



SELF-HELP EXERCISE: WRITE A MEMORIAL ABOUT A FALLEN WARRIOR

INTRODUCTION

The death of someone close to you is one of the most difficult and stressful things a veteran can experience. Grief is a natural and expected reaction to loss.

People grieve in their own ways, but common reactions include:



- ★ Sadness about the loss
- ★ Difficulty reconnecting with people
- ★ Self-blame
- ★ Frustration or anger about the loss
- ★ Guilt or anger about what was or wasn't done
- ★ Anger about decisions or situations that led to the death (e.g., command decisions, the behavior of the enemy, etc.)

Some veterans try to forget about their loss(es) and refuse to allow themselves to grieve. This coping strategy may work in the short term, but memories can't be eliminated. Strong feelings will surface unpredictably, preventing you from focusing on what you need to do in your personal life or at work.

Writing about a loss might help you learn or organize your thoughts about the meaning and implication of the loss. Once you are clear about what a loss means and what the implication is for your life moving forward, you can make choices about the path you take. One way to write about a loss is to write a memorial.

How might writing a memorial help you and the people who care about your friend?

Writing a memorial can help you to:



- ★ Express your feelings rather than keeping them bottled up.
- ★ Honor your friend by putting the respect and admiration you have for him or her into words.
- ★ Record parts of your friend's life and sacrifices that deserve to be recognized.
- ★ Share memories of your friend with the people he or she cared about the most.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Write a memorial:



Take a moment to remember your friend, and write about the kind of person he or she was, the friendship you shared, and the personal qualities about him or her that you admired. It may help to jot down a list of the things that come to mind so that you don't forget anything important. Try to find a quiet place to write so you won't be distracted. Write from your heart as much as your head.



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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Tips for writing a memorial about a fallen warrior:

- ★ Think about your friend's personality and good qualities. What did you like the most about him or her? What were the good times you shared?
- ★ What would your friend have wanted others to know about his or her life?
- ★ What notable achievements would the family and friends of your lost friend want to know about?
- ★ What notable challenges did your friend face that the people who cared about him or her would want to know and that your friend would be comfortable having you share?
- ★ What did your friendship with him or her mean to you? What parts of that relationship do you want to keep with you as you move on with your life?
- ★ What sacrifices did your friend make for things he or she valued the most?
- ★ Where was your friend heading with his or her life? (That is, based on what you know about your friend's talents and aspirations, what might he or she have accomplished in the future?)



You can keep your memorial private or share it with others who knew your friend. It could mean a lot to others to read a message from you. However, you should do what feels comfortable. The important thing is to write as honestly and directly as you can.

A word of advice:

If you plan to share this memorial, be sensitive to the grieving family's and friends' needs. It is OK to describe your friend in a balanced way – warts and all – but this is not the place for inappropriate stories or language that might be destructive.



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