

## **HOW TO HELP THE FAMILY OF A DEPLOYED SOLDIER**

**BY BETTY SMITH**

Do you know someone who has a family member in the National Guard or Reserves now serving overseas or in some other place far away from home? Is it someone in your church? the neighborhood? the office? Do you want to help the person left behind but are unsure how to do so? Do you say to him or her, "Let me know if there is anything I can do for you," but feel that your words are inadequate, that you really want to offer concrete support? Here are some ideas to help you get started.

Is the person taking care of children at home? Offer to go with the family to a zoo, circus, movie, restaurant, or party. If the children are involved in sports or an arts activity like piano lessons, offer to go to a game or performance with the parent to watch the young star. It is more fun to go to a play, concert, or sporting event with someone than to go alone. The youth and the parent will both appreciate the interest.

If there are no children or the children are grown or no longer at home, invite the spouse to go for coffee. Ask him or her to go shopping or to a movie, a restaurant, the library or other place of interest. Remember that doing things alone can be very lonely, so lonely that a person may avoid some activities. Sitting in front of a TV or alone in a house can make the time go by very slowly.

Call your friend out of the blue just to say "hi." It's a nice surprise to hear from someone who cares, even if it's a message on an answering machine waiting to be heard when the person comes home.

Gather a few things to send as a care package to the deployed soldier. Depending on where the soldier is, restrictions on what can be sent may exist. The family member will know what is or is not allowed.

Send a card. It is uplifting to get something besides bills, catalogs, and junk! Send cards to the deployed soldier. Cards will lift his or her morale and let the family know you are remembering the soldier. Send birthday, anniversary, holiday, and "just because" cards.

If the family of the deployed soldier has a pet, volunteer to help with the pet once a week or so. A mother with young children may find it hard to take a dog and three small children on a walk each day. Someone who works days and has to walk the dog alone at night might enjoy company. Going along on a trip to the vet would be appreciated.

Think about how hard it may be for a spouse with young children or an elderly parent to do the mowing, raking, window washing, shopping, and other such activities alone. Could you help?

These are some ideas to spark your imagination. Put yourself in the place of the spouse, brother, sister, mother, father, grandparent, son, daughter, or best friend. If you were that person, what would help you deal with daily life?

Some activated Guard and Reserve personnel are stateside. Remember that whether the soldier is deployed overseas or is stationed stateside, the loneliness felt by the family is the same. The fears are different; the loneliness is there. Children do not know the difference—mommy/daddy/big sister/big brother is gone! The family needs our support no matter where the loved one is stationed

#### **ABOUT THIS ARTICLE**

Reflecting on the number of families who have members deployed in the military around the world and on her experience when her husband was deployed as a chaplain in Afghanistan, Betty Smith created this list of suggestions as a springboard to help people identify ways to reach out to families who have members serving in the military. The article came to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program through Edward Brogan, Director of the Presbyterian Council for Chaplains and Military Personnel (PCCMP), and is shared with the permission of the author. Learn more about the ministry of PCCMP at [www.pccmp.org](http://www.pccmp.org).

#### **ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES**

Prayers from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program  
[www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/prayers.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/prayers.htm)

Pastoral Care in a Time of War for Those Serving in the Military and Their Families  
[www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/pastoralcare.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/pastoralcare.htm)

Resources for Families in Times of War  
[www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/families.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/iraq/families.htm)

Ministering to the Military in our Midst – Virginia Baptist Mission Board  
[www.vbmb.org/glocalmissions/military.htm](http://www.vbmb.org/glocalmissions/military.htm)

Department of Veteran's Affairs – Seamless Transition  
[www.seamlesstransition.va.gov](http://www.seamlesstransition.va.gov)

**The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program**  
a ministry of the General Assembly Council, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202  
[www.pcusa.org/peacemaking](http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking)