



COMMUNICATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



## Navy Gold Star Program Heads to Orlando for Snowball Express

By Lisa Bauch, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst

The creation of stuffed replicas of animals has been around since the beginning of recorded history. Across cultures, stuffed toys have been a favorite among children for generations. The year 1880 marked the start of these stuffed animals being sold commercially when a German company manufactured a stuffed elephant. The bear became increasingly popular in 1902 with the creation of the first teddy bear, named after then President Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt, which was invented by a Brooklyn, New York, couple who owned a candy and toy store.

Stuffed animals have an innate ability to offer comfort and a sense of security. Hugging a favorite stuffed toy can be reassuring and provide a sense of security, especially in younger children. Often, stuffed animals made with a loved one’s clothes or in their favorite colors can offer an additional layer of comfort when that person is no longer with us. With this as her inspiration, a generous community member has lovingly crafted more than 100 teddy bears, using donated military uniforms from all branches of service for the Navy Gold Star Program to provide to the children of our nation’s fallen. A huge “Thank You” to the transitioning service members from NAS Jacksonville, who provided uniform donations this past year.

Once again, the Navy Gold Star Program staff, along with these very special bears, are venturing forth to the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida, to attend the Gary Sinse Foundation’s Disney in December Snowball Express event. Navy Gold Star coordinators have been

meeting Gold Star families from every branch of service at this event since 2005, and we love spending time with them, whether it was in Texas during our earlier years, or at the “Most Magical Place on Earth,” as it is now. This year, staff from Florida, Mississippi, Connecticut, Washington, Virginia, and Georgia will be in attendance.

Meet us in the resource room Dec. 7-8, and connect with a coordinator, check out our resources, color a cup, grab a pin, and adopt a bear. We hope to see you there!





## Navy Gold Star Hosts Overnight Holiday Excursion

By Erick Roberts, Navy Gold Star Area Supervisor

The holidays can be a difficult time for Gold Star families grieving the loss of their loved one. For some, long-standing family traditions either cease or feel incomplete. Our Navy Gold Star Program has been working on ways to help families create new traditions to celebrate those loved and lost.

This holiday season, the Navy Gold Star Program is proud to bring back the Navy Gold Star Overnight Holiday Excursion aboard the USS Midway in San Diego, California, Dec. 6-7. This is a completely free event that is open only to Gold Star families. It's a unique opportunity for a real behind-the-scenes look at the USS Midway Museum. Guests will enjoy an overnight stay aboard USS Midway, and the following morning will be invited to create a unique ornament that includes a photo of their loved one. The ornaments will be placed on the USS Midway's Memorial Tree after its dedication to the memory of our lost heroes.

This is another example of how the Navy Gold Star Program works with community partners to bring special and unique opportunities to families to help them stay connected to their Navy family, connect with other survivors, and make new memories and traditions. Be sure to connect with your Navy Gold Star coordinator to learn more about future events and activities.



## Navy Gold Star Participates in USO Trunk or Treat

By Alicia McCoy, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

While providing long-term care and support to surviving Navy Gold Star family members is our mission, forming collaborative bonds with organizations that provide services to these same families is a key part of what Navy Gold Star does to ensure we provide a high level of care and support to families.

The United Service Organizations (USO) at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina, is one of those programs. The U.S. military and the USO have a long-standing relationship that began in 1941. The USO continuously adapts to the needs of our men and women in uniform, providing support to the U.S. military throughout their time in uniform, their families, veterans and their families, and those families who have given the ultimate sacrifice, Gold Star surviving family members.

As a result of this relationship, Navy Gold Star Coordinator Alicia McCoy participated in the USO Trunk or Treat event held at Camp Lejeune on Oct. 17. The air was chilly and perfect for a Halloween event. About 20 vehicles were decorated for the Trunk or Treat, and participants had fun passing out candy, treats and more to local military-affiliated families. There were food trucks, arts and crafts, games, a jump house, and lots of smiles to go around. The event also offered a special “extra sensory” hour for those participants with Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) needs, to ensure that they felt welcome in a comfortable and accepting environment.

