



Heartwarming ways to Help our heroes this holiday!

Whether you create a festive care package, or pitch in on the homefront to support a military family, there are plenty of wonderful ways to support and salute our nation's troops this holiday!



1 Send care! Find a connection!

"Put out the word at your church or community center," says Brittany Catton of The Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA.org). "Chances are a friend or co-worker knows of a serviceperson or unit you can send a care package to." Or head to Any Soldier.com, says Deanna Cole of MilitaryFamily.com. "It's like Match.com

for care packages! Troops sign themselves up and specify their needs; just click on the soldier you'd like to help."

● **Tip!** Use USPS Priority Mail (free!) flat-rate boxes, says Benita Koeman of Operation WeAreHere.com, a resource for military supporters. "When you use an APO/FPO address, you'll get a discount on postage."

Support canine warriors!

Go to SupportOurTroops.org, click "About SOT" and "Programs." Then head to "Military Paws" to send a canine care package filled with anything from treats to doggie goggles!



2 Creative ways to support military families!

Ship an angel hug!

Think a "hug" can't fit in a package? Think again! "Get some butcher paper at the craft store and have a child whose parent is deployed lie on the paper," says Catton. "Trace her outline from the waist up with arms outspread like she's ready to give a hug—for 'angel wings'—and cut along the outline. Children can decorate their 'embrace' and put it in a care package to their mom or dad. Make it a fun event for kids of military families at your community center, or do it for an individual family in your neighborhood."

Include fun items!

Phone cards, cotton socks and baby wipes, check!

A few other items on our heroes' wish lists? Instant coffee, hot chocolate and oatmeal packets, says Jil Hinds of SaluteHeroes.org. Because hot breakfasts are no longer served in Afghanistan, oatmeal and cocoa mixes are truly a "hot" commodity. What else?

"A lot of our troops tell us they want recent DVDs and music," adds Catton. "I just sent my boyfriend the new Taylor Swift CD," she smiles. "It lets them create an 'entertainment library' to leave behind for the next unit." Also great: Include cards for various occasions, say, birthdays and Valentine's Day, says Koeman, so soldiers can send them home to loved ones.



Make pretty packages!

A huge need? Female-friendly care packages! "When my daughter was serving, she'd say, 'Mom, please send me girly things,'" recalls Cole. "They want feminine items like manicure/pedicure kits in natural, nude colors; tweezers, lip balm that smells good, like strawberry—and face lotion. Two of my best friends are serving; I sent them anti-wrinkle Olay face lotion," she says. "Just like you and me, our female troops want to feel pretty."

● **Tip!** Help send a "reverse" care package! At FullCircleHome.org, you can sponsor gift packages for troops to send to their heroes: their moms, wives and girlfriends back home!



Set up a festive photo shoot!

Gather friends and family of a soldier for a photo shoot, suggests Catton. "Put up holiday decorations in a corner of your church or community center to create a festive backdrop, serve some cookies and have a great time playing photographer!"



Create a comfort quilt!

Love to sew? Use your talents to comfort kids on the homefront, suggests Catton. "Through the ASYMCA's 'Operation Kid Comfort', children of the deployed receive quilts with a picture of Mom or Dad on them. The ASYMCA prints out the pictures on photo fabric and incorporates them into the quilts made by volunteers." Learn how to volunteer at a participating branch or how to donate at ASYMCA.org.



Make an "arrival" advent calendar!

Need a great gift for kids of a serviceperson about to return home? "Trace a Christmas tree on green paper," says Catton. "Cut it out, make a calendar on it and place Post-its over the days. Kids can pull off a note each day until Mom or Dad is due back!"

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