

## Not Only Human Lives – Part B: Of the Value of a Support Group for Processing Loss Among Oketz Unit Soldiers Who Lost Their Dogs in the Iron Swords War

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This article presents a pioneering group intervention in the IDF's Oketz Unit, supporting 11 soldiers who lost their military working dogs during the Iron Swords War. Building on prior research on the emotional impact of canine loss, this follow-up study evaluates a single-session support group initiated at the soldiers' request. The intervention was assessed using a modified Two-Track Model of Bereavement Questionnaire (TTBQ), adapted for animal loss.

The session used the "Photo Album Protocol" by Yoram Ben Yehuda, which aids emotional expression through symbolic imagery. Thematic analysis revealed eight core themes: helplessness, emotional flooding, need for recognition, farewell, the dog's operational significance, anger, grief processing, and loneliness. Participants described their dogs as more than tools – viewing them as attachment figures and combat partners.

Post-session feedback highlighted emotional validation, normalization of grief, and a sense of shared experience. Soldiers reported increased emotional clarity and expressed interest in continued group support. The findings emphasize the value of focused group interventions for disenfranchised grief in military settings.

The study suggests that this model can enhance resilience across IDF units. It recommends institutionalizing frameworks like the unit's "Resilience Forum" and expanding tailored support for soldiers facing traumatic loss. Despite limitations in scope and sample size, the initiative represents a meaningful step toward acknowledging the psychological impact of losing military dogs in combat.

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