Taking care of those closest to you…

Planning for the worst can be difficult. You’ve already survived losing your spouse and the other parent of your child or children. Were you prepared? Did you know what to expect from the Army when notification was made? The policy below will provide you with an additional tool for future planning. In the event you pass while your children are still minors, know the U.S. Army Casualty Assistance Program will assist the guardian with applying for Federal benefits and entitlements due your minor child or children.

The Acting Secretary of the Army signed a policy (Army Directive 2021-04, Casualty Support for Dependent Children). People are the Army's greatest strength, and we hold imperative the care of the Total Army Family. This policy expands the population authorized to receive the support of a Casualty Assistance Officer (CAO) and clarifies expectations and responsibilities for CAOs and applies to those whose Soldier died while serving:

(1) All Soldiers whose death occurred while in a duty status

(2) All Soldiers whose death occurred while in an Absent Without Leave (AWOL)

(3) All Soldiers whose death occurred while in a suspected desertion status, but are not in the U.S. Army Deserter Information Point database

Dependent children of specific categories of Soldiers listed above are authorized a CAO upon the death of their non-military parent or legal guardian. Appointment of a CAO to a dependent child can occur at any time after the death of their non-military parent or legal guardian. To request a CAO, the guardian should contact any SOS Coordinator who will contact the appropriate Casualty Assistance Center.

The CAO may assist with the following:

(1) obtaining installation access for the guardian

(2) updating dependent child enrollment in Defense Enrollment Eligibility

Reporting System and obtaining a new identification card

(3) updating dependent child enrollment in TRICARE

(4) applying for any outstanding benefits and entitlements authorized pursuant to Federal statute

(5) coordinating for legal assistance

The death of a non-military parent or guardian does not generate new benefits or entitlements. For example, the CAO may not assist with mortuary related tasks such as planning or funding a funeral, application of commercial life insurance or estate planning/probate. The CAO assists with the few specific benefits and entitlements that will be transferred to the dependent child.

On completion of all the immediate responsibilities, the CAO will transfer the dependent child and the child's guardian to their servicing Survivor Outreach Services (SOS) coordinator for continued long-term case management. SOS coordinators will provide milestone management, such as changes in benefits, entitlements, financial stability, and recertification of enrollment of children in full-time education. SOS Coordinators will refer dependent children and guardians who require changes to Federal entitlements or benefits, including the Survivor Benefit Plan, TRICARE elections, and education benefits, to the appropriate agency for continued support.

If your family is suffering this unthinkable loss, the Army is ready to assist. Please contact your local Survivor Outreach Services (SOS) Coordinator (<https://dcsg9.army.mil/safr/sos/sos-find.html>).