McCoy met several local Gold Star families that reside near Camp Lejeune and provided them with information on the program, as well as candy and Navy Gold Star tattoos for the surviving kids. With an estimated 750 people in attendance at the event, it's safe to say this was a success, and hopefully there will be many more collaborations with the USO in the future. This was a great example of how Navy Gold Star continues to fulfil the mission of long-term care and support for our Gold Star family members. Go Navy!







## Defense Department Offers Survivor Symposium Series

From [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://www.militaryonesource.mil)

The DoD Survivor Symposium series underscores the Defense Department's commitment to providing support for survivors of active-duty deaths. This virtual event focuses on educating surviving family members of service members who died while on active duty about their survivor benefits, entitlements and available resources, as well as addressing any questions or concerns they may have.

These virtual events are hosted quarterly and bring together survivors and representatives from various support offices to share information, resources, new initiatives, and answer questions. The first DoD Survivor Symposium was held June 21, 2004, and the most recent symposium was held Oct. 25.

Sign up for The Survivor Connection eNewsletter to receive updates about future symposiums. Visit <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/publications/the-survivor-connection-enewsletter-archives/> to sign up and view past issues.

## Tips and Tools for Navigating Relationships as You Grieve

From [MilitaryOneSource.mil](https://www.militaryonesource.mil)

The death of a loved one can leave survivors feeling uncertain about what lies ahead and where to begin their path forward. Relationships can also feel different and strained compared to what they were before, and you may be in need of some tender loving care.

In the aftermath, you may notice that:

- Family members and friends get quiet when you're in the room, perhaps fearing that they might say the wrong thing.
- You feel alone.
- Things that formerly brought you joy no longer do.
- You have mixed feelings when you see couples laughing and having a good time.



### Relationship with yourself

Taking care of yourself and watching out for your overall well-being might feel more difficult when you're grieving. But it is also a necessary part of the healing process and can have a positive effect on your other relationships as well. Here are some resources that can help:

- View the Mourners Bill of Rights (<https://www.taps.org/articles/19-4/mournerbillofrights>) for a list of rights that help make healing possible.
- Seek counseling (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/non-medical-counseling/>) and/or a support group.
- Take care of yourself (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/relationships/support-community/taking-care-of-yourself-to-overcome-stress-grief/>), both physically and emotionally.

- Keep a journal to document your feelings (<https://www.taps.org/video/2022/grief-journaling>), especially if you cannot talk about them.
- Understand healthy ways to cope (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty-assistance/grief-support/>) with what you're feeling.
- Access this course (<https://www.taps.org/webinar/2023/managing-difficult-emotions-after-loss>) about navigating the full range of complicated emotions.
- Care for yourself (<https://www.taps.org/articles/28-1/self-care-while-grieving>) while grieving.

### Relationships with family

Family can be a place people turn to when they're in a crisis. But when it comes to these connections, things may be awkward at first. The following resources can help maintain these relationships:

- Understand that family members (<https://www.taps.org/video/2021/grieving-styles-family-dynamics>) may process grief differently and have varying needs.
- Build a plan that honors the needs of each family member, especially during milestones and events that may trigger intense emotions.
- Develop healthy boundaries (<https://www.taps.org/articles/24-1/settingboundarieswhilegrieving>) and respect the boundaries of others who are also grieving.
- Embrace transformation (<https://www.taps.org/video/2024/honoring-love-embracing-transformation>) while honoring those who have died.



### Listen to this podcast episode for survivors.

The Military OneSource podcast episode *Surviving Milestones as a Survivor* (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/podcasts/military-onesource/milestones-as-a-survivor/>) offers help with understanding and working through the range of emotions associated with grieving, as well as outlining how good

communication between family members can ease some of the potential strain on these relationships. For example, there may be some family members who want to maintain a wall of photos and a collection of memories, while others may prefer not to.

