



Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

From Heartbreak to Hope

Vietnam Veterans are dying at an alarming rate. The spouse and family not only feel the loss of their veteran but too often feel alone and no longer part of the chapter. *From Heartbreak to Hope* is another way that AVVA is giving back to our families and communities. Our goal with this program is to equip the organizer with the tools to begin a new peer-support program designed to bring comfort, belonging, and healing to the heartbroken families of deceased veterans, the families of a veteran's deceased spouse, and those families whose veteran is in Hospice Care.

Organizer duties

- 1. The Organizer will begin by identifying families in their chapter who have lost their veteran, spouse of a veteran, and those dealing with a terminally ill veteran in Hospice Care.**

Beginning with families of your **AVVA** Chapter, gather the names of deceased veterans and spouses. Hospice Care patients families need our help too. After completing this list, move to your **VVA** Chapter families. (not always members of AVVA) Gather the names using the same identifiers as mentioned above. (This may require enlisting the help of your VVA Chapter Membership Chair or an Officer.)

- 2. The Organizer will secure a place, select a time, and choose a date for the meeting.**

Choose a place that will be available to you on a routine basis. The size of the room depends on the number of families identified in # 1. The time and date should not interfere with working schedules of younger family members; a meeting on a weeknight is usually more attended than the weekend.



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3. The Organizer invites the identified families

Formal invitations are not required; use the method of communication that ensures reaching your targeted families. i.e. email, phone call.. While the families identified may be great, only a few may choose to participate. But, don't let that discourage your efforts, different people grieve in different ways.

4. The Organizer arrives in time to setup up the room; and, closes the room after the meeting.

The Organizer should be structured and punctual. Arriving early and having everything in place projects that "put-together" image. After the meeting, the Organizer secures the building and makes sure everyone is gone.

5. The Organizer develops an agenda to keep everyone on track

An agenda keeps the meeting on focus. It sets the rules and subject matter The agenda should include or a "welcome" and introductions time. At the first meeting, involve participants in setting rules for the group. Then, when a new member joins the group, clearly restate the group rules. As a support group, we want to make everyone comfortable, a good set of rules helps ensure that that happens. Introductions and a welcome will start your meeting with the feeling that everyone is of equal value; that their story and contributions are important and welcome. A sign-in sheet is optional.



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6. The Organizer must manage and maintain the meetings and the time

The Organizer keeps everyone focused and participating. Start and end your meetings on time. This shows everyone their time is valued. Time constraints on individual sharing are necessary for fairness. Don't allow one person to monopolize the conversation. Remember, everyone is of equal importance and all stories matter.

7. The Organizer must actively listen more than talk.

The Organizer need not be a widow, widower or one who is being affected by Hospice; the Organizer must be a good listener, compassionate, reliable, and trustworthy. Therapy credentials are not required for the Organizer because **NO COUNSELING** ever takes place. Support, benevolence, and patience are the key components to success.

8. The Organizer will research the community for professional help when needed.

There are approximately 600 local Agency on Aging offices across the US. Depending on the size of a community, different levels of professional help may be available. Hospice in your local area most likely have a grief counselor who can be invited to the meeting if the need is there. A few examples of counseling agencies.

www.betterhelp.com

www.goodtherapy.org

www.eldercare.acl.gov



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9. The Organizer schedules the next meeting

The next meeting date, time, and place announcement should be made before adjourning. This ensures that all attendees have the information. Each attendee should have the Organizer's contact information for in between-meeting questions or for the need of a compassionate ear.

AVVA is always standing by to assist with questions.

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