

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS OF LONE SOLDIERS

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“

BEING A LONE SOLDIER MOM HAS TAUGHT ME ABOUT STRENGTHS I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD. IT HAS ALSO UNWRAPPED FEARS I DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED.

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**-Mindi Gordon,
Mother of a lone soldier currently in Gaza**

The phone doesn't stop pinging with news updates. Well-meaning friends and families are checking in to see if you have heard from your son and all you want to do is curl up into a ball and cry. The constant fear, stress, loneliness is so much to bear all while putting up a brave face for the world -and especially, your child.





Parenting a lone soldier is a unique experience and hard to describe. So unique, that when typing “parent of lone soldier” into Google, Israel is the only nation that shows up. Which means that the only other people in the world that understand what you are going through are other parents of lone soldiers in the IDF!

Your heart is in Israel but your every day life is not. How can a parent cope under these exceptional circumstances?

First thing to keep in mind, is that an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is NORMAL! And there is nothing more abnormal than living thousands of miles away from your child who is at war. What you are experiencing is life altering which means that your current YOU may not be the same as your past YOU.



Here are some tips to help you cope:

Be kind and accepting of yourself:

You may not be enjoying the hobbies and outlets you used to take pleasure in. Try to find something that can calm and distract the current YOU instead of feeling frustrated by the inability to enjoy activities you once loved.

Find a support system that can support you in the way you currently need:

There may be times that you don't want to talk to anyone (or talk more than usual).

- Sometimes friends or family that used to be the ones you confided in may not be appropriate in this situation because they don't "get it" or their reactions can exacerbate yours.
- This may mean finding a new means of support. Ex. Another parent of a lone soldier or support group.



You may be feeling a range and intensity of emotions that are not typical of you. Understand that these are normal. Accept them as feelings that are helping you adapt to the current situation. These may include the following:

Numbness:

This is a coping mechanism to help you get through your day.

A simple comment may trigger **anger** (“how dare they ask that of me, don’t they know what I am going through?”)

Anxiety, panic attacks, and catastrophizing are normal even for people who have never experienced this before.



Here are some current questions that we have been receiving from parents of lone soldiers:

Q: How do I handle the inability to reach my child for weeks on end?

A: It is important to acknowledge what a difficult position this is to be in. Often, being the passive individual in the relationship is more challenging than the one doing the life risking activity! Your child is being kept busy following orders with very little time to think, unlike his parent who can make worrying a full-time career. Keeping yourself and your mind occupied can be very helpful in preventing the anxious thoughts from setting in.

Q: I know too many soldiers who have been killed or critically injured at this point of the war. How do I keep myself from fearing the same will happen to my child?

A: Balancing reality and hope is not easy! It is very painful to witness something devastating occur that that can just as easily be happening to your own child. It is hard to keep the dark thoughts at bay. Every person has their own way of coping with this. Some ways of coping may involve showing support to the families of fallen soldiers via money, gifts, letters or shiva calls. Another way is to channel the understanding of life's preciousness by sending love to your child and cherishing every moment that you have. It can be helpful to document each interaction with a photo, video, or handwritten note. And sometimes, when all else fails, a good cry is what is needed to keep putting one foot in front of the other.



Q: What will my child look like when he finally comes home?

A: Most individuals are resilient and a majority of soldier do not experience PTSD. Their perspective on life may be changed for the positive with an appreciation for life, formation of close-knit bonds, and pride in being a part of history with the ability to protect the Jewish people and Israel. For any soldiers who are having trouble coping, there are tremendous resources and infrastructure to help soldiers and veterans. Israel takes great pride in their soldiers and do a great job of supporting them.

Q: Can I share my anxiety with my lone soldier child?

A: A soldier does not have the luxury to focus on his emotions and fears. This will debilitate him in action. It is important to put on a brave face and just send lots of support and love. Telling him how great you and the family are doing and how proud you are of him is going to give him the strength to keep going. You can and should talk about your anxiety to the right support person, which is not your lone soldier child.

**Any additional questions, comments
or to request assistance, please
contact trauma@ohelfamily.org**