



COMMUNICATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



Remembrance, Awareness, and Strength

In this edition of Survivor's Link, we honor lives lost during pivotal moments in our nation's military history and recognize observances that raise awareness and support for those navigating loss and healing.

World Suicide Prevention Month - September

This September, we join the global community in raising awareness about suicide prevention and mental health. It is a time to break the stigma, encourage open conversations, and share resources that can save lives.

Remember: every life matters, and help is always available. If you or someone you know is struggling, reaching out can make all the difference. Together, we can build a world of hope and support.

For immediate help, call or text 988 or chat via 988lifeline.org.



Bells Across America For Fallen Service Members - September

This September, Navy Installations across the fleet will host the 10th Annual Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members. These ceremonies honor the memory of our fallen heroes, ensuring their families know their loved ones are never forgotten. It also provides a moment for all who have been touched by loss to pay tribute.

During the ceremonies, the names of Fallen Service Members are read aloud, and a bell is tolled in their remembrance.



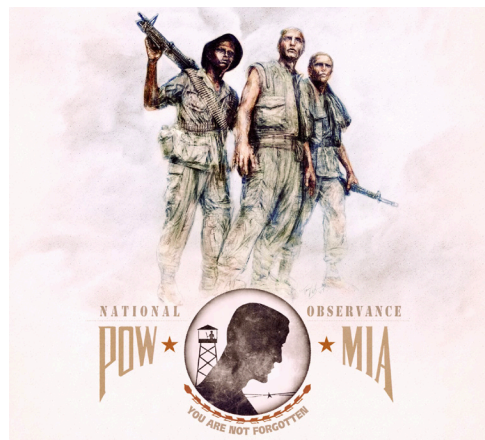
Sponsored by Navy Mutual, you can learn more about this year's hosting locations by visiting navygoldstar.com/events/bells-across-america or facebook.com/navygoldstar.

Patriot Day – September 11

On Patriot Day, our nation pauses to honor and remember the nearly 3,000 innocent lives lost during the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

As the Twin Towers fell, the Pentagon burned, and a quiet field in Pennsylvania became hallowed ground, our country stood still, and then stood together. In the face of unimaginable loss, we found strength in unity, courage in service, and hope in one another.

Each year on September 11, officially designated Patriot Day, we gather to reflect, remember, and reaffirm our solemn vow to never forget.



National POW/MIA Recognition Day – September 19

On National POW/MIA Recognition Day, we honor the bravery and sacrifice of the more than 81,000 American service members who are still listed as prisoners of war or missing in action.

Observed on the third Friday in September, this solemn day reminds us of our nation's promise: You are not forgotten. We pause to reflect on those who never returned, those who endured captivity, and the families who continue to wait for answers.

Let us stand united in remembrance and gratitude, and remain committed to bringing every missing hero home.

Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day 2025 – September 28

Since 1936, the last Sunday in September has been designated as Gold Star Mother's Day, honoring those who have lost a child while serving in the United States Armed Forces. In 2009, by Presidential Proclamation, the observance was expanded to include families of Fallen Service Members and renamed Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day.

Each year, the President issues a proclamation reaffirming our commitment to honor those "who carry forward the memories of those willing to lay down their lives for the United States and the liberties for which we stand." This year, on September 28, 2025, we pay tribute to the mothers and families who have made profound sacrifices for our nation.

The Navy Gold Star Program provides survivors with a safe space to process their grief, assess their needs, and access appropriate resources. The program supports Gold Star Families as they adjust to a new normal and offers meaningful opportunities for remembrance, ensuring they know they will forever remain part of the Navy community.

As we observe Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day, let us remember that no one has given more for our country than the families of the fallen and let them know they will never be forgotten.

For more information about the Navy Gold Star Program, please visit facebook.com/navygoldstar, navygoldstar.com, or call 1-888-509-8759.



USS Cole - October 12

We remember the 17 Sailors who lost their lives on the morning of October 12, 2000, when USS Cole (DDG 67) was attacked by terrorists while moored for refueling in the Port of Aden, Yemen.

