VA expands Fry Scholarship to surviving spouses

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs announced it will begin accepting applications by mail Nov. 3, for the Fry Scholarship under newly expanded eligibility criteria to include surviving spouses.

Expanding criteria for the Fry Scholarship is the latest in a series of VA actions to implement provisions of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, or Choice Act, of 2014.

Specifically, Section 701 of the Choice Act expands the Fry Scholarship to include the surviving spouses of service members who died in the line of duty after Sept. 10, 2001. Before this expansion, only children of those who died in the line of duty were eligible for this benefit.

“We can never fully repay the debt we owe to these families who have lost a loved one,” said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. “It is a privilege to provide educational benefits that will make a positive difference in their lives.”

The Fry Scholarship was created to honor Marine Gunnery Sgt. John David Fry, 28, of Lorena, Texas. Fry had one week left in his tour in Iraq in 2006, when he volunteered to continue working for seven more hours disarming explosive devices, despite having already sustained an injury to his hand. He made the ultimate sacrifice on March 8, 2006, in Anbar province, Iraq, when an improvised explosive device detonated. He left behind a widow and three young children.

The Fry Scholarship will entitle eligible spouses up to 36 months of the full, 100-percent level of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which includes a tuition-and-fee payment, a monthly housing allowance and stipend for books and supplies. Some spouses currently eligible for or already receiving benefits under the Survivors’ and Dependents’ Educational Assistance program may now be eligible for the Fry Scholarship. All surviving spouses eligible for DEA and the Fry Scholarship must make an irrevocable election for terms beginning on or after Jan. 1, 2015.

VA officials will identify surviving spouses eligible for both programs and send them a letter with comparative information on the benefits available and instructions on how to make an election. Information about these two programs is available on VA’s website and the GI Bill website at www.benefits.va.gov/gibill. The VA call center at 888-GIBILL-1 (888-442-4551) also will be able to help individuals understand the differences between the two programs. (Courtesy of VA News)

Care groups available

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or TAPS, offers care groups in several states for those people who are grieving the death of a loved one in service to America.

TAPS Care Groups are informal gatherings of surviving military family members, and loved ones co-hosted by a TAPS Peer Mentor and a mental health professional. These groups are not therapy groups, but they can be therapeutic. They meet at a safe, easy-to-find location with available parking.

All those who are grieving the death of a loved one in service to America, without regard to circumstances, relationship to deceased, branch of military service, or geography of death, are welcome to attend. There is no charge to participants, and the meetings are set at a regular time and date that best accommodates those desiring to attend.

For more information, click here.

Attention AFFSN Facebook page users

The legacy Air Force Families Forever Facebook page has been replaced.

The new page will be activated Dec. 1, 2014.

Please click on the Facebook icon to gain access.

Disclaimer: This news bulletin is for informational purposes only. The appearance of hyperlinks, and the information and services you find at these locations, are provided for your convenience and do not constitute endorsement by the Department of the Air Force. The Air Force Families Forever Program does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find by accessing hyperlinks. Such links provided are consistent with the stated purpose of the AFF Program.
Helping yourself heal during the holiday season

by Dr. Alan Wolfelt
www.centerforloss.com

Holidays are often difficult for anyone who has experienced the death of someone loved. Rather than being times of family togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving, holidays can bring feelings of sadness, loss and emptiness.

Since love does not end with death, holidays may result in a renewed sense of personal grief — a feeling of loss unlike that experienced in the routine of daily living. Society encourages you to join in the holiday spirit, but all around you the sounds, sights and smells trigger memories of the one you love who has died.

No simple guidelines exist that will take away the hurt you are feeling. We hope, however, the following suggestions will help you better cope with your grief during this joyful, yet painful, time of the year. As you read through this article, remember that by being tolerant and compassionate with yourself, you will continue to heal.

Talk about your grief

During the holiday season, don’t be afraid to express your feelings of grief. Ignoring your grief won’t make the pain go away and talking about it openly often makes you feel better. Find caring friends and relatives who will listen — without judging you. They will help make you feel understood.

Be tolerant of your physical and psychological limits

Feelings of loss will probably leave you fatigued. Your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you.

Eliminate unnecessary stress

You may already feel stressed, so don’t overextend yourself. Avoid isolating yourself, but be sure to recognize the need to have special time for yourself. Realize also that merely “keeping busy” won’t distract you from your grief, but may actually increase stress and postpone the need to talk out thoughts and feelings related to your grief.

Be with supportive, comforting people

Identify those friends and relatives who understand that the holiday season can increase your sense of loss and who will allow you to talk openly about your feelings.

Talk about the person who has died

Include the person’s name in your holiday conversation. If you are able to talk candidly, other people are more likely to recognize your need to remember that special person who was an important part of your life.

Do what is right for you during the holidays

Well-meaning friends and family often try to prescribe what is good for you during the holidays. Instead of going along with their plans, focus on what you want to do. Discuss your wishes with a caring, trusted friend. Talking about these wishes will help you clarify what it is you want to do during the holidays. As you become aware of your needs, share them with your friends and family.

Plan ahead for family gatherings

Decide which family traditions you want to continue and which new ones you would like to begin. Structure your holiday time. This will help you anticipate activities, rather than just reacting to whatever happens. Getting caught off guard can create feelings of panic, fear and anxiety during the time of the year when your feelings of grief are already heightened; however, leave room to change plans if you feel it is appropriate.

Embrace your treasure of memories

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved, and holidays always make you think about times past.

Instead of ignoring these memories, share them with your family and friends. Keep in mind that memories are tinged with both happiness and sadness. If your memories bring sadness, then it’s alright to cry. No one can ever take away memories that were made in love.

Renew your resources for living

Spend time thinking about the meaning and purpose of your life. The death of someone loved created opportunities for taking inventory of your life — past, present and future. The combination of a holiday and a loss naturally results in looking inward and assessing your individual situation.

Make the best use of this time to define the positive things in life that surround you.

Express your faith

You may find a renewed sense of faith or discover a new set of beliefs. Associate with people who understand and respect your need to talk about these beliefs. If your faith is important, you may want to attend a holiday service or special religious ceremony.

As you approach the holidays, remember: grief is both a necessity and a privilege. It comes as a result of giving and receiving love. Don’t let anyone take your grief away. Love yourself. Be patient with yourself. And allow yourself to be surrounded by loving, caring people. (Used with permission from the Center for Loss & Life Transition)