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Dealing With Bereavement Post Military Discharge

Bereavement after military discharge presents unique challenges that can deeply affect veterans' emotional and psychological well-being. Many veterans experience the **loss of comrades, family members, or close friends**, which can evoke complex grief intertwined with their military experiences.

The transition to civilian life often changes support networks, sometimes leaving veterans without the close bonds they relied on during service. This shift can intensify feelings of **loneliness** and **complicate the grieving process**. Additionally, veterans may carry unresolved trauma from combat or service-related events that amplify their emotional pain.

Coping with bereavement requires acknowledging the layered nature of grief and its impact on identity. Veterans benefit from seeking **professional counselling** tailored to their experiences, where they can process loss in a safe and understanding environment. **Peer support** groups also provide vital spaces for sharing grief with others who understand the unique military context.

Engaging in **meaningful rituals, maintaining connections** with loved ones, and gradually **rebuilding social networks** can foster healing. Addressing bereavement openly and with compassion is crucial for helping veterans navigate loss and move forward toward emotional recovery after military discharge.

Understanding Bereavement

Bereavement among veterans is often layered and complex. While everyone experiences loss at some point in life, veterans may encounter death in both military and civilian contexts in ways that deeply affect their mental health.

During service, the **death of comrades in combat**, training accidents, or operational environments can result in **traumatic grief**. The bonds formed in the Armed Forces are uniquely strong, forged under extreme pressure and life-threatening conditions. When a fellow service member dies, it can feel like the loss of a family member. This grief is often sudden, violent, and, in many cases,



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followed by an expectation to “carry on” without time or space to process the loss.

After service, many veterans experience additional grief due to the **death of former comrades** by suicide, illness (such as cancer or conditions related to service exposure), or accidents. This form of bereavement is often accompanied by feelings of helplessness, guilt, or survivor’s remorse.

Veterans also face **general bereavement** in civilian life – the death of spouses, children, parents, or close friends. However, when compounded with unresolved grief from military service, these losses can feel overwhelming.

Psychological impacts of bereavement in veterans include:

- **Prolonged or complicated grief** (where mourning does not follow a typical trajectory)
- **Depression and anxiety**
- **Sleep disturbances**
- **Substance misuse** as a coping mechanism
- **Social withdrawal** and isolation
- **Suicidal ideation**, particularly when loss feels cumulative or unmanageable

Due to the cultural expectation within military life to suppress emotion and maintain resilience, many veterans may not seek help for grief. Some may even feel that their pain is not “valid” unless it resulted from combat, leading to internalised guilt or shame.

Effective support includes bereavement counselling, trauma-informed therapy, peer support groups, and holistic services that address both emotional and practical needs. Services like **Cruse Bereavement Support**, **SSAFA**, and **NHS Op COURAGE** provide specialist help tailored to veterans.

Contact Us

For more information and support, get in touch with our advisors and veterans with lived experience today.



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