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Navy Region Northwest Honors our Fallen

by Gary A. Mayes, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy, Commander, Navy Region Northwest

In 2017, the Navy lost over 260 Sailors who left behind loved ones. The Navy Region Northwest eleven-state area is home to 74 family members who were directly affected by these deaths. Regardless of the cause, location, or circumstances of your loss, your sacrifice deserves our acknowledgment and deepest respect.

Our country and its services have strong traditions of honoring the service of the fallen and caring for the well-being of their survivors: from the Revolutionary War when half-pay was provided to widows and orphans to the creation of Memorial Day, a day to honor those “who died in defense of their country.” Today, many commands continue with their own traditions throughout the year, including honoring those who never came home in Prisoner of War/Missing-In-Action (POW/MIA) displays or hosting 'Roll Call of Heroes' ceremonies.

The Navy has made a promise of lasting support to our service members and their families, and through the Navy Gold Star Program, the Navy strives to fulfill that promise to you, our Navy families who have endured the loss of their Sailor. Honoring our shipmates and your fallen loved ones is not just the right thing to do, but a vital and enduring mission that requires our dedicated focus and partnerships to get it right.

There are many ways the Navy supports Gold Star Families, including ship tours, invitations to events, tribute rides, and runs. Often families just want to stay connected with the military community and ensuring your loved ones are not forgotten. Support of commands within the region is essential to keeping our promise of support to you.

Navy Region Northwest ensures that our surviving families, located across the region, are not forgotten. For the last two years, the Navy Region Northwest commands and the Navy Gold Star Program have partnered in hosting a remembrance ceremony “Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members.” This ceremony is on the last Thursday in September, which precedes the Gold Star Family and Gold Star Mother’s Day on the following Sunday. This bell-ringing ceremony is a way to ensure that you and our Gold Star Families, living in the Northwest Region, know the Navy has not forgotten your fallen loved ones and honors and remembers your sacrifice as well.

Please reach out to your Gold Star Coordinator if you would like to find out more information on Bells Across America for Fallen Service Members and other support services in which your Navy Gold Star Program can be of assistance.



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Navy Gold Star Tribute

Triannual Rotating Watch

In 2016, we were proud to announce that we instituted a Fallen Triannual Rotating Watch, a tribute to a Fallen Sailor whose family resides in the Northwest Region. The Fallen Sailor's photo and a brief biography is framed and displayed for approximately four months, at several Northwest Region installations and NOSC sites. After which time, another Fallen Sailor will be rotated in, so another Northwest Family can have their Fallen Hero remembered.

If you are interested in submitting your Fallen Hero to take a Watch, contact your Northwest Navy Gold Star Coordinator.

The following are our Watches for the last three Rotations:

LCDR Erik M. Sweet

Watch: September 2016-December 2017



Dec. 14, 1970-Apr. 26, 2015

Lieutenant Commander Erik M. Sweet enlisted in the Navy when he was only 17 and served 12 years as a nuclear-trained Electrician's Mate, achieving the rank of Chief Petty Officer.

He then commissioned via the Limited Duty Officer program, where he served for more than 14 years as an officer. With only two shore duty assignments in his 26+-year career, he was a proud, sea-going nuclear operator, Mustang mentor and friend to everyone with whom he met.

He served his sea time on board USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) for two tours – as a Petty Officer Second Class and a Chief Petty Officer. On board USS Emory S. Land (AS 39) as an Ensign where he earned his Surface Warfare qualification, and on board USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) for three tours – as a plankowner First Class Petty Officer, as her Auxiliaries Technical Assistant and Electrical Officer, and, lastly, as the Ship's Maintenance Officer.

His retirement ceremony was held aboard the USS John C. Stennis in Puget Sound Naval Shipyard on March 6, 2015. Erik's retirement ceremony was attended by several hundred people, showing how much he was loved by his friends, family, Shipmates, and the nuclear maintenance community.

I was the Commanding Officer of USS Halsey (DDG 97), homeported in Pearl Harbor, HI in April of 2015. Erik and I were competing in a run/swim biathlon in Kailua, Hawaii. Four days prior to his official retirement date, on April 26, 2015, at the age of 44, Erik drowned while competing in that biathlon.

All who knew or had even met Erik saw that he lived each and every day to the fullest, and he had the knack for making everyone whom he was with feel special and loved. Losing his mother to breast cancer when she was 47 (he was 30) profoundly impacted how intensely and sensitively he approached life and personal interactions. He'd often say, "I'm not here for a long time, I'm here for a good time!" A few days before he died, he told me, "I could die tomorrow and be the happiest man ever. I'm done with the Navy... my kids are taken care of and I am finally with you, the love of my life. The only reason why I wouldn't want to die is that I don't want to make you sad."

Erik Sweet was and is a gift to be cherished and his indomitable spirit lives on in the land of Aloha and in the hearts of everyone who he loved.

