

# Navigating the Holiday Season While on Deployment or Away from Home

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## Introduction

The holiday season can be especially challenging when you're deployed or working far from home. For many, this time of year brings a longing for connection, traditions, and the comfort of loved ones. Yet, being away during the holidays doesn't mean you can't find moments of joy, connection, and meaning.

This resource provides practical strategies to help you navigate the unique challenges of being away from home during the holidays while maintaining your mental health and resilience.

## Why the Holidays Can Be Hard When You're Away

1. **Feelings of Isolation:** The absence of family and friends during the holidays can heighten feelings of loneliness and disconnection.
2. **Missed Traditions:** Not being able to participate in familiar celebrations or traditions can lead to a sense of loss.
3. **Increased Workload or Stress:** Deployments or humanitarian work often come with demanding schedules, leaving little time for personal reflection or celebration.
4. **Emotional Weight of the Work:** Working in high-stress or high-risk environments during the holidays can amplify the emotional toll of the job, especially when you're witnessing hardship or crises.

## Signs You May Be Struggling

- Feeling unusually irritable, sad, or withdrawn
- Difficulty concentrating or staying motivated
- Physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, or sleep disturbances
- A heightened sense of homesickness or emotional overwhelm

## Practical Strategies for Coping

### 1. Create Your Own Traditions

- Celebrate in a way that's meaningful to you, whether it's a special meal, a movie night, or decorating your space with holiday touches.
- Involve colleagues or teammates in these activities to create a shared sense of community.

### 2. Stay Connected

- Schedule video or phone calls with loved ones to stay engaged in their celebrations.
- Write letters or send messages to share your thoughts and holiday wishes.

### 3. Focus on Gratitude

- Reflect on what you're grateful for, even in challenging circumstances.
- Consider keeping a gratitude journal or sharing your reflections with others.

### 4. Take Care of Yourself

- Prioritize rest, proper nutrition, and hydration.
- Incorporate physical activity into your routine to reduce stress and boost your mood.

### 5. Acknowledge Your Feelings

- It's okay to feel homesick or emotional during this time. Acknowledging these feelings can be the first step toward processing them.
- If needed, reach out to a trusted friend, colleague, or counselor for support.

### 6. Engage in Service

- Giving back to others can bring a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Look for opportunities to support your local community or team while on deployment.

### 7. Set Boundaries

- If holiday expectations feel overwhelming, remember that it's okay to step back and focus on what feels manageable for you.

### 8. Plan for Post-Holiday Connections

- Arrange a time to celebrate with loved ones when you return. Having something to look forward to can make the holiday season feel less daunting.

## Conclusion: Finding Meaning in the Season

While the holidays may look different this year, they can still hold meaning and joy. Focus on what you can control, embrace new traditions, and remember that connection, gratitude, and kindness are at the heart of the season—no matter where you are.



By prioritizing your mental health and resilience, you can navigate the holidays with grace and purpose, even when far from home.

If you found this resource helpful and believe you or your organization could benefit from further support on these topics, the Headington Institute offers a range of services to meet your needs. We provide in-person and virtual workshops, webinars, psychological consultations, and leadership consultations tailored to help teams and individuals navigate high-stress environments and foster resilience.

For more information, visit our contact page at <https://www.headington-institute.org/contact/>. Current clients can email us directly at [support@headington-institute.org](mailto:support@headington-institute.org). We're here to support you.