

Warrior Christmas - Holiday Stress

Well, we are fast approaching the Holiday Season. For many, it is a very stressful time of year--particularly in light that many of you have your family member deployed, or things at home have changed dramatically due to the loss of your loved one or wounding.

It is a time to gather together and form strong bonds of love and remembrance to help us all get through a rather difficult time of year.

I recently lost my father, and this will be my first holiday season without him, and I have noticed that I am not quite myself. I feel all sorts of emotions and I don't even see them coming. So, on that level I can offer my own insights, but for those of you who have lost your loved one or who are longing for them to be at home with you my heart truly goes out to you.

The holidays bring about a certain amount of nostalgia, along with that comes wishing for warm memories of the past. This is where it gets quite difficult to bear.

For this holiday season take some time to remember, but also take time to reach out to others to make their season a bit smoother. It is through helping others that we can move beyond some our own pain and make a difference in the lives of others.

Having your Warrior home for the holidays is exciting, but it also offers some new challenges for them as well as for the family. Here are some practical tips for reducing stress in your household.

- 1) If your Warrior is home with you this year after being deployed, do your best not to expect that things will be the same.
- 2) Give your Warrior plenty of space and don't demand that they join in the festivities. The commotion and chatter may create an undue amount of stress for them.
- 3) Inform your guests and family members not to ask questions. Just let things flow naturally without going into Iraq or Afghanistan. Let your Warrior direct the topic.
- 4) Discuss the plans with your Warrior. Let them know what the schedule of events consists of, and give them an option to bow out if they feel more comfortable doing so.
- 5) Fix some of your Warrior's favorite dishes. This can certainly be a treat for them.
- 6) Watch the amount of alcohol that is passed around. Nothing is worse than someone who gets tipsy and starts spewing off without even giving it a second thought of how your Warrior may be affected.
- 7) It may be up to you to run interference to create a better environment from which to celebrate this holiday season.

8) Flexibility is the key here--what may have traditionally been standard protocol may need to be re-evaluated to accommodate and create a smooth landing for your Warrior.

9) Get plenty of rest in order to have the energy and resiliency to handle whatever comes your way.

10) Keep it simple. What may be of paramount importance to you may not have the same significance for your Warrior.

11) Don't expect them to run errands for you because bright colors, crowds, and excess stimulation may push many buttons for them.

12) Don't be over alarmed if your Warrior sits quietly, watches TV, plays video games or isolates, as this may be a healthy alternative and positive coping mechanism over the holiday season.

13) Bring out the board or card games and just enjoy the togetherness without getting into any heavy conversations.

14) If gift giving is part of your tradition, talk about cutting back and setting a limit on the amount spent.

15) Don't be alarmed if your Warrior does not feel comfortable attending your place of worship as in the past. Just let it go and look at this as their way of reducing the stress by not being around people.

16) Be sure to set some personal, family and professional goals for this new-year.

Have a blessed holiday season, and may we all take this time to remember those who serve our country today and in the past. Let this holiday be the beginning of a year of filled with compassion, peace and kindness that we extend to all our fellow mankind.

With Deep Gratitude and Respect,

Bridget C. Cantrell, Ph.D.

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