– CAPT Linda Seymour-Sweet, Gold Star Spouse

EODC Patrick Wade

Watch: January 2018-April 2018



Aug. 13, 1968-July 17, 2007

Patrick grew up knowing that he would follow in the footsteps of many of his family members and join the service. He enlisted in the Navy right out of high school, in July 1987, and spent the next 20 years faithfully serving his country and traveling the world. Patrick had a calm, meticulous, and focused personality that was a great match for his career as an Explosives Ordnance Disposal Technician, and he loved his job. On July 17, 2007 Patrick was deployed to Iraq and out on a call when a culvert full of explosives was detonated under his vehicle.

As much as Patrick loved his career, he loved his role as a father even more. Patrick was a very hands-on parent and spent as much time as he could with his family. He loved to take his young daughters on walks to go play at the park, and read them bedtime stories. Even though we miss his presence every day, his daughters are growing up to be wonderful women who embody his spirit, smile, and impish sense of humor. We are grateful for every moment that we were able to spend with him and take comfort in the legacy that he left with us.

– Keri Wade, Gold Star Spouse

Navy Gold Star Tribute, continued



Jan. 31, 1942-Apr. 30, 1968

2ndLT John Michael 'Mick' O'Dell

Watch: May 2018-September 2018

John Michael O'Dell grew up on Orcas Island, off the Washington coast. He was the third of four children, his family and friends called him "Mick." He enjoyed hunting and fishing with his brothers and friends, had a talent for music and played both basketball and football in high school. The O'Dell family lived in the Lodge built by the CCC located in Moran State Park where his father was the park ranger.

Mick graduated from Western Washington University, WWU, in Bellingham, WA where he majored in history. There he met his future wife, Kathy Kandlik. Mick and Kathy married that December. Mick had an amazing tenor voice, where he was lead singer in the O'Dell family band, and singing in the WWU chorus.

The O'Dell family appreciated the military. His brother Kim had joined the Air Force, while brother Don and wife were teachers on a US Military base in Germany. Mick, however, always admired the Marine Corps, and after graduating from WWU, he enlisted and was accepted for the Officer Candidate Course. Basic class 6-67 graduated in November 1967 at Quantico. Mick drove Kathy back to Washington State after graduation, where Kathy would live with her parents during Mick's Vietnam duty.

On April 30, 1968, Mick's platoon was conducting patrols. Earlier that morning, a Navy Landing Craft Utility (LCU) boat was ambushed from the vicinity of An Lac, a village southeast of Dai Do. Mick was given orders to cross the Cua Viet River and attack An Lac. His platoon was ambushed and Mick died. The commanding officer of the 3rd Marines, Colonel Milton Hull, commented later that during the fighting he saw during World War II and Korea, he had never seen such a huge volume of enemy fire as he did on that day.

Kathy has been to the site in Vietnam, where he was killed with other Marines, to honor his leadership during the battle. It was a very healing experience for her, and a great honor to meet several of his fellow Marines that served with him.

There is a Tribute Monument at Quantico to honor Mick and his fallen brothers from Basic Class 6-67.

Mick is buried on Orcas Island, where he grew up, and is missed by his family every day.

— Excerpts from *Class of '67: The Story of the 6th Marine Officer Basic Class of 1967*, with permission by author Jack Wells and Gold Star Spouse, Kathy O'Dell.



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by Katelyn Smetana, Naval Station Everett
School Liaison Officer

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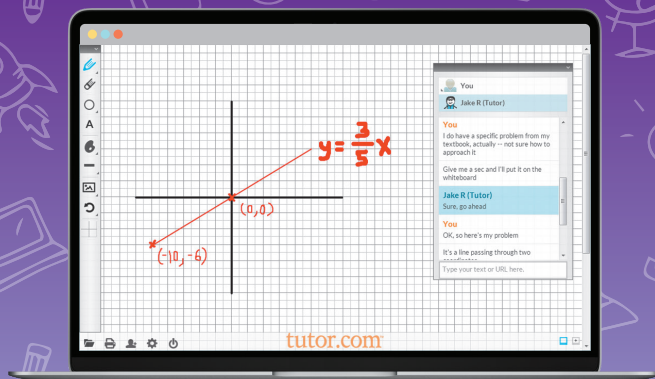
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Meet Your Coordinator

Tina Soukup and Sandra Neuman share responsibilities as the coordinators for the Navy's Northwest eleven-state region. Tina's main focus as Installation Coordinator is working with our Navy Gold Star Program's families. She has responsibility for most of Washington State, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming. Sandra is the Regional Coordinator. She has regional responsibilities to leadership as well as working with households in Alaska, Idaho, Montana and families living near Naval Base Kitsap in NW Washington. They both have authored articles in this publication. Here is a little more information they wanted to share about themselves.



Tina Soukup
Northwest Installation
Navy Gold Star Support Coordinator

I grew up in Okinawa Japan. My dad was in the Air Force and was stationed there most of his career. After graduating high school, I decided to join the Navy. Being a Sailor and Hospital Corpsman, I was surrounded by courageous men and women who taught me discipline and showed me what being a

Shipmate was all about. While in the Navy, I met my husband, who is an Active Duty Chief Petty Officer. With his support, I was able to leave the Navy, take care of our three kids, and go to school full time.

