



*Make Prevention a CHOICE*

## **Facing The Holidays: Some Tips On How To Enjoy Them And Not Just Survive**

The holidays from Thanksgiving to New Year's are always billed as a time for family, celebration, warmth and love. However, many people experience them as times of high stress and deep disappointment or depression. Military families face special challenges since they are often away from family or have a family member on deployment. The tips listed below are meant to help you maintain a perspective on these days that will make the hectic pace of this season work for you rather than against you.

### **GET REAL**

- \* Christmas is full of high expectations about how it "should" be. Let go of the "should be's" and work on some "can be's".
- \* If you are stationed too far away to be with family, or if your spouse is deployed through the holidays, focus on positive ways to be in touch for the holidays. Focus on the strength of what is there, not the hurt of what is missing.
- \* Set some realistic goals for your preparation. You don't have to cook every favorite food or use every decoration you own. If others expect certain things for the holidays, invite them to help in the preparation.
- \* Establish a realistic budget and save for your Christmas purchases. Resist the temptation to run up credit card bills you will not be able to pay off in a reasonable time.
- \* All families have ongoing problems that sometimes create tension. The tension is sometimes heightened during the holidays and boils over to ruin an otherwise happy atmosphere. This is especially true when heavy alcohol use is a factor. Realize that now is not the time to fix long-standing family problems. Do what you can to let go of your own feelings and encourage others to focus on positive things as well.

The holidays heighten feelings of loss because of a death of a family member or a divorce. It is important to acknowledge these feelings. Admit the feelings of hurt or loss to one another. This may also be a time to do something new for the holiday, such as celebrate at another family member's house, or create a new tradition to observe the holiday.

### **GET HELP**

- \* Resist the feeling that you must be responsible for everything. Your holidays are meant for the whole family. Divide up responsibilities according to the ability of each family member. If they don't do their part, then let go of something else. Don't allow others to take you or the special things they like about the holidays for granted.
- \* If child care is a problem, see about arranging with another friend to baby-sit for you for a morning or afternoon to allow you time for shopping, doing things around the house, or simply relaxing by yourself. Return the favor.
- \* Stay in touch with a good friend during this time. Talk about what you are doing and other things on your mind. Talk is an excellent way to relieve stress.

### **GET CREATIVE**

- \* Sometimes it's not possible to celebrate the holidays the way you'd like because the climate is different, or certain foods are not available where you are stationed. It's important to be creative with your celebration. Take advantage of the opportunities or unique characteristics of the place you live.
- \* Create Christmas tree ornaments that represent the place you are living. Years lead to an interesting collection. Stories about each place may be told at future tree trimmings.
- \* Let the kids be part of the preparation. Depending on their age, they might help by putting stamps on the card envelopes, or hold their finger on a bow while you wrap a gift. Let them create some gift wrap. Paper, glue, crayons and glitter offer interesting possibilities.
- \* Make a video or audio tape for the family member on deployment. Let him or her know how much you care and that they are still a part of things, even from a distance.
- \* Invite someone who might otherwise be alone for Christmas dinner. Alternatively, you might prepare some cookies or other holiday foods and deliver them as a family to someone who lives alone on your street.
- \* Think of alternatives to store bought gifts, such as homemade items or a cherished article you already own that you know someone else would appreciate.

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