HT2 Kenneth E. Clodfelter

ETC Richard Costelow

MSSN Lakeina M. Francis

ITSN Timothy L. Gauna

SMSN Cherone L. Gunn

ITSN James R. McDaniels

EN2 Marc I. Nieto

EW2 Ronald S. Owens

SN Lakiba N. Palmer

ENFN Joshua L. Parlett

FN Patrick H. Roy

EW1 Kevin S. Rux

MS3 Ronchester M. Santiago

OS2 Timothy L. Saunders

FN Gary Swenchonis, Jr.

LTJG. Andrew Triplett

SN Craig B. Wibberley

Celebrating the U.S. Navy's 250th Birthday – October 13

This year marks a historic milestone as we celebrate the 250th birthday of the United States Navy. Established on October 13, 1775, the Navy has spent two and a half centuries defending our nation's freedom, ensuring maritime security, and standing ready to respond wherever duty calls.

From its humble beginnings to today's global force, the Navy's legacy is one of courage, honor, and commitment. As we commemorate this remarkable anniversary, we extend our deepest gratitude to all who have served and continue to serve in the U.S. Navy.

Happy 250th Birthday to the United States Navy! Fair winds and following seas to all who have worn, and continue to wear, the uniform.



Make A Difference Day – October 25

Make a Difference Day is a national day of service that reminds us of the power we each hold to create positive change. Celebrated on the fourth Saturday in October, it's a day for people of all ages to come together through volunteering, acts of kindness, and community projects to help others and uplift their communities.

Whether it's lending a hand to a neighbor, cleaning up a local park, or supporting a cause you care about, every action matters. Because even small acts, when multiplied, can make a big difference.

USS Oriskany - October 26

We remember the Sailors who lost their lives on October 26, 1966, when a deadly fire broke out aboard the San Diego-based aircraft carrier USS Oriskany while stationed off the coast of Vietnam. The fire began after a lit flare was accidentally locked in a flare locker. It swept through five decks, killing 44 men, mostly aircrew, and injuring 156 others.

Veterans Day – November 11

On November 11, we observe Veterans Day, a time to honor and thank the brave men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces. Their dedication, sacrifice, and courage have helped preserve the freedoms we enjoy today.

As we pause to recognize our veterans, let us also reflect on how we can support them not just today, but every day. To all who have worn the uniform: thank you for your service.



Children's Grief Awareness Day – November 20

Children's Grief Awareness Day, observed each year on the third Thursday of November, is a time to recognize the unique and often unseen grief that children experience after the loss of a loved one.

First established in 2008 by the Highmark Caring Place, this day has since gained international recognition as a moment to bring grieving children into focus, especially during the holiday season, which can be a particularly painful time.

Grieving children often feel isolated, misunderstood, or overlooked. But support makes a difference—sometimes all the difference. This day reminds us of the importance of listening, showing up, and making sure no child grieves alone.

Let's raise awareness. Let's open our hearts. Let's ensure every grieving child feels seen, supported, and surrounded by care.



International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day – November 22

November 22 is International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day, a day dedicated to those who have lost someone to suicide. It is a day of remembrance, compassion, and connection.

For those left behind, the loss is not just painful. It is often complex, isolating, and filled with questions that may never be answered. Survivors carry stories that do not always fit into the usual language of grief. Today, we honor their courage to keep going, to speak out, and to seek healing.

If you are a survivor: your grief is valid. Your love for the person you lost continues to matter. You are not alone.

If you know someone who has lost a loved one to suicide: reach out. Sit with them in silence if words are too much. Just being there helps.

Today is about remembrance, but also resilience. In community, there is strength. In sharing, there is healing. You are not alone.



Pearl Harbor Remembrance – December 7

Each year on December 7, we pause to honor and remember the 2,403 service members and civilians who lost their lives during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. An additional 1,178 individuals were wounded in the surprise strike that forever changed the course of history.

