



The De-Stress Press

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The Western New York Stress Reduction Program Newsletter

3359 Broadway, Cheektowaga, NY 14227

No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave. ~ Calvin Coolidge ~

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS (A SOLDIER'S PERSPECTIVE)

*WRITTEN BY: HOUSTON CRUM, ACSW

When we talk about the “sacrifices” made by members of the American military during time of war, being separated from family members during the holidays comes quickly to mind. But there are deeper sacrifices experienced by military personnel during these times.



For many who have served in the military (particularly in a war zone), there is a strong association between holidays and personal loss. At the very least, a holiday spent overseas is a holiday with family lost forever. In a dangerous area of the war where focus on mission and on security is paramount, there isn't even time to reminisce or fantasize about being home. For many deployed service members, it is too painful to think much about “back home” and phone conversations can make the separation even more unbearable.

For veterans of war, holidays become forever associated with combat events or with the deaths and wounds of friends and comrades that occur near holidays. Months and years later, they still feel these losses acutely. Numerous Vet Center clients start telling us in November “this is a bad time of year for me” and “I can't wait until the holidays are over.”

For families of deployed service members, the sadness of separation is compounded by fear of the unthinkable: my soldier may not come home. For the family members of the thousands of casualties as well as the severely wounded themselves, their loss is the loss of an anticipated future. For the family members of veterans who withdraw into themselves during important family holidays, their loss is the loss of an emotional connection.

Fast Facts

- ❖ 86% of American soldiers in Iraq reported knowing someone who was seriously injured or killed.
- ❖ 77% of American soldiers in Iraq reported shooting or directing fire at the enemy.
- ❖ 48% of American soldiers in Iraq reported being responsible for the death of an enemy combatant.
- ❖ 51% of American soldiers in Iraq reported handling or uncovering human remains.
- ❖ The estimated risk for PTSD among American soldiers in the Iraq War is 18%.

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD.

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For so many service members and veterans, the challenge of the holiday season is to reconcile their sense of loss with their sense of connection to those around them. For them, joy will always be mixed with sadness. For the family and friends, the challenge is to include them in activities that foster connection and belonging while respecting their need to remember...and to grieve. Loving patience may well be the best gift to give a veteran of war.

*Houston Crum, ACSW, is a Team Leader at The Buffalo VET Center, providing readjustment counseling services to returning military personnel.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The Western New York Stress Reduction Program is pleased to announce that Genesee County joined our team in the spring of this year. I would like to extend a sincere welcome, and I look forward to continued partnerships in the delivery of Critical Incident Stress Management services. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the ongoing support from all of our members. I wish you much happiness and good health during the holiday season and throughout 2007. Stay safe and if you need us, call us - we'll be there.
~ Michael Walters, Executive Director ~



Holiday Blues

Holidays are typically thought of as times of joy, cheer, and family gatherings. However, for many people it is a time of loneliness and depression. This is often referred to as the "holiday blues". Factors such as unrealistic expectations for the season, increased stress, inability to be with family, changes in daily routines, and over commercialization contribute to the onset of the holiday blues. The good news is that symptoms experienced during this time of the year, e.g., headaches, anxiety, excessive guilt, changes in sleeping and eating patterns and decreased interest in pleasurable activities, are usually short lived and subside after the holiday season is over. Suggestions for coping during this high-stress season include setting realistic goals, maintaining good self-care, doing something for others less fortunate, avoiding too much alcohol, refraining from over spending, and recognizing that feelings of sadness are normal. If you would like more information, please contact us at 681-6070.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy and peaceful holiday season.

Training Opportunities

- ❖ January 26 & 27, 2007: *Group Crisis Intervention*
- ❖ March 16 & 17, 2007: *Assisting Individuals in Crisis*
- ❖ April 27 & 28, 2007: *Advanced Group Crisis Intervention*

How to Contact the Team

Information & Education: 716-681-6070
Immediate Assistance:
Erie County: 716-898-3696
Genesee County: 585-343-3311
Niagara County: 716-433-4482
Wyoming County: 585-786-8867
Website: www.erie.gov/depts/wnystress
Email: wnystress@yahoo.com