As a supporter of all things military, I was fortunate to get a job with Fleet and Family Support Center as an Administrative Assistant. Two years later, I began my journey as a Navy Gold Star Support Coordinator. In 2003, my husband and I lost a friend who went through training with us. This became not just a job for me, but a way to honor him. Though I do not understand what Gold Star Families have gone through, I make it my mission to remember the Fallen and to serve you in any way I can. During the last three years with the program, I've seen strength, resilience, and humbleness. It has been my honor to meet and work with a cadre of steadfast people. The Navy Gold Star Program is available to you for as long as you desire. We strive to provide you with tools to assist you in your journey. We offer remembrance events to honor your loved ones. We make every effort to ensure you stay connected and assist you in any way we can. Although we may not have the answers right away, we will provide you with the attention and assistance now and in the future.



Sandra Neuman
Northwest Regional
Navy Gold Star Support Coordinator

I grew up in NW Montana and graduated from the University of Montana. I have worked in banking and investing in the private sector for a number of years before having the opportunity to work as a Financial Counselor for Survivor Outreach Services, the Army's Gold Star Program. When the Navy stood up its Gold Star

Program in 2014, I joined the Navy Gold Star Program as the Northwest Regional Coordinator.

I am the youngest of three and had the fortune of spending most of my summers at our family cabin, located on a lake just a few hours from Glacier Park. Although I was not raised in a military family, I was taught a deep respect for those who served. My father was in the Army for a short while. He met my mother while stationed in Mannheim, Germany. I have an uncle and cousin-in-law who served in Vietnam and a nephew who is a Reservist with the Army. I have had the honor of working with Gold Star Families for over six years. Within that time, I have learned that every person goes through their own circumstances and journey and no two paths are identical. Although I will never fully understand the loss you have experienced, I am sincere in giving you my full condolences and empathy.

The Navy Gold Star Program is available to you in many different ways, and it is my task to ensure you remain a member of our Navy Family for as long as you desire. The program tries to accomplish this through serving as a trusted source of information related to resiliency and recovery. We facilitate remembrance events for your loved ones. We advocate by helping you navigate paperwork issues and requests for documents, pins and other questions. We are available to you. Although we may not be able to fully comprehend the loss and difficulties as you move forward, be assured that we have some understanding and experience in assisting Gold Star Family members. Our goal is to provide you with foundational assistance as you forge ahead. We may not have the answers to everything, but we will give you our attention and assistance as you may need it.

We Don't Want to be a Bother...

Gold Star Families, we want you to know that if your loved one died while on active duty, you are eligible for the program regardless of the circumstances of his or her death. That being said, we also don't want to be a bother to you and your family with our mailings and emails. We try to send annual outreach twice a year; once in May and also once during the month you lost your Sailor. Please feel free to contact your coordinator or email goldstar@navylifepnw.com if you wish to be removed from these distribution lists. Also note, if we have never heard from you and you wish to continue to receive our twice a year annual outreach, please let us know by contacting your coordinator or emailing us.





Effective Communication: What's Your Perspective?

by Victoria Oak, M.Ed.
NRNW FFR Training Specialist

For most of us, effective communication is not something that comes easily, especially when our "listener" is someone from a very different life experience than our own. While

we may take into account the more obvious, or visual, cues that help us to modify our message to our audience, we usually aren't aware of the complex set of lenses that make up each person's perspective on the world.

In an effort to understand the different glasses people are "seeing through", I will sometimes pass a towel around a room of co-workers and ask them how to fold it "the right way." As you can guess, if there are twelve people in the room, I will be shown twelve "right ways." And, each person can explain why they believe that their way is the right way. I hear everything from it's how their mom (or grandma or spouse or boss or the Navy) taught them, to "it's how the towels fit into the basket in my bathroom!" Silly, right? However, it does open the conversation up to considerations of how even the most basic convictions we hold, our very ideas of what is good/bad, polite/rude, rich/poor, hard/easy, old/young, common sense/stupid, etc. stand on very little common ground. We may know this intellectually, but often, especially during a difficult conversation, we quickly lose sight of this fact and end up assuming that the other person is wearing the very same pair of glasses as our own.

Think about the people you communicate with the best. Chances are you share a similar eyeglass prescription. You might even be able to exchange glasses with them and see your world nearly as well as you can see it through your own. Yet even then, you may not completely "get" where they are coming from. You have to work at it, keep navigating the conversation, sharing feelings and experiences and your reactions to all of that. The closer your lens RXs match from the start, the better your chances become at understanding one another. But, what about when they don't match? What happens then?

Here I am, trying to talk to this person who just doesn't get me. And I have no idea what they are going on about. They have no concept of my vision, and I have no concept of theirs. It's frustrating. Even maddening. And, I'll be honest, if there is no critical reason why I HAVE to talk to them, I usually decide to give it up. Maybe you're the same. You think about all the time and energy it will take to learn that person well enough to even hope to forge a common view, and you just walk away, because THEY just don't SEE. Am I right? But how does that play out if there IS a critical reason that you have to communicate with them? When you have to find a way to forge some kind of understanding between you because there is something important at stake?

