

Navy Gold Star Program

Leadership Quick Reference Guide



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The cornerstone mission of the Navy Gold Star (NGS) Program is to ensure that the surviving families of deceased service members are not forgotten and that they remain a part of the Navy family for as long as they desire. Survivors tell us that one of the greatest challenges they face in their grief journey is rebuilding resiliency as they transition to their new normal. A huge help in the resiliency building process for survivors is the reassurance that their loved one will never be forgotten and that they still can maintain their link to the Navy.

Navy Gold Star Services

Initially following a loss, the Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO) is the primary point of contact for families. Picking up where the CACO leaves off, NGS coordinators provide long-term support to the families of those who die on active duty, regardless of the cause, for as long as they desire. Coordinators serve as their link to the Navy as well as the bridge to survivor support resources, both within the government and the community, and to each other. This is primarily done through outreach to identify the needs of the survivor, connecting them with resources to meet their needs and following up to ensure that these needs are met.

Staff are empowered to create opportunities for our surviving families to connect with one another through social outings, and foster a culture of remembrance by hosting ceremonies and events to show these families that their loved ones are not forgotten.

Understanding a Survivor's Potential Emotions

- Anger
- Irritability
- Change in appetite
- Cries easily
- Denial
- Depression/sadness
- Disbelief/shock
- Distrust
- Fear
- Lack of motivation
- No reaction
- Numbness
- Sleep disturbances
- Nightmares
- Withdrawal

Suggestions to Support a Grieving Survivor

- Send a letter of condolence.
- Acknowledge the family's feelings and listen.
- Be patient.
- Respect the family's privacy.
- Ensure the family doesn't become isolated.
- Check on the family periodically.
- Encourage family members to get help (if needed).
- Use the Sailor's name.
- Accept grief and anger as a normal reaction.
- Listen quietly and non-judgmentally.
- Honestly answer questions that you can answer.
- Don't try to answer the "why."
- Don't be afraid of silence or tears.

What to Say

- "My heart goes out to you at this most difficult time."
- "I know there is nothing I can say that will make your loss easier."
- "I cannot imagine how difficult this must be for you or your family."
- "I'm/we're here for you."
- "How can I/we help?"
- "I'm at a loss for words."

What Not to Say

- "I know how you feel."
- "Everything will be alright."
- "God knows best."
- "It's God's will."
- "God doesn't give us anything we can't handle."
- "You'll feel better in a month or so."