

Hot Topic: Family Support in Times of Tragedy

CYFAR Resource

How should we respond in times of tragedy? It is often difficult to know what to do or see. The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS, see below for contact information) recommendations are listed below followed by several resources on CYFERnet that may be of assistance to those of you working with the children, families, survivors, and communities impacted by tragedy.

Reaching out to express condolences and support to the family members and friends left behind is a natural and heartfelt reaction to tragedy. TAPS offers the following tips for those seeking to express sympathy and support:

- **Be understanding.** The surviving families are in tremendous shock in the immediate days and weeks following the death of their loved one. Understand that families may need to be focused on making important decisions about funerals, memorial services, benefits, and a host of details. The family may not be able to respond to you right away or express their appreciation for your thoughtfulness.
- **Respect their privacy.** Grieving families who have experienced the traumatic death of a loved one may need their family and close friends around them. Please allow them the privacy and space they need to get through what are going to be difficult days.
- **Think beyond flowers and food.** Often, bereaved families will be overwhelmed by gifts of food and flowers. Consider making a contribution to a charity or memorial fund in honor of their loved one. Often, families will specify a charity or organization that their loved one was involved with or supported and find this type of donation particularly touching.
- **Send a card.** A card can express your sympathies and be an important reminder to a grieving family of your care and concern.
- **Simply express your condolences.** If you talk with a family member, say you are sorry for their loss, or say you want to offer your condolences. That's enough. Avoid saying things like "I understand exactly how you feel," or "It was his (or her) time," or "He (or she) wouldn't want for you to be sad."
- **Show your support.** In many communities, a procession is held when a fallen service member's remains are brought home. Consider standing near the processional route to show your support for the family. Bring an American flag, carry a sign that expresses your feelings, and stand in respect to honor the sacrifice their loved one has made for our nation.
- **Attend a memorial service.** If a memorial or funeral service is open to the public, consider attending. Your presence can be a valuable support to the family, which appreciates knowing that their loved one is being remembered by many. Some families may need to observe their funeral ceremonies in private. If that is the case, please respect their wishes and be with them in your thoughts and prayers.

- **Offer skills or services to help the family.** If you are a business person who can offer an in-kind donation to help the family that will help during the funeral process, such as limousine services, public relations assistance, or event management aid, consider donating your time and services.

ABOUT TAPS TAPS is the national organization providing compassionate care for the families of America's fallen military heroes. Since its founding in 1994 by bereaved military families, TAPS has helped more than 25,000 surviving family members and offered services to assist caregivers supporting families coping with a military death. Services are provided free of charge. For more information, go to www.taps.org [1] or call the toll-free crisis line at 800-959-TAPS. TAPS released the above advice on November 5, 2009.

Common Measure:

[Parenting](#) [2]

Year published or updated:

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Author(s), Presenter(s):

N/A

Outcome Age Category:

[School Age \(K-8\)](#) [3]

[Teen](#) [4]

[Parent/Family](#) [5]

Core Competencies:

[Program Implementation](#) [6]

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Links

[1] <https://www.taps.org>

[2] <https://cyfar.org/resource-cyfar-topic-area/parenting>

[3] <https://cyfar.org/resource-outcome-age-categories/school-age-k-8>

[4] <https://cyfar.org/resource-outcome-age-categories/teen>

[5] <https://cyfar.org/resource-outcome-age-categories/parentfamily>

[6] <https://cyfar.org/resource-core-competencies/program-implementation>