The attack resulted in the permanent loss of two U.S. Navy battleships, the USS Arizona and the USS Utah, and the destruction of 188 American aircraft. This day stands as a solemn reminder of the cost of war and the resilience of a nation united in the face of tragedy.

We remember. We reflect. We honor their sacrifice.



Gold Star Children's Day: Chalk Your Walk Contest

On August 1, 2025, we honored the brave and beautiful lives of Gold Star children, those who carry the legacy of a loved one lost in service to our nation. These children embody resilience, love, and strength far beyond their years.

Though their loved ones are no longer here, their light lives on in the stories passed down, in the values they upheld, and in the strength their children show every day. Their memory is not only honored, it is alive in the laughter, dreams, and determination of the children they left behind.

We would like to congratulate the following Gold Star children who participated in our Chalk Your Walk Contest with the theme "Their Light Lives On."

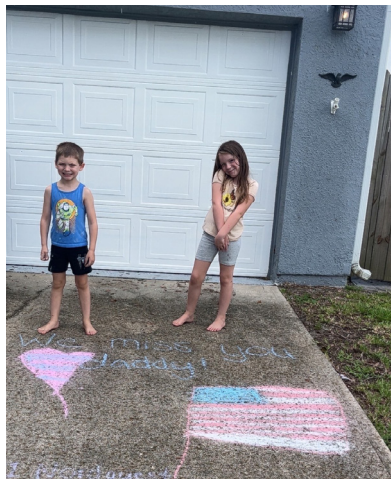
We recognize the sacrifices made, the grief carried, and the courage it takes to keep going. We honor not only the fallen, but also those who continue to shine in their memory. To every Gold Star child, your light is a legacy, and your story matters.

Congratulations to the winners of the Gold Star Children's Chalk Your Walk Contest!

- Age 10 & Under: Adelynn & Jaccson
- Ages 11–17: Sofia & Ava

Your artwork beautifully reflected the theme "Their Light Lives On," honoring the memories that continue to shine brightly in our hearts.

Thank you to everyone who participated and helped make this tribute so meaningful!



Adelynn (right) and Jaccson (left), winners of the Age 10 & Under category, with chalk art honoring their dad and reflecting the theme "Their Light Lives On."



Sofia, winner of the Ages 11–17 category, proudly displays her "Let Your Light Shine" chalk artwork.

Back to School: You've Put in the Work — Now Make It Count

By: Maura Bradshaw, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

You've worked hard: applications submitted, deadlines met. If you're using VA education benefits, you've likely reviewed your options, including the Fry Scholarship and Dependents' Education Assistance (DEA). If not, check them out here: [VA Education & Career Benefits](#).

Still comparing schools or programs? The GI Bill® Comparison Tool is a must. Explore and compare.

If you're aiming for a career in healthcare, don't miss the VA's scholarship programs and education support, especially for medical fields: [VA Medical Career Benefits](#).

Start the year with confidence—you've already laid the foundation.



By: P. Jackson, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

1. Reflect on Summer Experiences

2. Gradually Adjust Your Routine

- Start waking up and going to bed at times closer to your school schedule.
- Reintroduce structured activities such as reading, studying, or organizing your workspace.
- Limit screen time and social distractions to refocus on academic priorities.

- **Gather Supplies:** Make a checklist of necessary school supplies, textbooks, and technology.
- **Set Goals:** Define academic and personal goals for the semester to stay motivated.
- **Review Material:** Refresh your knowledge on subjects you will be studying to make the transition smoother.

- Embrace the excitement of new opportunities, friendships, and learning experiences.
- If you feel anxious, remind yourself that transitions take time, and it is okay to ease into the change.
- Stay positive by focusing on aspects of school or college that you enjoy, such as a favorite subject, extracurricular activities, or reconnecting with friends.

Transitioning does not mean summer fun has to end abruptly. Plan a few enjoyable activities before school starts, such as a final trip, a gathering with friends, or a personal project. This helps maintain enthusiasm while shifting focus toward academic responsibilities.