This can be especially challenging when we remember that as humans, we are hardwired to judge and classify everything as simplistically as possible. There is a good reason for this that goes way deep into our DNA: survival. If our primal ancestors couldn't quickly judge the nature of a thing, decide whether it was time to shake hands, fight, or run, our species would not have survived its first 100 years. Thus, we need to work against type, in essence, in order to become good listeners and communicators. So, don't beat yourself up when you blow it. It's natural. Hopefully, you will get another shot at that

particular conversation. When you do, here are a few tips to help it go more smoothly:

Listen to hear, not to respond.

Don't interrupt or finish their sentences for them. Let them "get it all out" before you speak at all. Only then will they be able to listen to you, anyway. If they are still processing their anger, confusion, worry, fear, etc., when YOU start to talk, they won't hear you.

Also, don't be mentally planning your response WHILE they are talking. If your brain is full of the arguments, retorts or information you want to share, you will not be hearing them.

Assess their message; don't judge it.

Communication studies show that the impact of a message from one person onto another consists of three basic parts: body language, tone and words. And, of those three, body language is the most powerful component (55%). So, try to assess the *how* of someone's message before you respond to the *what*. Oh, in case you're wondering, tone is 38%, leaving words at just 7% of the whole experience. ~ Albert Mehrabian *Silent Messages*, 1971

So, what does this mean? Simply put, don't assume any judgment about their message until you have had a chance to watch and listen to it. Only by paying objective attention to both the non-verbal as well as the verbal content of the message can you hope to start seeing the issue through their lenses, not just your own. And, that is when you can start to forge a common view, leading to improved communication.

Respond first to the thing you can productively act on.

As the other person speaks, train yourself to listen for the one thing you can do or say something productive about. When it is your turn to speak, start with that. In other words, try to move the conversation away from reaction and toward a mutually helpful course of action. Most importantly, accept that what they're telling you is real and right from their perspective, and try to move on from there.

The good news is that this practice can also help you to stay more objective while you listen, as well as keep you from rehearsing your "comeback" while the other person is talking.

Allow that they may be seeing life through very different lenses from your own, and that's OK.

Because the bottom line here is that we can never completely know how another person sees the very same thing that we are looking at. Just like in the Indian folk tale about the six blind men trying to describe the elephant, when we come at each other from completely different sides of a thing, we are never going to 100% agree on how that thing looks. So, all we can hope to do is to find some space where we can at least agree that this is the way we will see the thing together, right now, for as long as it takes for us to talk to each other effectively about the issue at hand.





Captain Joseph House and the Traveling Memorial

by Tina Soukup, tina.soukup@navy.mil, (425) 304-3721
Northwest Installation Gold Star Coordinator



The Northwest Gold Star Support Coordinators were able to visit the Traveling Memorial that made a stop at the Captain Joseph House in Port Angeles, Washington. After Betsy Schultz lost her son, Army Green Beret Captain Joseph William Schultz, she found a way in which to honor him and support families through their grief journey. This nonprofit foundation provides respite to Gold Star Families and allows them to meet others who have endured a similar experience.

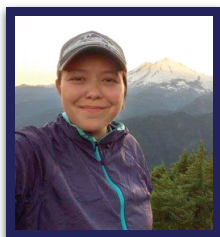


The house built in 1910, formerly a bed and breakfast, has gone through many changes and renovations. Many people of the community donate their time and talents to make the restorations needed to provide a comfortable stay. These changes allow families to have privacy if needed; furthermore, there is an opportunity for them to gather and cook, eat, and mingle together in the common spaces. Throughout the tour, we found that the family rooms were named after Soldiers who were with Captain Joseph; Apolinar Family Room, Blasjo Family Room, and Baxter Family Room. The house will accommodate three families each week, eleven months out of the year, all-expense paid.

During the first weekend in December 2017, the street in front of the Captain Joseph House was closed off to all vehicle traffic. There, standing memorials of over 5,000 Service Members stood for people to see. During those three days, there was a 24 hour "watch" who stood and guarded the memorials. Although the weather was crisp and temperature low enough to see your breath, people came. They looked over each picture, some for minutes, and some for hours. Five thousand names and their pictures displayed, depicting a lost parent, child, sibling, or friend. It was a humbling experience, firstly because many people came to see a display of bravery and heroism, secondly because, out of the thousands of pictures, we recognized many and thought only of their resilient and inspirational families. These moving monuments have graced the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in DC, small towns in Nebraska, Iowa, Texas, and many more places. Now, it has graced 1108 South Oak Street in Port Angeles.

As a Gold Star Support Coordinator, it has been a mission to spread awareness of what a Gold Star Family represents and to safeguard and ensure that their loved ones are remembered. With every name and picture you see on memorials, there is somebody who has experienced tragedy. Let us remember them.

To learn more about the Captain Joseph House and the Traveling Memorial, visit rememberingourfallen.org/national-memorial/ and captainjosephhousefoundation.org/.



