

Tough Times Talk

Target Audience: Commanders at all levels

Purpose

To prepare leaders to discuss the social, emotional, and psychological aspects of handling a tough time within their unit, e.g. an Airman not returning to work, a suicide, or a casualty.

Description

Challenging situations require leaders to be prepared. Selflessness, humility and compassion are leadership traits required during tough times. These traits are the tools often required during stressful situations. Just as happy occasions such as a promotion ceremony are prepared for, the same should be true for more difficult events.

In those moments, you have to be at your best because everyone is watching. Challenge yourself with the “what if” drill: What if someone is critically injured on the job? What if someone is fatally injured? What if an Airman doesn’t return to work Monday – or ever? Have a plan to avoid improvising. Prepare now before you are faced with a tragic event. Familiarize yourself with items that may be discussed based on the situation. Keep in mind, grief is a tool to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling and is as unique as each individual.

Employ

- Sit down and talk with other leaders who have experience:
 - Discuss possible scenarios and listen to the voices of experience
 - Consider what may be needed for better communication such as cultural sensitivity
 - Discuss how to deal with grieving family members, e.g. sharing stories about their loved one
 - Discuss how the situation may affect the organization and you as an individual
 - Respond to the family’s expressed needs; do not assume you know what they need
 - Reflect afterward—what could have been done better or differently?
 - Share your experience with other command teams
 - Take advantage of the online resources for dealing with grief and loss
 - Review AFI 36-3002, Casualty Services
 - This publication describes procedures for the Casualty Services Program for all levels of command and all Air Force organizations
 - Of particular interest is Attachment 6, Casualty Notification Officer Checklist
 - Consider referring family members to TAPS: Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. TAPS offers compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in our Armed Forces. <http://www.taps.org>. Toll free information line 1-800-959-TAPS (8277).
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