

JOINING FORCES



Joining Families

HELPING, CARING AND LEARNING

War Movies: Advising Service Members and their Families

“Today’s war movies, unlike the John Wayne movies of yesterday, often disturb rather than entertain.”

War movies are a longstanding part of American culture, but today’s war movies are even more graphic and realistic. The vividness of combat, destruction, human death and body mutilation greatly affect combat veterans who not only see the movie but recall their experiences. The films can stir powerful memories of battle. Young children may have difficulty distinguishing these movies from reality.

Combat veterans are often drawn to war movies out of their experiences. For those soldiers who are struggling with post traumatic stress symptoms, such powerful images may serve as **traumatic reminders** that can stir troubling memories and nightmares. For some Army Families, the movies may further the distress and anxiety of deployment separations, while for others it may draw them closer to their military member’s experience.

Whether to watch more violent films is a personal choice to be decided by each individual and family. Here is some helpful advice to communicate to families about watching war movies.

What to Communicate

- Today’s war movies may disturb rather than entertain.
- You do not have to watch the movie or you can watch it at a later date.
- Read some reviews beforehand to help you consider its impact on you and your family.
- If your spouse is deployed, take a friend along as it is often helpful to talk to someone who understands your family’s experience.
- If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed by your emotions during the film leave the theater or turn off the television. You can always watch the rest at another time.

Children, Movies, and Deployment

- Children under the age of 12 often have difficulty distinguishing between reality and the fantasy of movies. Distress at this age can show up as requests for parental reassurance, nightmares or repetitive play about a distressing theme or image in the movie.
- Graphic films are not appropriate for young children (under the age of 13).
- These movies may be disturbing for families or children of any age who currently have a loved one in harm’s way.

For more information on how to advise families about watching war movies, go to:

www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org