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11 ways to support the family of a deployed service member



By Linda Dahlstrom / Starbucks Newsroom

When Shannon Feltz's husband was deployed to Iraq in 2008, her son, Ian, was in the 11th grade. One of the things that still touches her all these years later was how some of their adult male friends went out of their way to do things with her son and try to keep his mind off his worry about his dad.

Allie Fiorino remembers how when her husband was in serving in Iraq a friend would come to her house when her young daughter was napping to visit and drink coffee. "She'd just let me talk," she said. "She was a military spouse who knew where I was coming from."

Last year, nearly [200,000 active military personnel](#) were deployed outside the United States, according to the Department of Defense. But for each service member who is deployed, also affected are spouses, children, parents and other loved ones at home. An entire family serves

when one person does, notes Kathy Roth-Douquet, chief executive officer of [Blue Star Families](#), a non-profit organization supporting military families and a key Starbucks partner.

While military families often know how to support each other, civilians may not. Some offer help in a general way, such as “Let me know if you need anything,” which is appreciated, but it can be hard to know if people really mean it. And it can be difficult to ask for help for specific things, some say.

Starbucks asked partners who are military spouses who have experienced deployments, as well as Roth-Douquet, for their tips on what has been most helpful to them. Here is what they said:

1. Ask if you can mow the lawn or shovel the snow.
2. Send a text message or call a military spouse regularly during a deployment to check in.
3. Offer to babysit and give the spouse a break to run errands or just take some time for himself or herself.
4. Share a meal. Invite them over, order take-out or bake a casserole to freeze.
5. Show you care by asking questions like, “Why has your family chosen to serve?” (“People have really uplifting reasons for it and it makes you feel good to talk about it,” said Blue Star Family’s Roth-Douquet.)
6. Invite kids to focus on the positive by asking questions like “Tell me about the last time you talked to your dad/mom. What did you share about what you are doing?” (Stay away from questions like “Do you miss your mom/dad?” said Feltz.)

7. Put together a care package for the family at home, such as a family movie night kit that contains home, such as a family movie night kit that contains popcorn and movies.

8. Picking up the tab for lunch or dinner can mean a lot, especially when money is tight. Or consider giving a gift card so the family can treat themselves.

9. Help run errands such as going grocery shopping or picking up the kids.

10. Invite them for to join you for holiday celebrations, even if you think they may have other plans. (“No one should spend the holidays alone,” stresses Feltz.)

11. Make them feel cared for by giving little tokens of appreciation. (“It could even be something like, ‘I saw this candle and thought of you,’” said Katie Scragg, whose husband has been deployed twice. “You can almost feel forgotten.”)