Outdoor Recreation

by Summer Dahozey
Outdoor Recreation Specialist
Community Recreation, Naval Station Everett

In 2012, I began my job as an Outdoor Recreation Guide with the Navy's Morale Welfare Recreation (MWR) program. One of the roles that I was responsible for was leading

people into the outdoors. Up until that point, I did not understand the emotional and mental benefits that a good day outdoors can have on a person.

At MWR, we lead a multitude of trips from beginner stand-up paddleboarding, to a multi-month mountaineering program. The intent of our program is to provide recreational opportunities to our Sailors and their families who may not be aware of all the activities their home base has available to them. I've seen and met all kinds of people. Most of my trip patrons are just looking for a fun and safe day outside with like-minded company. But sometimes, I can tell that others are looking for some form of healing. Whether it's decompressing from a rough week at work or something even heavier, I don't need to do much to tap into the healing power of the outdoors. The fresh air, quiet breeze, and lack of electronic distractions work magic on their own. It's well known that exercise improves our mood, but being out on a beautiful winding trail, with waterfalls and valley views, allows opportunities to simply pause, catch your breath, take in the surrounding beauty, and reflect on the past and the future ahead.

Personally, I hit the trails to clear my mind and recharge my batteries. But, I have learned from patrons that joining a beginner class to learn a new sport can open up a new world in so many different ways. There is



an opportunity to meet other like-minded people, usually pushing oneself out of his or her comfort zone, and possibly discovering a lifelong hobby that continues to push growth.

I cannot claim to know exactly what it is about nature and the outdoors that gives it such healing properties, but I do know that it's unique to each individual and what they are willing to receive. There are numerous studies done on the subject that are absolutely fascinating to read. Countless wilderness poets and authors have written famous literature that is regularly quoted on coffee mugs, T-shirts, and bumper stickers, because they speak to us on some level. Nature does not discriminate and will take you as you are, regardless of your physical abilities or current emotional state. One does not need to be rafting Class IV whitewater rapids or summiting the state's highest mountains to get the fullest benefits. Sitting near the ocean or a lake and listening to the waves crash up onto the beach, or going for a drive and a picnic could be exactly what you needed that day. If you are new to experiencing outdoor activities, I recommend visiting your local MWR and talking to their Outdoor Recreation Specialist. They will be able to answer all your questions about great outdoor activities in the area. If you don't have access to the base, outdoor stores in the area will also be a fount of information for you to get started.

"I found my heart upon a mountain I did not know I could climb, and I wonder how many other pieces of myself are secreted away in places I judge I cannot go."

— Laurel Bleadon-Maffei

Lessons Learned

by Sandra Neuman
NW Region Navy Gold Star Coordinator
Naval Base Kitsap, Keyport



It is a difficult subject to broach, one that our society and overall culture has placed in concealed whispers and stigmatized in history. We use different words to express its meaning; loss of own life, self-inflicted, killed him/herself or suicide.

To be candid, when I first started working with Gold Star families, six or so years ago, I had never worked with Survivors of suicide. Actually, I had never worked with Survivors in general. My background was in personal finance and worked at banks in the Trust and Estate Departments. My first experience with Gold Star families was when I worked as a contracted financial counselor for Survivor Outreach Services, the Army's program for long-term assistance for Gold Star families. As time went on and as careers can move in unexpected directions, I found myself working for the Navy as the Northwest Regional Coordinator for the Navy Gold Star Program. Over the last several years, I have become much better equipped and experienced regarding grief and especially the trauma of the unexpected loss of a loved one.

Suffices to say when I was a rookie working with grieving families and learning the ropes, I tried to stay on topic with assisting families on benefits, finances and budgets. However, the nature of the job made me step out of my financial comfort zone and educate myself in so many other ways. One of those educations was awareness of the difficulties and trauma of suicide and the uncharted journeys of grief for the Survivors of suicide.

When it came to the subject of suicide, I was basically an uneducated dolt. I was ill informed and had beliefs that I am now basically ashamed of. My life at that time had never been touched by suicide, I had experienced grief and had lost people I love and miss, but never by suicide. I had ill-conceived notions and understandings. I basically was a Neanderthal on the subject. Today, I speak openly about suicide and see the fault in our culture's beliefs as one of the problems our society has with the issue. I now prefer to shed light on the issue and not hide it in the dark recess of averted eyes and wrongful judgments.

"Death by suicide is not a gentle deathbed gathering; it rips apart lives and beliefs and set its survivors on a prolonged devastating journey."

— Kay Redfield Jamison

Over the last several years in my work with Gold Star families, as well as in my personal life, I have now been touched by the suddenness, self-blame, sadness and overall soul-biting numbness of the effects and the trauma of suicide.

When working with families, who have experienced the loss of their Sailor to suicide, I have nothing that I can say to make anything better. I can only lend my words of encouragement and sympathy in the hopes that I can convey my empathy. As time has gone on, I find it even more important to let families know that their Sailor's manner of death is not that uncommon and they should not feel alone in this unexpected and difficult pain. Some would be surprised to know, when I review the families in our Northwest Region, that the program is responsible for a significant number of families that are survivors of suicide. I also know from talking to survivors that finding others who have experienced the same type of loss is very helpful. For some, these connections can provide healing. I strongly suggest finding support groups and resources to assist you. On page 10 of this newsletter, you will find some fantastic resources available for you. These resources are provided from a book that is officially endorsed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, *The Gift of Second*, and we were given permission to share them by the author, Brandy Lidbeck.