Moving Into Your Dorm or Barracks Room

By: Maura Bradshaw, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Did you decide to head directly into the military to follow your family's new or long-standing tradition of service to our country? After proudly graduating boot camp and completing your specialty schools for your rate, MOS, or AFSC, you're ready to walk into any number of room situations. Some of these situations may already be familiar, but now you can possibly be settled for a longer period of time. You'll be there as long as the military decides. Let's make it yours while it is yours.

As the day approaches when you start to pack your belongings, how do you create your home away from home? How do you manage space restrictions and shared living? Before you start, make sure you are clear on your dorm or unit's rules and restrictions about what you can and cannot bring or hang. Find out what is allowed as far as decorations, furniture, and appliances. Then be sure you know what is prohibited, such as items that cannot be hung on the wall, restrictions on scented items (plug-ins, candles), and limits on paint or peel-and-stick wallpaper.

First, establish your budget. Be realistic about what makes sense for you. As you spend, keep track with a budget app or spreadsheet to help prevent going over what you've set.

Often the next step is to select a color palette. This can be a single or monochromatic scheme, or every color you can find on the shelf. The colors should reflect what you want out of your space. Neutral tones can be calming, while brighter colors can be energizing. You have the opportunity to create a space that is a reflection of you. It should be your own cozy corner. If you have your roommate's contact information, you may want to coordinate a cohesive design or decide to let each side of the room reflect your individual styles.

If the room allows, create distinct spaces for sleeping, working or studying, and relaxing. This helps your brain associate the different areas with what you want to accomplish. When activities are tied to specific locations, it strengthens your ability to focus when you're in those spaces.

Think multipurpose when planning storage. Is there space for a storage ottoman, or can the bed be lofted? Another option is to lift the bed on bed risers to create room for drawers or storage containers. Rolling carts can move around the room to where they're needed and provide extra storage. Seating is often limited in these living situations. If you plan to socialize in your room, people may sit on your bed. A thin, decorative blanket can provide a layer for people to sit on that is not the blanket you sleep with.

Since this is your home away from home, select a few favorite photos of family, friends, partners, or pets to display. Consider the space available when deciding whether to frame them. Photos can be placed on a desk or dresser, or hung on the wall. If space is limited, taping prints to a place where you can see your loved ones' faces daily may be the most practical option.

Don't shy away from plants if you're unsure. Plants bring color and can help clean the air. Low-maintenance options include spider plants, snake plants, or pothos. Try a money plant as another option—it couldn't hurt.

Create cozy comfort with a rug, bed pillows, and string lights. If you choose a rug, be sure you have a way to clean it. A desk lamp can also be helpful if you need to study or enjoy gaming while your roommate is sleeping.

These spaces tend to be small. Mirrors make rooms feel bigger, so use them strategically. As a bonus, this is a decorating idea you can carry into your first apartment.

Making your space feel more like home can help you acclimate faster in a new location. Being comfortable may translate into better work and study habits, a happier mood, and even a wider social network because new friends will feel welcomed into your inviting space. This corner of the world is yours while you're at that duty station or educational institution. Let the world know it's your own.

A Tool for When You Feel Overwhelmed: Box Breathing

By: Catherine Ragsdale, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

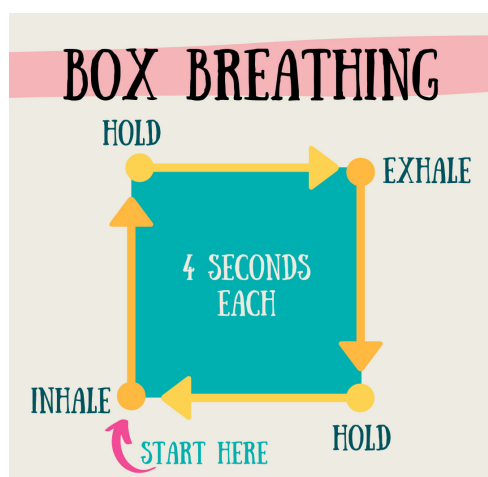
In moments of stress or anxiety, the body shifts into fight-or-flight mode. Your heart races and your breath quickens, preparing you for danger. Unfortunately, that same response can be triggered when we feel emotionally overwhelmed. To reset, we need to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, also known as the “rest and digest” mode.

