

Section A-2 Family Readiness Groups (FRG)

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

Family Readiness Group (FRG)

Helping in Times of Trauma

Emergency situations and crises are a difficult part of life that also affect military families. Trauma affects the unit and family members. It is extremely important to have a well-developed and time-tested system in place for notifying family members of a service member who has been injured or killed. Military units provide casualty assistance and emergency notification in an official manner through the casualty assistance team or Casualty Assistance Calls Officer.

Family members are not included in the casualty assistance team. However, the FRG Coordinator or Ombudsman may be notified to assist with information about the family, what support systems they may have, and to organize meals for the family. FRG members may want to limit their support to the emotional and logistical assistance that the family requests. The most important consideration is to respect the needs of the family and follow their cues as to how the unit can support them.

Bad things don't just happen to service members. Tragedy can strike those who are left behind as well. When it does, the morale of the service member, as well as that of all other unit members and their families, will be impacted. Support for families is essential if you are to maintain morale and unit cohesion. Serious illness, injury, or death of a service member's spouse, child, or close relative may occur, and FRG members may be able to provide support. Be prepared. Provide training for the unit and FRG on helping in times of trauma. Everyone has good intentions and wants to help. However, not everyone has had the experience or training and may not know where to start and what to do. Training in dealing with crisis interventions and grief is indispensable. Elicit support for training from the unit chaplain or a social worker. Identify local resources of information and assistance within the community. Most medical facilities (military or civilian) offer support groups. Trauma, death, serious illness, and miscarriages are subjects that are difficult to discuss, but they are events that need to be addressed by the command and FRG.

Ensure that your rosters and telephone trees are current. Make sure that members' personal data form with the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of family members are accurate and up-to-date. This is especially true for single service members whose family may be spread throughout the country. Many units have been caught in an uncomfortable situation when the personnel data forms are incorrect, list only post office boxes, or do not provide accurate telephone numbers for next of kin.

The possibility of receiving emergency calls reinforces the importance of having an up-to-date resource file with emergency numbers easily accessible. These numbers would include (but not be limited to) police, fire, ambulance, hospital emergency room, rescue squad, family service center, and the poison control center.

Once the emergency incident has passed, obtain permission from the person to activate their support systems such as neighbors, friends, family, FRG, and the American Red Cross. That will support and assist the family in coping with the aftermath of the emergency.

Some basic guidelines for crisis intervention:

- Let the family involved talk. Listen to what they have to say. Be sure that you hear what they expect from you and what is their view of the problem. Repeat back to the person in crisis what he or she said.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Do not try to give advice or try to solve their problems. Listen and reflect back what they have said. Let them process and talk through options.
- The goal of crisis intervention is to allow the individuals involved to become responsible for themselves and to be aware of the consequences of their actions. They have to live with the consequences of decisions. Do not make decisions for them.
- Your role is listening and providing referrals to resources as appropriate.
- Provide attention to all family members. The crisis is affecting them also.
- If you refer them, be specific. Tell them where to go, provide the name and telephone number of the agency and the person who can provide them services. When in crisis, it is often hard to think clearly. Specific facts will help.
- Do not call the police, hospital, and others to assist without the permission of the person you are helping.
- Protect their confidentiality. Ask them what information they are comfortable with you sharing with others. Their trust in you must be developed and maintained.

FRG members assisting families in crisis should stay in close contact with the command. As a commander, stay visible; ascertain how things are going by staying in touch with the casualty assistance team (as appropriate) and the FRG members. Visit the family. Let them know how to reach you. A well thought out Emergency/Crisis Notification System is crucial to unit, family, and mission readiness. Place it high on your priority list. Be proactive so that when trauma occurs in your unit, you are prepared and the unit is prepared.