

Seven Practical Ways to Help Military Families This 2011 Holiday Season

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The 2011 Holiday Season has arrived and for the majority of Americans it's a fun-filled family time, often liberally seasoned with stress and frustration. But, for 1% of the nation—our military service members and their families—the holidays can usher in the unwanted ghosts of loneliness, loss and isolation.

This holiday season an estimated 200,000 military personnel remain forward deployed or stationed in over 150 countries worldwide. In addition to the currently serving troops, the last decade produced over 45,000 wounded warriors and 16,000 families of the fallen. Comprised of the active duty, reserve and national guard forces, these military personnel and their families come from every state and territory in the nation.

As a result, all across America, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands, and kids of all ages, are struggling with the temporary or permanent loss of a military loved one this year. These military families are a cross-section of America, a blend of ages, races, and backgrounds. They're not strangers—they're your neighbors and co-workers; friends of your kids, or the worried mother sitting by herself at your church, synagogue or place of worship. You may not know these families very well, but you have a golden opportunity do a good deed and get to know them a little better.

How can you help? Here are seven practical ways you can make the holidays a little less stressful and more comfortable for a military family. Make it a family project, and give your kids a real-time lesson in patriotism and the spirit of the Season.



Combine forces to shop. Go to the mall with a single parent or worried Mom so they won't have to fight the crowds alone. Shop on-line. Suggest gift cards. Offer to wrap some presents or babysit—these are gifts in themselves!

Help with decorating. Military kids are still kids, and want to celebrate the holidays regardless of the family circumstances. Help put up the Christmas tree or other decorations. Remember to come back and take it all down!

Consider a “feel good” gift. Give a massage or manicure, a movie night, or a round of golf. Give the adults a “time-out” by watching a Monday night football game together.

Hire a house-cleaning service. Especially for the parent who is both Mom and Dad. Who wouldn't be grateful to have their house cleaned anytime of the year?

Lend a hand with the “honey-do” list. Something *always* falls apart, stops working, or seizes up during a deployment. The same goes for the families of the wounded and fallen. If you can't fix it, recommend a good repairman.

Skip the plate of cookies. And the chicken casseroles. Replace them with gift certificates for pizza or other deliverable foods. And don't forget those free coupons for “Happy Meals” and other fast food.

Share your home and family with them. Set an extra plate or two at your table, and invite a military family to share a meal with you. It's what family and friends are all about, especially in this season of good cheer.

If none of these ideas work for you, then simply thank a military family member for their loved one's service. Thank the family members, too, for they serve and sacrifice in big and small ways that never make the news. It'll be appreciated!