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While many in the Charleston family are preparing to celebrate the year's most joyous moments, many others are not. As the music chimes ring and the television blares "shop 'till you drop in the name of credit cards," some people feel an acute sense of loneliness and sadness.

For the military family there are several sources of stress this time of year. Absence of family members is especially common.

Active-duty members may be half-way around the world over the holidays. This also disrupts family traditions on how the holidays are celebrated and puts extra stress on the remaining parent, or caretakers of children, at a time when they are extra excited and difficult to manage.

For some personnel there is the stress of decisions on who to visit. Sometimes parents are divorced and live far away from each other. Visiting everyone who wants to be visited may cost a fortune. So the question of "who do we disappoint this time?" has to be answered.

If you come from a strong and loving family, being away from them for the first time can be very lonely, until you have established new traditions for celebrating the holidays. Since everyone's expectations of this family time are

# Holiday Blues and what you can do to cope with them

heightened, being alone, sipping eggnog may be too stark a contrast with how Christmas "is supposed to be."

For single people there is a growing sense of not fitting in, loneliness and embarrassment about not having anywhere to go.

If family visits are destructive due to a parent's alcoholism or mental illness, there is particular anxiety about whether to visit out of duty, or find a good excuse so they don't have to visit.

Additionally, some recently divorced or single people do not want to feel as if they are some type of hard-luck case or squadron poster child. Especially in the case of divorce or a recent breakup, the holidays can be a stark reminder of how their world has been turned upside down.

What was normal is now radically different, and lonely.

Some people can become so depressed and feel so alienated from others that they "can't stand it," and may see suicide as the

only solution. Suicide may become a way to take control of their pain. A suicide attempt may also become their only way to let other people know they need help. Several members of Team Charleston have had their vision of family torn apart through a spouse's adultery or through divorce.

In fact, depression and relationship problems are the risk factors most clearly increasing the likelihood of a suicide attempt.

To help combat these problems, first, be reasonable in your expectations. It's not possible to visit everybody, it's not smart to deplete your bank account "splurging on the kids," and it is lonely without someone who's deployed, so surround yourself with people.

Second, don't accept other people's unrealistic expectations. Accept that everyone truly can't be visited every year. Maybe it would be a good idea to stay home and establish new holiday

traditions, especially if you now are a parent, not just someone's son or daughter.

Third, make a single or separated person feel wanted and welcome. Married people can invite a single person to their home for supper, or coffee and dessert. Take advantage of squadron or section functions and actually talk to and learn about others, don't just stand in the corner and down another drink.

Realize also, other people may be shy, nervous or bummed out. They could need a smiling face or invitation to talk. Make the first move.

Lastly, if depression has been a problem in the past, it may be coming on again, get help.

You may not need "counseling," just a feeling of connection to a caring person available to listen. My staff and I in Behavioral Sciences are here for you as are the chapel staff, your first sergeant and many others.

We all know this can be a difficult time for many people and no, you won't be bothering us or "ruining someone else's holiday," as many depressed people fear. Let us do whatever we can to help make this a joyous holiday time for our Charleston family.

For more information during duty hours, call 963-6852. After duty hours, call the Acute Care Clinic at 963-6747.