

GRIEF AND LOSS GUIDED DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

A NOTE FOR LEADERS BEFORE LEADING THE DISCUSSION:

Talking about grief is recommended for all Marines after moments of hardship and adversity. Having professional support and other Marines familiar with grief will ensure conversation and discussion remain focused. You are a conductor of information. Guide the discussion to encourage free exchange of information. You must know the subject well, to develop the ability to guide the discussion it is recommended that you read the guided discussion through at least two times. It is highly recommended to have an Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) team member lead this discussion. Think about questions and comments Marines, Sailors, or other Service members may share, and consider how you may best respond. Deaths related to combat or training may be especially challenging. Empathetic leaders who support Marines and Sailors during difficult times of grief or loss are necessary for a healthy and ready force.

WHEN TO USE THIS GUIDED DISCUSSION:

*This guided discussion can be used, Marine to Marine, any time your unit has suffered a loss. Use after primary Combat and Operational Stress First Aid (COSFA) has been administered (Cover and Calm). This discussion may be beneficial for secondary aid (restoring Connection, Competence, and Confidence) in the days, weeks, and months following a loss. For more information about COSFA, see COSC Doctrine MCTP 3-30E. **Stress first aid and this guided discussion are not intended to take the place of chaplains or professional care when that is needed.** Use the Stress Continuum and Stress Decision Flow chart to help determine if professional care may be necessary.*

INTRODUCTION

Good morning/afternoon my name is _____. Today we will be talking about grief and loss. Losses may impact each Marine differently. Some are easily able to move forward, while it may be more challenging for others.

Gain Attention

We know that:

- Being a Marine is inherently dangerous, whether in combat, or in operations and training.
- Warriors will be exposed to risks.
- Sometimes lives will be lost.

Losing a fellow Marine, Sailor, or other Service member is never easy. It is one of the hardest things we will face during our time in service. These experiences change us - biologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

(Note to facilitator: Extra lines are provided for the facilitator to personalize the gain attention section with personal experience relating to topic.)

The following items can be used for gain attention, 3-5 mins: video clip, historical/actual event, rhetorical question, skit, or unexpected/surprising statement.

Discussion points for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Grief experiences
- (2) How to manage triggers
- (3) Finding meaning
- (4) Identifying resources for getting further support

Learning Objective: During this guided discussion, you will learn that grief emerges naturally after a loss and in many different ways. Grief is natural and complex. There is no “right or wrong way” to grieve. Grief is unique to each person.

The **ground rules** for this discussion are:

- (1) Express yourself openly and honestly.
- (2) Respect the expressions of others.

DISCUSSION

Experiencing grief and working through it takes daily courage. Grief can affect our body, mind, emotions, and spirit. People might notice or show grief in several ways:

- **Physical reactions:** These might be things like changes in appetite or sleep, an upset stomach, tight chest, crying, tense muscles, trouble relaxing, low energy, restlessness, or trouble concentrating.
- **Frequent thoughts:** These may be memories of the person who died or thoughts of what life will be like without the person.
- **Strong emotions:** These include sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, despair, depression, relief, love, hope, and others.
- **Spiritual reactions:** This might mean finding strength in faith, questioning religious beliefs, or discovering spiritual meaning and connections.

DISCUSSION POINT 1

1. Grief is a natural reaction to loss of any kind and it is also the process of coping when someone has died. Grief is a healthy process of feeling comforted, coming to terms with a loss, and finding ways to adapt.
2. Grief takes time. Although experts have historically identified five experiences or stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance), grief does not follow a defined timeline, it is not always linear through those experiences or stages, and there's a variety of grief experiences.
3. If you've experienced loss, it can help to talk about your thoughts and get support—this is part of taking care of yourself.
 - a) Take a moment to think about how you've been feeling and reacting. Try to put it into words. Would anyone like to share what they have been experiencing? (Pause for responses.) I appreciate your answers. Working through challenges and loss take time. It's not easy, but I'm confident we will continue to display courage and compassion as we move forward.
 - b) It's OK if you don't feel comfortable talking about it here. Think of someone you can talk with, someone who will listen and understand.
4. Even when you don't feel like talking, it can help just to be with others who also cared about the person who died. When family and friends get together, it helps you feel less isolated. Being with

others helps you, and your presence — and words — can support them, too.

5. When you first learn of a loss, it's normal to think, "This isn't happening" or "This can't be true." You might feel shocked or numb. This denial is a temporary way to deal with the rush of overwhelming emotion. How do you believe denial helps us during early stages of loss? (Pause for responses.)

a) As reality sets in, you might start to feel the pain of the loss. You could feel frustrated and helpless. Those feelings could turn into anger. You may be angry toward other people, peers, leaders, a higher power, or life in general. If you are angry, find ways to explore it, and if needed, talk to those you're close with or a professional.

b) You might dwell on what you could've done to prevent loss. Common thoughts are "If only..." and "What if..." which may delay sadness, confusion, or hurt that comes with a loss.

6. Sadness might set in as you begin to understand the loss and its effect on your life and your unit. Sadness after loss is normal; however, sadness that isn't getting better after a few months can be a sign of needing some additional help. Signs to look for may include prolonged feelings of sadness, sleep issues, trouble concentrating, fatigue, a decreased appetite, and a desire to harm yourself. You may be overwhelmed, regretful, and lonely. If you believe you or peer need some additional help, it will be helpful to seek guidance from a professional. Who are some people you know you could talk to? (Pause for responses.)