Box breathing, also called Combat Tactical Breathing by military and law enforcement, is a simple, evidence-based practice that signals to your body, “I’m safe now.” By inhaling, holding, exhaling, and pausing to a steady count of four, you slow your heart rate, lengthen each breath, and calm your mind. Once your nervous system finds balance, you can think more clearly and face what comes next.

How to Practice Box Breathing

1. Take a big inhale through your nose, then let out a slow sigh through your mouth. Repeat one or two more times to settle in.
2. Inhale through your nose for a count of four (“Inhale, 2-3-4”)
3. Hold your breath for a count of four (“Pause, 2-3-4”).
4. Exhale through your nose for a count of four (“Exhale, 2-3-4”).
5. Hold again for a count of four (“Pause, 2-3-4”).

That’s one round. Practice at least three rounds—or as many as you need—until you feel the shift. Notice how your body softens and your mind grows calmer with each breath.



Tools to Stay Mentally Healthy: Autumn Self-Care

By: Catherine Ragsdale, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Fall invites us to slow down with cooler air, shorter days, and the natural urge to rest more. A self-care routine doesn’t make us lazy. It makes us stronger, more resilient, and better able to support ourselves and our loved ones. If you don’t already have rituals in place, try one or two of these simple autumn self-care ideas:

- **Creative Comfort:** Write in a journal, sketch, or arrange a small bouquet of fall foliage. Creative outlets help reduce stress.
- **Rest to Reset:** Put the screens away an hour before bedtime and get to bed early. A good night’s sleep will leave you refreshed and ready to take on the day.
- **Movement with Purpose:** Take a 10-minute walk outdoors. Cool, crisp air and the crunch of leaves underfoot bring playful mindfulness.
- **Fall Candle Ritual:** Light a pumpkin-spice, apple-cinnamon, or cedarwood candle. Sit quietly for a moment, inhaling the warm aroma and watching the gentle flame dance. The soft glow and seasonal scent help center your mind and invite cozy calm.
- **Seasonal Nourishment:** Sip warm herbal tea or enjoy a bowl of nourishing soup. Let the aroma ground you.
- **Cozy Reading:** Nestle into your favorite nook with a soft blanket, a warm drink, and a good book. Let the story carry you away. Reading calms the mind, sparks imagination, and offers a gentle escape.

Building a few of these practices into your week can create a shield against overwhelm. As you try them, notice which ones make you feel steadier, calmer, and more connected to yourself.

How Humor Heals Up Heal

By: Hailey Chittick, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Let's be honest: grief is strange. One moment you may find yourself crying at the smell of laundry detergent, and only minutes later laughing at an inside joke only you still remember. It's disorienting, but also deeply human. Even in its heaviest moments, life continues to offer small, unexpected chances to smile.

Some believe grief and laughter do not belong together. Those individuals have likely never sat at a table with survivors who, through experience, have learned how to find light in the darkest places. Yet even for them, it can be difficult to allow that light in. Many of us hold back joy or suppress laughter because we feel guilty, as though happiness means we have "moved on." But it does not. When you've lived through the unimaginable, sometimes laughter is the only thing that keeps you standing—not because something is funny, but because it is necessary.

Grief and humor have a complicated relationship. At times, laughter can bring a wave of grief crashing over you, and at other times, it is the very thing that carries you through the day. One study of bereaved adults found that humor often appears both as a grief trigger and as a way to cope with loss over time (1). These "caught off guard" moments are not inherently negative. They force us to pause and feel what is present instead of pushing it aside. And the beautiful part is that laughter can soften those feelings while we sit with them. Research also shows that laughter benefits us physically by lowering stress hormones, boosting endorphins, and improving blood flow and immune function (2). Laughter does not simply lift the spirit; it helps us move through grief and strengthens the body as well, which is why making space for it matters.

