



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Death and Mortuary Affairs

Defence Mental Health & Wellbeing





*'Mental health and wellbeing is the state in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'**

Defence's vision is that our people – military and public servants – experience positive mental health and wellbeing. *They are Fit to Fight – Fit to Work – Fit for Life.*

*World Health Organization

Death

As Defence members, the very nature of our employment exposes us to a higher risk of injury and fatality. Yet the reality is that death can occur at any time, suddenly and unexpectedly, with profound implications for our families and loved ones.

What is Mortuary Affairs?

Mortuary Affairs is a military term used to describe all aspects of the ADF Mortuary Affairs system. This system is designed to professionally manage deceased Defence personnel and their personal effects from an incident site through to funeral and or memorials. In addition, the system is designed to support the family of the deceased and to preserve the mental and emotional health of Defence members affected by a death.

Mortuary Affairs and your mental health

The impact of a death will affect us all at some stage in our lives. Sometimes death can impact on us unexpectedly, even when we have not had a close personal association with the deceased. This experience can be exacerbated in a military environment where connections and associations with others may be very strong as a result of shared experiences, culture, customs, identity and values. Our reactions and experiences associated with a death are known as 'grief'.

How can I prepare myself for exposure to death?

Although it is difficult to predict how we might react, the following are some steps you can take to ensure that you are as prepared as possible psychologically in the event of exposure to death:

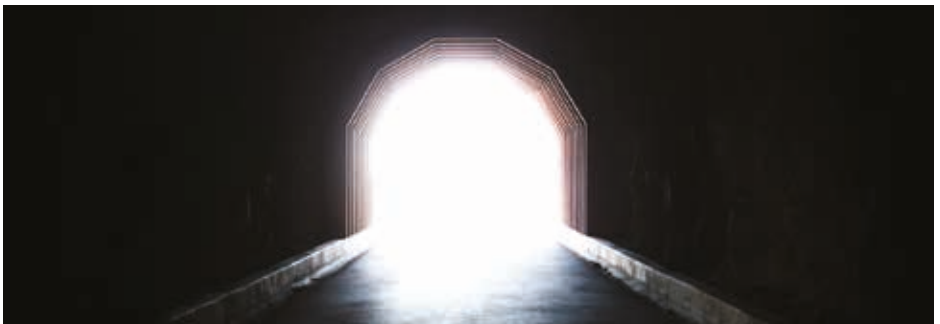
- consider reactions you have had in the past when faced with difficult experiences, in order to help you anticipate how you may react if confronted with death
- be aware of the support services around you, both at work and at home, and think about where you might turn if you needed support or advice
- remember that reactions to death can take many and varied forms.

How can you prepare your family in the event of your death?

Death can occur unexpectedly, and not just in a Defence environment. It is important to ensure our families are as well prepared as possible for the issues they will face with the death of a loved one. Discussing issues around death can be very difficult and uncomfortable for many people. However, sharing desires, concerns, wishes and thoughts regarding some of the administrative functions associated with death, can often help to reduce anxiety and uncertainty for a bereaved family.

You may wish to express any funeral or burial wishes, a preference for organ donation, your desires with respect to medical intervention for prolonging life or financial implications in the event of your death.

All Defence members and families are encouraged to consider these issues now rather than leaving it until it may be, sadly, too late.



What are the reactions?

No-one is immune to the potential effects of exposure to death, human remains and associated personal effects. It is common for people to experience a range of reactions:

- emotional reactions may include anger, distress, grief, horror, anxiety and depression
- cognitive reactions may include poor concentration, unpleasant memories and difficulty making decisions
- physical reactions may include feeling tense or on edge, sleep disturbances, stomach upsets and general aches and pains
- behavioural reactions may include irritability, loss of interest in activities and social withdrawal
- spiritual reactions may include questioning beliefs, assumptions, values and life choices.

Training and awareness

The ADF has commenced developing a suite of mortuary affairs training packages aimed at raising general awareness across Defence and equipping people with the skills required to effectively and professionally manage an incident involving death.

It will ensure Defence personnel are appropriately trained and supported when operating in a mortuary environment.

The unnecessary exposure of personnel to an incident involving fatalities has the potential for long term detrimental effects. Defence is committed to preventing unnecessary exposure:

- to preserve the mental and emotional wellbeing of Defence personnel and their families
- to respect the dignity and physical integrity of the deceased
- to respect the family of the deceased.

The APS People Policy has information on Death of an Employee that will provide further guidance.

Where to seek help

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call **Emergency Services 000**, contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information – 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on **000**
- Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- Suicide Call Back Service on **1300 659 467**.

ADF

Contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal is an online health information resource tool for ADF members and their families www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support.

Military Chaplains are connected to all ships/units/bases around Australia and on Operations. They can provide all-hours support and appropriate referral. To access Defence Chaplaincy support, call **1300 333 362** and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain from your area and service.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas **+61 2 9425 3878**.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK (1800 467 425)** to locate the nearest support.

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608) The Defence Family Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists. Defence Community Organisation website is: www.defence.gov.au/dco

The National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)

Serving Families of Deployed Australian Defence Personnel.

As part of the Headquarters Joint Operations Command, the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) provides a 24 hour support, referral and information service for families of Defence personnel deployed on operations and exercises.

1800 801 026 or **+ 61 2 6127 1812**.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office (SeMPRO)

SeMPRO offers advice, guidance and support to current and former Defence personnel who have been affected by sexual misconduct, whether the incident is current or historical.

This includes support to ADF cadets, officers and instructors of cadets, APS personnel, commanders, managers, supervisors, support people and families affected by sexual misconduct. **1800 736 776 (1800SeMPRO)**.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling (formerly WCS): is a national mental health service that provides 24-hour free and confidential counselling, group programs and suicide prevention training for current and ex-serving ADF members, and their family. To get support or to find out more, call **1800 011 046** or visit **www.OpenArms.gov.au**

APS (and Reservists)

Defence Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (including the Reserve Assistance Program – RAP). The EAP provides short term confidential counselling and support for employees and immediate family members (if eligible). It is easily accessible, voluntary and can provide support on a range of personal and work related issues. The Defence EAP can be accessed by calling **1300 687 327**.