



- Home
  - News
  - About the Guard
  - Leadership
  - Joint Staff
  - For the Media
  - Resources
- 
- News Archive
  - Today in Guard History
  - The On Guard
  - State Publications
  - Foundations Magazine
  - RSS News Feeds
  - News Widget

## Woman's personal tragedy used to educate others

By Air Force Master Sgt. Greg Rudl  
National Guard Bureau

ARLINGTON, Va. - No one would have faulted Carol Graham or her husband U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Mark A. Graham if they had kept their enormous grief private.

Their youngest son, Kevin, committed suicide in June 2003. Seven months later, their other son Jeffrey, an Army lieutenant, was killed in Iraq.

Instead, the two have gone public with their personal tragedy in order to teach others about suicide prevention.

In front of a crowd of well over a 100 people here at the Army National Guard Readiness Center Oct. 8, Graham talked about losing her two sons and how it changed her life.

Her appearance was as part of the ARNG's Suicide Prevention Program Guest Speaker Series hosted by the Soldier/Family Support Service Division.

"The goal was to provide personal insight into suicide and to help the audience, both military and civilian, empathize with both the mindframe of the person who completed suicide as well as the family and loved ones that are left behind," said Army Lt. Col. Ashleigh Bechtel, chief of the Soldier Support Branch.

"Pain is the price we pay for being alive," said Graham, quoting Rabbi Harold S. Kushner from his book, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People."

She and her family have had more than their share.

Kevin was a University of Kentucky senior and Army ROTC scholarship cadet when he took his own life in June 2003.

His brother Jeffrey, a second lieutenant in the Army, was readying for a deployment to Iraq. As a result of his brother's death, the Army offered him stateside duty instead. He declined.

On Feb. 19, 2004, while leading a foot patrol in Khaldiyah, Iraq, he stopped his platoon short of a bridge after noticing something out of the ordinary on the bridge's guard rail. As he was calling in the report, the Improvised Explosive Device denoted, killing him.

Graham, with Jeff's picture on a screen behind her, read a prepared statement in a somewhat tired, monotone voice about how her and her husband received the news, but couldn't accept it. Her husband felt that he couldn't lead anymore and wanted to retire from the military.

"We joined every support group in Lawton [Okla.]," said Graham. Her husband was stationed at nearby Fort Sill at the time.

In her despair, she said she thought: "How could the world keep spinning without Jeff and Kevin in it."

But something happened at those recovery groups when the two shared memories of their two sons and the grief over losing them. They found that the more they talked about them the better they felt. Instead of withdrawing, they decided to get involved in educating others about suicide and how to prevent it.



Carol Graham, who lost one son to suicide and the other in the War on Terrorism, speaks at the Army National Guard Readiness Center Oct. 8 as part of the Suicide Prevention Program Guest Speaker Series. Pictured on the screen is her son 2nd Lt. Jeffrey C. Graham who was killed by an Improvised Explosive Device Feb. 19, 2004 in Khaldiyah, Iraq. Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Greg Rudl.

[download hi-res photo](#)

**Illinois Guardsmen help neighbors after weekend tornado**  
17 hours ago

Tornadoes hit the towns of Streator, Dwight, St. Anne, and Elmwood on [Atterbury's warrant officers revitalize Blue River Dam](#) [Connecticut Guardsmen put their skills to constructive use](#) [Illinois Guardsmen help neighbors after weekend tornado](#) [Medal of Honor recipients promote mental-health support](#) [Louisiana Guard completes sandbag barrier missions on gulf](#)

Receive email updates

Enter Email Address

[Get Widget](#)

### NEWS ARCHIVES

- [June 2010](#)
- [May 2010](#)
- [April 2010](#)
- [March 2010](#)
- [February 2010](#)
- [January 2010](#)
- [December 2009](#)
- [November 2009](#)
- [October 2009](#)
- [September 2009](#)
- [August 2009](#)
- [July 2009](#)
- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [April 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
- [More Archives](#)

text size: [A](#) [A](#)

For the past four years, Graham has been instrumental in raising depression and suicide prevention awareness for families and Soldiers at Fort Sill. She received the Oklahoma Governor's Commendation for Suicide Prevention and Depression Awareness in support of the PTSD program in July 2004. She also was awarded the Texas Governor's Yellow Rose of Texas for her work with wounded Soldiers and their families at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

Following Kevin's death, his parents established a memorial fund at the University of Kentucky to raise suicide and depression awareness. After Jeff's death, the fund was endowed and renamed for both.

Graham's somber tone in the first half of her talk changed to a lively exchange with the audience in the second half as she stepped from behind the podium to take questions.

"Kevin wore the mask very well," she said, meaning he disguised his discontentment with a normal exterior. He had won several awards in his ROTC class, she said.

Graham looked back and recounted the suicide warning signs her son was giving off. Indicators she didn't pick up on then, but now knows through education.

The mental health community agrees that the classic signs are talk of suicide, giving away possessions, acting bizarre, financial problems and withdrawal.

Her son also had suicide risk factors, including a history of depression that required medication and a family history of the illness. She found out later that her father suffered from depression most of his adult life.

Graham remembers talking to a TRICARE Healthcare representative over the phone and trying to get psychiatric help for her son. She was warned by others that it would cost \$250 an hour. The representative said there wasn't a psychiatrist in the TRICARE network in her area, so she didn't pursue it.

Guardmembers suffering from depression, post traumatic stress disorder or worse – contemplating suicide – have more resources that can help them than ever before.

One of those is Military OneSource, a program through which they can receive up to six sessions with a counselor for no charge.

Graham warned that people considering suicide show signs. "No one (who) commits suicide is impulsive," she said, meaning that no one thinks about it for the first time and does it.

It's a gradual process. "It's like a jar sitting on the shelf," she said. "They take it down several times and put it back before finally going through with it."

She ended her talk with a plea to everyone in the room: "I beg you, if your buddy is showing signs of suicide, do what we didn't do and reach out to them. And don't be afraid of mentioning the 'S' word."

---

[Home](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) |  
[External Link Disclaimer](#) |  
[Accessibility](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Contact Us](#)

2010 National Guard Bureau