. They may deny the reality of the loss at some level, in an attempt to avoid the pain. Initially, they may display signs of shock, which provides emotional protection from the overwhelming reality of the loss, i.e., “empty nest syndrome”.

Since grief and **bereavement** are very similar, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two. The term “bereavement” refers to the whole process of grieving and mourning, and is associated with a deep sense of loss and sadness. Bereavement is a natural process, but its effects can be overwhelming. The death of a loved one is always difficult. When the death results from a war or a disaster, it can be even more troubling given the sudden and potentially violent nature of the event. After the death of someone you love, you experience bereavement, which literally means, “to be deprived by death.”

In the simplest terms, **self care** is personal health maintenance. Self care is what we do as individuals to maintain good health through nutrition, hygiene, exercise, stress management and other approaches to personal well-being and resilience. Self care is as unique as the individual. What works for one person may or may not work for another. Your self-care should focus on things that help rejuvenate you and keep you feeling your best.

The **stages of grief** are:

- Shock: Initial paralysis at hearing the bad news. (Extended)
- Denial: Trying to avoid the inevitable.
- Anger: Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion.
- Bargaining: Seeking in vain for a way out.
- Depression: Final realization of the inevitable.
- Testing: Seeking realistic solutions. (Extended)
- Acceptance: Finally finding the way forward.

Letting Survivors Know You Care:

The most loved and valued CNOs/CAOs are those who are willing to share the pain of the loss. Watch your words – do not discount their feelings; do not use words that disempower or God clichés; do not use unhealthy expectations. For example:

- Discounters:
 - I know how you feel. (You don't.)
 - Time heals all wounds. (It doesn't.)
 - You'll get over this someday. (They will get better, but they will never "get over it".)
 - You must go on with your life. (They will, the best way they can and they don't need to be told.)

These discounters say, "I am not comfortable with you like you are. I need to make it better for you so I will feel better."

- Disempowering:
 - You don't need to know that.
 - What you don't know won't hurt you.
 - I can't tell you that. (If you can't, go on to explain why and when they can expect to have an answer.)
- God Clichés:
 - It must have been his/her time.
 - Someday you'll understand why.
 - God must have needed him/her more than you did.
 - God never gives us more than we can handle.
- Unhealthy Expectations:
 - You must be strong for your children/wife/parents.
 - You have to get a hold of yourself.

What to Say:

- I'm so sorry. (Simple, direct, validating)
- It's harder than most people think. (Validates, normalizes, encourages them to seek support)
- Most people who have gone through this react similarly to what you are experiencing. (Validates, normalizes)
- If I were in your situation, I'd feel very _____, too. (Validates, normalizes, assures)
- I'll check back with you tomorrow, see how you're doing, and see if there's anything else I can do for you. (Be sure you do it – validates significance of loss, expresses concern, introduces an element of control)

Ten Ways to Build Resilience:

1. Make connections - Good relationships with close family members, friends, or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need can also benefit the helper.
2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems – You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to those events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations – they will help you the next time around.
3. Accept that change is part of living – Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situation. Accept circumstances that you cannot change to help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.
4. Move toward your goals – Develop realistic goals. Do something regularly – even if it seems like a small accomplishment – that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, “What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?”
5. Take decisive actions – Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.
6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery – People often learn something about themselves and may find they have grown in some respects as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardships have reported better relationships, greater sense of personal strength, increased self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life.
7. Nurture a positive view of yourself – Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.
8. Keep things in perspective – Try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook – An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.
10. Take care of yourself – Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of you helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Questions to Consider When Building Resiliency:

- What kinds of events have been most stressful for me?
- How have those events typically affected me?
- Have I found it helpful to think of important people in my life when I am distressed?
- To whom have I reached out for support in working through a traumatic or stressful experience?
- What have I learned about myself and my interactions with others during difficult times?
- Has it been helpful for me to assist someone else going through similar experiences?
- Have I been able to overcome obstacles? How?
- What has helped make me feel more hopeful about the future?