If you are one of our Navy families who have lost your Sailor to suicide, it is imperative that you know your Navy Gold Star Program has the deepest respect and sympathy for the loss of your family's Hero, and want to ensure you know that your sacrifice is never forgotten.

"Grief is not a disorder, a disaster or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve."

— Dr. Earl Grollman

For our Navy Families who have lost their Sailor to suicide, we want to celebrate your Fallen Hero's life and would love an opportunity to have them take a 'watch' in our honor frame for our Triannual Rotating Watch. Please refer to pages two and three for examples of our last three watch rotations. If you would like your Sailor to take a watch, please reach out to your NW Gold Star Coordinator.



Helping Children Cope with Grief and Loss

by Carolyn Ripper, LMFT

Contracted Child Counselor

Fleet and Family Support Program, Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor

When a loved one dies, each family member will respond to the loss in a manner that is unique to that person. The variety of ways a child may experience the death of a parent is affected by many factors, including their developmental stage in life, their own temperament and personality, the relationship they had with the deceased, and the emotional responses of the surviving caregivers. As a surviving guardian attempts to cope with a child's shock and confusion about the loss, they are also faced with keeping the family going, all while trying to manage their own grief. So, what can parents, grandparents and other adults in the child's life do to help? One central way of helping children is to remember to speak in a plainspoken and truthful manner to them about death, rather than attempting to protect them by not talking about it. Avoiding talking about death will only serve to force them to deal with the questions, reactions and feelings they have alone.

It is important to understand the significant role a child's cognitive and emotional development plays in their understanding of death. For most pre-schoolers, death is not seen as permanent, but rather something that can be reversed. Common responses to grief for these young children are clingy and tearful behavior, temper tantrums and behavioral regressions. We can help young toddlers by providing brief, but honest explanations about death such as, "Daddy died. His body stopped working." Lots of nurturance and a routine schedule will create more predictability and feelings of safety for these young children.

The school-age child, of around five to eight years, looks at the world very concretely, in terms of black and white. They often will fill in the blanks to anything that they do not understand with fantasy. So, it is very common for the school-age child to blame themselves for the parent's death. They may say, "I got mad at Daddy, so that's why he died." They commonly will respond to grief by changes in sleep and eating patterns, regressions with tasks they had already mastered, by asking lots of questions and needing reassurance. We can help school-age children by using honest language about death, rather than saying that they have 'gone to sleep, passed on, or that 'we lost him'. They will benefit from continuing the family routines as well, and by allowing them plenty of time to play and take breaks with friends.

Nine to 12 year old or tween children are more able to grasp the abstract concepts of life and death, now seeing death as a permanent and irreversible state. Despite this cognitive leap, self-blame and guilt are common responses with this age group also, as this child still may feel that had they done something differently, the outcome might have changed. Anxiety about the universal aspects to death is common, as they become aware that they, too will die. The world begins to feel like an unsafe place. However, they need very little 'talking to' by the adults in their lives, but instead a great deal of listening. Rather than trying to make it better or tell them not to be sad, adults can reflect back to the child the words they say. It is a much more effective way of helping them express themselves, when you let them guide you in this manner.

A teenager is developmentally discovering their own identity and finding out who they are, and they have a complex ability to ponder life and death in abstract ways. Teens will most often rely on their peer group in order to get emotional supports. But in response to grief, they may withdraw even from their friends, engage in increased risk-taking behaviors, and have a variety of intense emotional reactions. We can help teens experiencing grief by helping to keep up routines, while offering them more flexibility if they need it. Asking open ended questions without judgment or advice will increase the likelihood that they will seek out your support in their own time.

It is important to note that as adults, we process death in a typically more linear progression, while children will grieve in cycles. A young child may go off and play and laugh in a manner that appears incongruous or rude to adults. Rather than being disrespectful, this is

actually a way of self-protection that helps a grieving child to feel safe. Once the emotions become too powerful, the child instinctively knows to take a play break. Encourage this normal behavior and make room for it by enlisting the help of your friend and family support team when you need them.

New developmental milestones can cause children to revisit their parent's death from a new and more informed perspective. It can also create crises along the way, as a child has to experience the pain of a parent's absence at meaningful life events—such as their baseball game or the prom. Anticipate this by keeping communication open and non-judgmental. Know that, should your children need it, community mental health and other agency supports are available to provide child counseling, peer support groups, kids' camps that address grief and loss, and family counseling.

As the parent who has died moves in their mind from a physical presence to a memory, offer children lots of choices, and keep asking for their opinions about the best ways to honor your loved one's memory. Art-making, memory books and memory gardens, poems and songs are a few ways for a child to cope with the loss. Healing from the death of a parent is not something we need to fix or to help a child get over. Rather, it is a lifelong process that the child incorporates, as the relationship with that parent continues to transform. Remember to keep talking with and listening to your children. This will show that you honor and respect their feelings as you continue to go through the process of change and healing together as a family.