You can also find help at Sesame Street for Military Families (<https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/>), which is a free, bilingual (English and Spanish) website where families can find grief support services, including Little Children, Big Challenges.



### Relationships with a spouse or partner

Perhaps the most important connection is with a spouse or partner. There are many variables that can put a strain on this relationship, including the death of someone close to one or both of the spouses. Here are some resources that can help:

- View this webinar for couples (<https://www.taps.org/videos/2020/you-me-us-grief>) after the loss of a child.
- Strengthen your communication skills (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/benefits/building-healthy-relationships/>) with a series of personalized coaching sessions.



### Get relationship support.

Military OneSource's relationship support program (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/media/news-and-releases/new-ourrelationship-online-support-for-military-couples/>) provides military couples with free access to OurRelationship, an online, evidence-based tool for addressing relationship issues.

You can also reinforce your relationship by using these resources and tools from the Better Relationships Within Your Reach (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/relationships/married-domestic-partner/military-relationships-support/>) page:

- “Love Every Day” Texts to Rekindle Romance
- Quick Checkup With a Relationship Pro
- Personalized Coaching for Healthy Relationships

## MILITARY ONESOURCE

### Access Military OneSource's Relationship Resource Tool.

Every military couple has different strengths and areas in need of improvement when it comes to their relationship. Answer a few questions to get a list (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/tools/relationship-resource-tool/>) of recommended resources for your relationship needs.



### Relationships with children

Another vital relationship for survivors is with their children. It can be difficult to know what your child is thinking or how your grief might complicate things and close the lines of communication. They may be sensitive to what you're experiencing and be afraid to discuss their feelings.

This article about bereavement camps (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty-assistance/grief-support/bereavement-camps-a-place-to-grieve-and-heal/>) provides information on camps for children working through their grief. The following resources can also help during these difficult times:



- What Bereaved Kids Want to Know (<https://www.taps.org/webinar/2023/what-bereaved-kids-want-adults-to-know>) is a webinar that discusses what grief is like for children and teenagers and what bereaved kids want adults to know.
- Something Small: A Story About Remembering ([https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Something\\_Small\\_A\\_Story.pdf](https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Something_Small_A_Story.pdf)) is geared toward young children to help them keep the happy memories of their loved one alive by celebrating their life.
- Helping Grieving Children and Teens Cope With Difficult Emotions (<https://www.taps.org/webinar/2022/helping-grieving-children>) is a webinar designed to help grieving children and teens deal with difficult emotions.



## Relationships with friends

Friends are sometimes the most vital source of support. But these relationships can become strained as well, especially since emotions can be more one-sided.

For example, a friend may care deeply for you but also be afraid of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time so as not to hurt your feelings, which might make them seem unsupportive. One way you can help is by sharing the handout *Tenets of Companionship for the Bereaved* (<https://www.taps.org/globalassets/pdf/covid/tenets-of-companionship>) with a friend to give them a better understanding of how to be there for you.



## Listen to this podcast episode about approaching milestones.

One suggestion offered in the Survivor Milestone podcast episode (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/podcasts/military-onesource/milestones-as-a-survivor/>) is how survivors can put others at ease about how to approach them as they grieve. It also emphasizes the importance of survivors knowing their own state of mind, and discusses how that can help them plan for potentially triggering events, such as birthdays and anniversaries, as well as being prepared for milestones that may surface unexpectedly.

This Military OneSource article titled “Tools and Tips for Navigating the Holidays as a Survivor” (<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty-assistance/survivor-support/navigating-holidays-as-a-survivor/>) also provides guidance, such as asking a friend for help when holidays and memories become too overwhelming.