Grief, as we know, has terrible timing. It shows up in the middle of buying produce at the grocery store, while we're stuck in traffic, or while doing taxes. But humor can be just as unpredictable. It surfaces when you burn their favorite recipe the same way they always did, when a song on the radio reminds you how badly they sang along, or when a bagpipe squeaks off-key during a rendition of Amazing Grace at a memorial event. It lives in the stories that begin with "Remember when..." and end with everyone crying from laughter.

And let's not forget: our people were often funny. Maybe they told the worst dad jokes. Maybe they had bone-dry sarcasm, or a sense of humor so strange it could derail a family dinner. They were full, complex humans—not just names on plaques or photos in frames.

If you're not at the "laughing part" yet, that's all right. Humor will wait for you. When it comes, it will not erase your grief, it will simply sit beside it. When it does appear, try not to push it away. Too often we hold back a smile or stifle a laugh because we feel guilty or believe we're "not allowed" to feel joy. Laughter does not mean you loved them any less. It is proof that their life is still connected to yours, even in small moments of lightness. Laughter is not the opposite of mourning; it is another room in the same house. You can cry in one room, laugh in another, and sometimes do both in the hallway while holding a sandwich. That is called healing.

We need to stop apologizing for laughter or for appearing "too okay" for a moment. Humor is not avoidance or disrespect. It is resilience with a punchline. It is how we release pressure, remember what matters, and stay tethered to ourselves when everything else feels unfamiliar.

Your story is sacred. Your laughter is too. Laughter does not mean forgetting; it means remembering without coming undone. It may be one of the greatest gifts we give ourselves and the people we miss most.

You're allowed to feel joy again. You're allowed to laugh, even when it feels complicated.

So go ahead and laugh—loudly, freely, and unapologetically. Not because you're "over it," but because you're still here.

Sources

(1) ["Humor: A Grief Trigger and Also a Way to Manage or Live With Your Grief." OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying \(2 March 2022\).](#)

(2) ["Stress relief from laughter? It's no joke." Mayo Clinic \(22 September 2023\).](#)

Navy Gold Star Coordinators

Area of Responsibility	Phone	Postal Mail
California (Los Angeles County/Northern CA), Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Japan, Korea & Philippines	901-581-2383	NAVY MEDICAL CENTER SAN DIEGO 34800 BOB WILSON DR BLDG 26, 3RD FL, Rm 349 NWW C/O NAVY GOLD STAR SAN DIEGO CA 92134
California (San Diego/Riverside) & Colorado	901-930-8290	
Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wisconsin & Canada	901-930-8062	
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Texas	901-930-8109	
Illinois, Indiana & Michigan	901-930-8593	
Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma & Tennessee	901-930-8300	
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania & Rhode Island	901-671-6910	NAVY GOLD STAR PROGRAM 264 MARVIN SHIELDS BLVD, BLDG 1 GULFPORT, MS 39501
New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York & Vermont	901-930-8308	
Delaware, Maryland, Washington DC, West Virginia & all other counties in Virginia not listed below	901-930-8578	
Virginia (the following counties: Chesapeake, Hampton, Isle of Wright, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Poquoson, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg & York)	901-930-8008	
Kentucky, North Carolina & Ohio	901-930-8210	
Georgia, South Carolina & Europe	901-671-5597	
Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi & Florida (the following counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Gulf, Franklin, Liberty, Gadsden, Leon, Wakulia, Jefferson, Madison, Taylor, Hamilton, Suwannee, Lafayette, Dixie, Columbia, Gilchrist, Levy, Alachua, Marion, Citrus, Hernando, & Pasco).	901-671-6521	
Florida all other counties not listed above	901-930-8189	