You and Your Finances

by Eric Jackson, CPA/PFS

Beneficiary Financial Counselor, Financial Point

The Right Questions

I am constantly amazed at how successful we can be at maximizing the use of our money when we simply know the right questions to ask.

The world is full of opinions, ideas, and people influencing us to do what they think is best, and sometimes what may be only for their benefit.

These opinions can confuse us or make us unaware of what decisions to make with regard to our finances. But if we are equipped with the right questions, our paths will become clear and we will quickly discover the best courses of action for ourselves and for our family.

Throughout the last nine years that I have worked nearly exclusively with Military Survivors, I have observed numerous frequently-faced financial issues, and I hope that the following questions and answers will equip you with the tools needed to make your finances (and life) better in meaningful ways.

Credit & Debt

Question: Should I take out a loan to establish or improve my credit?

Answer: It depends on how much of an improvement it will make, and for what you plan to use credit/debt.

Some people believe that their credit score is part of who they are/their identity. This concept has been very well marketed into our society, as debt and credit has become one of the most highly sold “products” of the 21st century.

To determine the actual cost vs. reward in your situation, I would encourage you to ask yourself the following:

What is my current credit score?

How much will my credit score rise if I take out this loan?

How much will it cost me in interest?

How much interest am I earning on my savings accounts?

When do I plan to borrow money in the future?

How much will a higher credit score save me in future interest?

How much will a higher credit score reduce my auto and home insurance rates?

Is this specific loan the most likely and the least costly way to increase my credit score?

Generally speaking, open credit lines, such as credit cards, have the greatest impact on credit scores (up to 90%) and can often be utilized without paying interest (via promotions, or by paying off your balance monthly). Many can even earn you cash back and other rewards.

Maintaining a variety of debts generally only impacts your score by only 10%. Therefore, most people can maintain a very good credit score without paying unnecessary interest on car loans, student loans, personal loans, mortgages, etc.

Financial Habits

Question: If I keep spending like I do now, when will I run out of money?

Answer: If you spend more than your income currently, or if your income will ever become less than it is now, you should consider taking a look at your overall finances - income, expenses, savings and debt, projected over your lifetime. You can determine any potential shortfall, and determine how to fill the gap with increased income, reduced spending, or by maximizing discounts, rewards, savings, cash back, etc.

Social Security

Question: How much is my family maximum and individual maximum for Social Security Survivor Benefits? How does this affect my income now and in the future?

Answer: You can find out your family and individual maximums by calling or visiting a Social Security office, or by examining a relevant Social Security statement.

In my sad experience, many Military Survivors have followed the advice of Social Security representatives telling them not to apply for their own benefits because it would “take away money” from other beneficiaries (typically children). While in some cases this may be true, applying for “child in care” benefits does not reduce the overall family income, and it may improve your tax situation.

If you are not registered for benefits when children become older, you may completely miss out on thousands of dollars of Social Security income when the number of family members receiving benefits decreases. Many benefits change based on age, and can be affected by death, disability or other circumstances.

If you were given bad information by a Social Security representative that resulted in the loss of thousands of dollars to your family, it is unfortunately very difficult to prove that Social Security is in the wrong, or to receive back payments. Taking the advice of a Social Security representative is considered your own choice, and back payments are very limited based on Social Security rules. So, it is best to do things right or get them corrected as soon as possible.

Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)

Question for Surviving Spouses: How much extra money will you receive over your lifetime if you choose the child-only versus the spouse-child SBP option?

Answer: It varies, especially if the money is saved/invested or spent, but it can often result in \$100,000+ in extra income to the family, even after taxes.

Question: Can I change my election if I realize that I made the wrong decision for my family? Will my family receive back payment?

Answer: Yes, in many instances you can reverse your election if you made a poor decision, especially if it was based on bad information given to you at the time of the original election. If the election is changed retroactively, you should be eligible for back payment.

If less than six years have passed since the original election, the process can sometimes be easier and quicker than otherwise. However, a successful appeal may be made regardless of the time that has passed.

Line of Duty, Service Connection

Question: If my loved one was determined to be “not in line of duty” by the military, and/or “not service-connected” by the VA, how long do I have to appeal to change the determination?

Answer: You generally have six years to appeal a negative determination by the military, but you can submit a request at any time via the board of corrections. You can also seek an exception with the assistance of your Senator or Member of Congress. The Veterans Affairs department does not specify a time limitation, although it does apply limits to compensation back payment for any successful corrections/appeals.

So, if you have information that was either unknown or unclear to the military or VA at the time of initial determination, or even if you simply believe that the decision was wrong, I encourage you to submit your appeal and establish the true facts to honor your loved one’s legacy and provide financial benefits to your family.