## Read this article about surviving loss and finding love again.

There may come a time following the death of a spouse or partner when you're ready to explore new romantic relationships. But this can be a difficult transition, not only for a parent, but for the children as well. The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors article titled “Loving Again After the Loss of an Intimate Partner” (<https://www.taps.org/articles/26-2/loving-again-after-loss>) can help. It's just one of many tools and resources the site offers.



## We Remember

In this edition of Survivor's Link, we honor those lost during several key moments in history that occurred during the months of December and January.

Dec. 7: Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day – On National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, we honor and remember the 2,403 service members and civilians who were killed during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. A further 1,178 people were injured in the attack, which permanently sank two U.S. Navy battleships, the USS Arizona and USS Utah, and destroyed 188 aircraft.

Jan. 17: LCM-6 Liberty Boat Accident – We remember the 49 lives lost from the USS Guam and USS Trenton on Jan. 17, 1977, in Barcelona, Spain, when a landing craft being used as a liberty boat by USS Trenton and USS Guam, was run over by a freighter. The LCM-6 liberty boat capsized and came to rest against the fleet landing pier.





## Survivor's Day at the Races Honors Gold Star Families

By Alicia McCoy, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Navy Gold Star Program Coordinator Alicia McCoy (NGS-East) supported the U.S. Army Survivor Outreach Services and the Woody Williams Foundation's 14th Annual Survivor's Day at the Races event held at the world-renowned Churchill Downs Racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky, Nov. 3.

The event was held the same weekend as the Breeder's Cup and was open to all Gold Star family members from all service branches, providing a fun, welcoming activity that also allowed for fellowship and information sharing among survivors. Entrance to the event included a fully catered meal, support services, music, and fun all from the comfort of the coveted Millionaire's Row situated on level 4 of the venue. This location provided a prime race-watching area under a covered terrace with a full view of the racetrack.

The attendees at the event were welcomed by Kentucky Air National Guard SOS program coordinators David Orange and Jim Stinnett. A Gold Star surviving teen daughter sang the national anthem at the start of the race day. The event also included a children's room with face painting and crafts, along with a variety of music selections for everyone to enjoy. After short speeches and presentations, attendees were invited to step outside to watch the races, and all were given small American flags to wave while cheering on the horse that was representing the Gold Star survivors. Survivors of eligible age could place bets on the races at their own risk if they wished.

This year, Navy Gold Star had the privilege of being the only organization with a manned information table at the event, which allowed for maximum exposure to those in attendance. Navy Gold Star is always pleased to participate and have the opportunity to not only support our survivors and fellow resource programs, but to share information with others about the Navy Gold Star Program. As always, please watch your inbox for future event information and invitations from your local Gold Star coordinators.





# Survivor Milestones

September 2024

## SPOUSE

### Do you know what to expect the first year and beyond?

#### Within First Year

- Update DEERS.
- Apply for DIC, SBP, Social Security (if applicable).
- Establish DS Logon Level 2 (Premium) account (<https://myaccess.dmdc.osd.mil>).
- Establish VA eBenefits account.
- Access Online Survivor Benefits Report (OSBR).
- Free financial counseling and online will preparation from Financial Point Plus for SGLI Recipients (<https://financialpointplus.com/groWeb/fpp/login/login.xhtml>). (Two years of eligibility for up to 40 hours of financial counseling support.)

#### 1 Year

- HEART (Heroes Earning Assistance and Relief Tax) Act eligibility for applicable survivors expires.
  - Survivors who remain in base housing are required to vacate after one year.  
*Note: Be sure to allow for scheduling time. It is suggested that you begin the process at least six months prior to the one-year mark.*
- For more information, see the NGS Reference Sheet “Ready to Move, Navigating Your Final Move.”

