



CSM Column December 2010

The holiday season is once again upon us. With the holidays comes a kaleidoscope of emotions. Hopefully most of you will experience the great joy and happiness of being together with families and friends. Sadly, some of you will experience the sadness and loneliness of being separated from those that you love during this most important season.

While separation from family and friends occurs across the nation, it's by far most prevalent among members of the armed forces and their families. Almost every Soldier has experienced a holiday deployed, and almost every Army family has endured an empty seat at the table during this most joyous season.

Please keep in mind those who cannot celebrate the holidays with loved ones. If you know a Soldier or family who will be apart from loved ones, please try to include them in your own celebrations. Invite the Soldier to dinner, or prepare a special dish for the family. Let's all work to ensure that those affected by separations this holiday season know that they are not alone. They are part of our Army family and we all hold them most dear.

Beyond separation from families and friends, many of us will feel a marked increase in stress and/or anxiety, and some will make foolish decisions concerning the use of alcohol and/or drugs. The causes of stress and anxiety are numerous and varied. The source is not nearly as important as how we deal with stress. Unfortunately, some of us will consider suicide as a solution to the stress and anxiety they are experiencing.

If you suspect someone is contemplating suicide, think **A.C.E.**

Ask your buddy. Have the courage to ask your buddy directly about thoughts or plans for suicide, but stay calm.

Care for your buddy. If someone tells you they are suicidal, it is often a plea for help. Ensure the Soldier gets immediate assistance (Chaplain or Behavioral health). Calmly control the situation. Remove any lethal means as calmly and strategically as possible.

Escort your buddy. Never leave your buddy alone. Find someone to stay with your buddy. Escort to the chain of command, a Chaplain, a mental health professional, or a primary care provider.

The Army has had the Buddy System for as long as I can remember. A Battle Buddy is someone that can be trusted with your life. A Battle Buddy should speak up when he/she notices changes taking place in one's behavior that are of concern. The Buddy System works very well on the battlefield. It can also work in garrison as a way for us to look out for each other.

If you find yourself unable to cope during the holiday season, or at any other time, I urge you to reach out to your Chaplain, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representative, your NCOs or your first line leaders. They are here to help you, not to judge you. Many of them have faced the same or similar issues, and all will do everything within their authority to assist you with overcoming the problems that are preventing you from enjoying a happy holiday season.

First line leaders must also remain constantly vigilant for signs of stress or depression among the Soldiers under their care. We are ultimately responsible for the health and welfare of those subordinate to us. We must remain approachable and we must never hesitate to act in support of our Soldiers.

If you know of someone having a difficult time, please help look out for your battle-buddy. Don't look the other way. Don't pretend there isn't a problem. Urge the Soldier or family member to see the Chaplain, give him or her contact information for their EAP representative, or suggest they reach out to their supervisor for assistance.

As each of you goes about celebrating the holidays, I urge you to enjoy them in a safe and responsible manner. Please don't drink and drive this holiday season. The consequences, ranging from a career ending DUI to the loss of property and even loss of life just are not worth it! If you drink, make sure your group has a designated driver or take a cab home. If you see a fellow Soldier or family member attempting to drive after drinking, intercede. Find alternative transportation for them. Don't let him or her get behind the wheel of a vehicle.

If your plans call for driving this holiday season, plan ahead. Conduct a thorough vehicle inspection well before your departure date. Tragedy often results from driving an improperly maintained vehicle in winter weather. Also remember that a survival kit can mean the difference between life and death if you become stranded during severe winter weather. Finally, take breaks every two hours to assure you remain alert and focused.

I'll end by providing a cautionary note about decorating for the holidays. Many of us will hang lights, wreathes, and other decorations in celebration of the holiday season. When doing so, I urge you to use caution. Before hanging anything electrical, thoroughly examine it to make sure the item is in good working order with no bare wiring or broken bulbs. Before climbing a ladder, make sure the ladder is properly positioned and that there are no hanging power lines in the area you will be working. Never climb a high ladder without help from someone who is able to steady the ladder while you are on it.

Please enjoy a safe and happy holiday season. You are all valued members of the SMDC/ARSTRAT team, and we very much look forward to your return in the New Year. On behalf of my family and the command team, I wish you all a very Happy Holiday Season!