



Coping with the Stress of Ongoing Military Operations;

Information for Military Families

As our service men and women continue to carry out missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere; their families, friends and significant others continue to experience varying amounts of worry and fear. This stress can be due to concerns about a loved one's safety, economic hardship, the challenges of coping as a single parent, or simply missing a partner. In the face of this anxiety, you or someone you know may be experiencing some of the following signs of the emotional impact of stress, or these symptoms may arise over the coming weeks and months:

- Difficulty completing tasks
- Irritability and anger
- Extreme hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Trouble concentrating
- Sadness and depression
- Difficulty making decisions
- Excessive drinking or drug use
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Feeling powerless
- Crying for "no apparent reason"
- Feeling withdraw
- Apathy and emotional numbing "
- Headaches or stomach problems

In the face of stress, some people will maintain their routines to achieve a sense of control and to distract themselves while others will have difficulty focusing for some time. Both reactions are common responses to this situation. Because everybody experiences stress differently, don't compare your "progress" with those around you or judge other people's reactions and emotions. Here are some tips for coping during these difficult times.

Talk about it. By talking with others, particularly other military spouses, you will reduce your stress and realize that others share your feelings. Support groups exist at most military installations. If there's one available to you, join; if not, consider starting one.

Take care of your physical health. Get plenty of rest and exercise, avoid excessive drinking and drugs and eat properly.

Limit your exposure to the news media. The images, rumors and speculation can be damaging to your sense of well-being.

Engage in activities you find relaxing. Plant flowers, attend a concert, visit an art gallery or take a long bath. Be kind to yourself.

Do something positive. Contact community volunteer organizations to see how you can help. Give blood, prepare "care packages" for service men and women, or support a friend or neighbor who is having trouble coping.

Take care of your children. Acknowledge their worries and uncertainties. Reassure them that their feelings are normal. Maintain your family routines and keep the lines of communication open.

Seek help. It's not a sign of weakness. If you have strong feelings that won't go away or are troubled for more than four to six weeks, you may want to seek professional help. Nearly every military installation has a Family Service Center, Family Support Center or Army Community Service Center (depending on the branch of service). These can provide information, referrals, counseling and crisis intervention services. In addition, all military families, including those of National Guard and Reserve members who are activated for more than 30 days, are eligible for medical and mental health care at either a Military Medical Treatment Facility or a civilian facility through CHAMPUS (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services).

Information provided by the National Mental Health Association