#### 3 Years

- Final Move deadline. (You may request an extension.)  
*Note: Be sure to allow for scheduling time. It is suggested that you begin the process at least two and a half years before the expiration date to ensure you do not miss the window. If you are seeking an extension, be sure to allow for processing time.*
- For more information, see NGS Reference Sheet “Ready to Move, Navigating Your Final Move.”
- “Qualifying widow/widower” federal income tax status expires.
  - TRICARE Prime (active duty) expires. Enroll in TRICARE for retirees. Visit [https://tricare.mil/plans/eligibility/survivors/surv\\_ADSM](https://tricare.mil/plans/eligibility/survivors/surv_ADSM) for your options.
  - Active-duty family member dental plan expires; you can enroll in retiree dental.

#### 20 Years

- Spouse DEA eligibility ends.

#### Age 55

- Remarriage restrictions on SBP and DIC payments are lifted.

#### Age 60

- Remarriage restrictions on Social Security survivor benefits are lifted.
- Reduced-rate Social Security retirement benefits are available.

more on next page



## Child(ren)

Within First Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Obtain ID card (any age).</li><li>• Eligible for 40 hours of respite care at military Child Development Center (CDC). Some restrictions may apply.</li></ul>
Age 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Security caregiver benefit ends unless the child has a qualifying disability.*</li></ul>
Age 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child's Social Security benefit ends unless the child has a qualifying disability.* (The benefit may continue to age 19 if the child is still in school grade 12 or below.)</li></ul>
Age 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TRICARE and TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) survivor benefit eligibility ends. Full-time college students can apply for an extension until age 23 or purchase TRICARE Young Adult.</li></ul>
Age 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TRICARE and TDP survivor benefit eligibility end for students; TRICARE Young Adult can be purchased.</li></ul>
Age 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DEA eligibility ends.</li></ul>
Age 33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fry Scholarship eligibility ends if eligibility began before January 1, 2013.</li></ul>

## Financial Beneficiary

Within First Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Free financial counseling and online will preparation are available from Financial Point Plus for SGLI recipients (<a href="https://financialpointplus.com/groWeb/fpp/login/login.xhtml">https://financialpointplus.com/groWeb/fpp/login/login.xhtml</a>).</li><li>• If applicable: Non-parent guardian surviving child(ren) should establish legal guardianship.</li></ul>
1 Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HEART (Heroes Earning Assistance and Relief Tax) Act eligibility expires. (Applicable to SGLI and death gratuity recipients.)</li></ul>
Child Reaches Age 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Security survivor benefits for child(ren)'s parental or non-parental caregiver end.</li></ul>

\*Check with the Social Security Administration to identify qualifying disabilities.

## Glossary:

**DEA:** Dependents Educational Assistance – an educational benefit provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**DEERS:** Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System – a registry of service members, spouses and children.

**DIC:** Dependency and Indemnity Compensation – a tax-free monthly payment to survivors provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**SBP:** Survivor Benefit Program, a taxable annuity for survivors paid through the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS).

**TRICARE:** The uniformed services' health maintenance program.

# Navy Gold Star Coordinators

Area of Responsibility	Phone
California (Los Angeles County/Northern CA), Japan, Guam, Korea	901-671-6720
California (San Diego/Riverside), Colorado, Utah, Hawaii	901-930-8290
California (San Diego/Riverside), Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada	901-930-8308
Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Minnesota, Canada	901-930-8062
Washington, Alaska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Iowa	901-671-7519
Texas	901-930-8109
Michigan, Illinois, Indiana	901-930-8593
Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee	901-930-8300
Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine	901-671-6910
New York, New Jersey, Vermont, New Hampshire	901-930-8388
West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., and all other counties in Virginia not listed below	901-930-8578
Virginia (these counties: Isle of Wight, Suffolk, Chesapeake City, Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Williamsburg City, Hampton City, Newport News City, Portsmouth City, York, Poquoson City)	901-930-8008
North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio	901-930-8210
Georgia, South Carolina, Europe	901-671-5597
Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida	901-671-6521
Florida	904-542-5706

*Note: All postal mail should be sent to the below address.*

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 Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5140