



Handling Difficult Situations

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These past two to three months have been an unusually difficult season of ministry for me and for some of our Post Chaplains. It is one thing to read about homicides and suicides that take place in our military and throughout our country, but quite different when it takes place with families in your own Post. One situation that occurred recently was a murder-suicide of a daughter and son-in-law of a Post employee. In another instance, an adult child of a WW II veteran attempted suicide. Then, I learned that a young wife of a Post member killed herself. Two weeks later, a member's fiancé died by suicide. These are just a few of the numerous difficult situations that have occurred recently within our VFW Posts.

Here are some helpful tips and suggestions:

- First thing to remember is that it is always proper to make contact with the family upon learning of a difficult situation or a death. Don't delay. A simple phone call expressing concern or condolence is always in order.
- It is okay to feel awkward. But, don't let that feeling of awkwardness and uneasiness prevent you from reaching out and ministering to the family and those affected by the situation.
- With a death, the next thing to do following the initial phone call is to show up. But do not show up unannounced!!! Place a second phone call and ask the family if it would be okay for you to drop by the house sometime. If they say it would be okay, ask them when would be a good time. This way they can prepare for your visit and may even invite other family members to be present so they too can meet you.
- Allow family, friends, and Post members to talk and express their feelings. Because of the social stigma associated with homicides and suicides, people are often reluctant to talk about what happened. If a bereaved person wants to talk, then listen intently and provide a safe and supportive environment.
- Families bereaved by homicides and suicides often feel guilty, shame, anger, alone and isolated. The stigma attached to a homicide and a

suicide makes it even harder for them and intensifies these feelings. Again, listen to them and provide an environment where they feel free to express whatever they are feeling or remain quiet and say nothing at all.

- Ministering to families and conducting a funeral for someone who died by homicide or suicide is always difficult – even for the seasoned minister. Please don't hesitate to contact me for guidance should you ever find yourself needing to deal with a difficult situation.

Resources for Chaplains: Check out my Chaplain's Page at the PA Department Web Site - vfwpahq.org Just look under District/Post Tools and you will see Chaplain's Guide. I have posted a number of items you may find helpful as you continue to serve those who serve.

Blessings as you serve,

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