

## 7 Ways to Help Military Families This Holiday Season

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The 2010 Holiday Season has arrived and for many Americans it's a fun-filled family time, often liberally seasoned with stress and frustration. But, for 1% of our nation -- the US military and their families on the home front -- the holidays can usher in the unwanted ghosts of loneliness and isolation.

This Holiday Season an estimated 250,000 US military personnel are forward deployed or stationed in over 150 countries world-wide. These military personnel, who include active duty troops, Reserve forces, and National Guardsmen, are from every state in our nation. As a result, there are military families all across America struggling with the temporary or permanent loss of a loved one this Holiday Season. These military family members are not all strangers—they are your neighbors or co-workers; friends of your kids at school, or the pregnant wife sitting by herself at your worship service. You may not know them very well, but you have a golden opportunity do a kind act and get to know them a little better.

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

- 1. Lend a hand with shopping.** Offer to go to the mall with Mom or Dad so they don't have to fight the crowds alone. Shop for them on-line or by catalog. Suggest gift cards. Gift wrapping or babysitting is a gift in itself.
- 2. Help with decorating.** Military kids want to celebrate, regardless of the family circumstances. Help put up the Christmas tree or other decorations. Offer to come back and take it all down!
- 3. Consider a "feel good" gift.** Give a massage or manicure, a movie night, or a round of golf. Give them a "time-out" by watching a Monday night football game together.
- 4. Hire a house-cleaning service.** Especially for the homefront parent who is both Mom and Dad. Who wouldn't be grateful to have their house cleaned anytime of the year?
- 5. Lend a hand with the "honey-do" list.** Something *always* falls apart, stops working, or seizes up during a deployment. If you can't fix it, recommend a trustworthy repairman.
- 6. Skip the plate of cookies.** Replace it with gift certificates for pizza or other deliverable foods. And don't forget the free coupons for "Happy Meals" and other fast food.
- 7. Share your home and family with them.** Set an extra plate at your table, and invite them 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 for the service of their loved one. And thank the family, for they too, serve and sacrifice for America in big and small ways that never make the evening news, but mean so much to us during this holiday season and throughout the year.

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