7. Loss is an Orange Zone stressor and seeking early help may decrease risk of a stress injury. A stress injury is characterized by lasting personality change, difficulty with sleep, feelings of guilt or shame, inability to enjoy usual activities, and loss of control of emotions or thinking. Take care of yourself by talking with peers, such as an OSCAR team member, leadership, or an OSCAR extender such as medical staff, chaplain, corpsman, or religious program specialist. We'll talk more about identifying resources for getting further support a bit later (Discussion Point 4).

a) Are any of you OSCAR team members? If so, is there anything else you want to say about Orange Zone stress? (Pause for responses.)

8. Acceptance is also a part of grieving—you accept and incorporate the reality of your loss. It can't be changed. Although you may still feel sad, you're able to start moving forward with your life. It feels okay to enjoy hobbies and time with friends and family again.

Interim Summary: The grief journey can be different for you than it is for others, and even different from your previous experiences. It can be long and challenging. At times, grief may seem to surge. It is easy to become impatient with yourself or others when grief does not seem to follow some sort of script or timetable. It's going to take listening and patience. If you believe you or a peer are feeling stuck, it will be helpful to seek professional help. Free counseling to Service members and their families is available from a wide range of resources including your local Community Counseling Centers (CCC) for those that are currently located near an installation, chaplains, and other resources your command or an OSCAR team member can direct you to.

DISCUSSION POINT 2

1. People who are grieving may experience each of what we just discussed, or only some. People may feel like they have accepted the loss, only to be triggered by a feeling or memory and find themselves feeling anger or sadness again. Monitor yourself and your peers. Use the Stress

Continuum to assist you.

2. Grieving doesn't mean forgetting about a person who has died. Healthy grief is about finding ways to remember those we lost and adjust to life without them present.
3. Some things that may remind you of the loss include the anniversary of a death, a familiar song, a photograph, conversation, or any number of reminders.
4. When you are reminded of the loss or feeling triggered, it will be helpful to have a self-care plan. Some healthy things you can do to take care of yourself during those times include talk to a friend, listen to music, take deep breaths, journal, go fishing, go for a drive, or go for a run or hike. What do you believe would work for you? (Pause for responses.)

(Note to facilitator: this is a good time to share your own self-care strategies, to include what you might do in garrison and how that changes during operations and training, when some options are not available. Extra lines are provided for the facilitator to jot some notes on his/her own self-care strategies.)

Interim Summary: Most Marines manage grief triggers well but at times we all need some help. If you find yourself not being able to manage triggers as well as you would like to, reach out to a chaplain or other professional for some additional help. It takes time.

DISCUSSION POINT 3

1. Finding meaning can transform grief into a more peaceful and hopeful experience. Many people look for “closure” after a loss— finding meaning is where healing often resides. Finding meaning can take many forms.
2. Can you think of any ways you may find meaning? (Pause for responses.) (Continue to do my job and be the best Marine I can be, reach out to the family of the Marines or Sailor that were lost to share stories about their life, explore my spirituality, recall fond memories of the ones lost and speak of them often, make a donation or volunteer for a charity, run a race or complete a hike in honor of my friend, find clarity for my life, and live in a way that honors those lost.)

Interim Summary: There is no right or wrong answer for finding meaning and this may take some time and exploration of many ideas. There may even be things we can do as a unit in addition to the regular military customs and honors. If you have ideas that can help others, please let me or another leader know.

DISCUSSION POINT 4

1. Who could you talk to? (Pause for responses.) (An OSCAR team member, leadership, or an OSCAR extender such as medical staff, chaplain, corpsman, or religious program specialist, a Community Counselor, a medical provider, Century Anger Management classes (available from MCCA Prevention and Education Specialists), Military Family Life Counselors (MFLCs)).
2. After a loss, every person will feel a little different. How would you know if you or a peer needed further support? (Pause for responses.) (Check the Stress Continuum. If the Marine or Sailor

seems to have lost the ability to focus, remember things, control anger, have a sense of humor, and other emotions, or the Service member's personality seems to have changed, seek additional support.)

3. Where could you seek additional support? (Pause for responses.)

- a) Peers, chain of command, chaplain, medical/Marine Corps Community Services resources to include but not limited to Substance Abuse Counseling Center (SACC), Community Counseling Center (CCC), Family Advocacy Program (FAP), and the [Military Crisis Line](#) (800-273-8255, Press 1).
- b) OSCAR team members, extenders, and mental health professionals
- c) Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLC)
- d) [Military OneSource](#) (800-342-9647)

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Today we have talked about experiencing grief, managing triggers, finding meaning, and where to seek further support. Remember, grief is natural and complex. You now have a better understanding of grief and know there is no "right or wrong way" to grieve.

Closing Statement: Thank you for listening today. I will be here if anyone needs to talk more.

END OF DISCUSSION

RESOURCES

- 1. Combat Stress MCTP 3-30E <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCTP%203-30E%20Formerly%20MCRP%206-11C.pdf?ver=2017-09-28-081327-517>
- 2. MCO 5351.1 Combat and Operational Stress Control Program <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Publications/MCO%205351.1.pdf#:~:text=This%20Order%20issues%20Marine%20Corps%20policy%20and%20guidance,%28COSC%29%20program%20in%20accordance%20with%20the%20references.%202>.
- 3. Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) Gen III <https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/887900/operational-stress-control-and-readiness-training-guidance/>
- 4. The Nemours Foundation