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NW Navy Gold Star 2017 Events We Took Part In

- 2-11-2017 Hearts and Crafts at Underwater Warfare Museum at Keyport, WA
- 2-24-2017 Lion Hearts Foundation Dedication of an AED to NAVSTA Everett
- 3-1-2017 Cycle in Remembrance at NAVSTA Everett
- 4-1-2017 Gold Star Spouses Day Ceremony at Joint Base Lewis McChord
- 5-20-21/2017 Remember Together Gold Star Family Retreat at Jim Creek in Arlington, WA
- 5-12-2017 Armed Forces Day Run at NAVBASE Kitsap
- 5-18-2017 Tour of Trident Training Facility and a Submarine at NAVBASE Kitsap
- 5-25-2017 NAVSTA Everett Command's Memorial Day Ceremony
- 5-25-2017 Spin-a-Thon/Ride to Remember NAVBASE Kitsap
- 5-29-2017 Wear Blue Run to Remember Memorial Day Run at Dupont, WA
- 7-14-2017 Lt. Dan Band concert and Meet and Greet with Gary Sinise for Gold Star Families at NAS Whidbey Island
- 7-23-2017 Honor Hike for Suicide Awareness
- 8-3-2017 Seafair in Seattle, WA – Blue Angels invited Gold Star Families to meet and watch show
- 8-5-2017 Kongo's Concert special seating for Gold Star Families at NAVBASE Kitsap
- 9-9-2017 Megan McLung Memorial Run on Whidbey Island, WA
- 9-21-2017 Bells Across America at NAS Whidbey Island and NAVBASE Kitsap
- 9-21-2017 Bells Across America at NAVSTA Everett and Tribute of Fallen Run
- 9-23-2017 Navy vs. Army Baseball Game, Gold Star Families honored in Tacoma, WA by Navy League
- 9-24-2017 Gold Star Mother's Day Honor Ceremony at Ronan, MT by VFW
- Mid Nov Hero Tree at NAS Whidbey Island Fleet and Family
- Mid Nov Gold Star Mom's of Washington State Partner Hero Tree to Fallen at NAVSTA Everett
- 12-9-2017 Snowball Express send-off of Gold Star Children and Guardians at SEATAC airport
- 12-11-2017 Closing Ceremonies for Traveling Memorial at Joseph House in Port Orchard, WA
- 12-17-2017 Wreaths Across America at Tahoma National Cemetery in Washington



Resources for Gold Star Families Who Have Lost Their Sailor to Suicide

provided by the book *The Gift of Second*, by Brandy Lidbeck

Online and Community Support

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): (afsp.org) Contains resources for survivors as well as a search option for in-person support groups in the area.

American Association of Suicidology (AAS): (suicidology.org) Offers online support as well as an annual national conference for survivors.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS): (taps.org/suicide) This is a wonderful resource for survivor of military related suicide.

The Gift of Second: (thegiftofsecond.com) Offers hope, encouragement, and connection through blogs and videos for anyone impacted by a loved one's suicide. No traumatic/triggering details are allowed on this site.

Our Side of Suicide: (oursideofsuicide.com) Offers blogs written by survivors for survivors.

Survivor of Suicide Loss: (soslsd.org) Offers online support with educational newsletters as well in-person support groups and events for those impacted by suicide.

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE): (save.org) Offers wonderful resources and educational information pertaining to grief.

Kidsaid: (kidsaid.com) Is 'a safe place for kids to help each other deal with grief and loss'.

Suicide: Finding Hope: (suicidefindinghope.com) Available to help people as 'they navigate this journey'.

Alliance of Hope: (allianceofhope.org) Offers an online communication forum with thousands of survivors where members can connect.

Support Groups

The Dougy Center: (dougy.org) "Provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences."

Heartbeat Grief Support: (heartbeaturvivorsaftersuicide.org) Offers support and groups to those who have lost a child. This is not a suicide-specific resource, but has been helpful to others after their loved one's suicide.

Survivors of Loved Ones to Suicide (SOLOS): (solosurvivorsofloodonestosuide.com) Offers both online and in-person support groups for survivors.

Compassionate Friends: (compassionatefriends.org) Offers support and groups to those who have lost a child. This is not a suicide-specific resource, but has been helpful to others after their loved one's suicide.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): (afsp.org) Search this website to find support groups in your city.

Events

Camp Kita: (campkita.com) is a free week-long summer camp program open to children, ages 8-17, who are survivors of a loved one's suicide.

Out of the Darkness Walks: (afsp.org) Walks connect survivors with one another, while also fundraising to both help prevent suicide and provide resources for those impacted by it.

Books

The Gift of Second, by Brandy Lidbeck. Officially endorsed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention as a top resource after a suicide.

Finding Peace without All the Pieces After a Love One's Suicide, by LaRita Archibald

The Best Little Girl Says Goodbye A Therapist Grieves, by Blanche Goodwin

No Time to Say Goodbye, by Carla Fine



NAVY GOLD STAR
REMEMBRANCE HIKE
ICE CAVES OR MONTE CRISTO

Enjoy a day on the trail as we hike in honor of suicide awareness.

Saturday, September 8
 Mt. Baker, Washington State
 Ice Caves: 8 am-3:30 pm
 Monte Cristo: 8 am-6 pm
 \$15/person

(425) 304-3575