



# Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

Understanding the Effects of Trauma and Traumatic Events to Help Prevent, Mitigate and Foster Recovery for Individuals, Organizations and Communities  
A Program of Uniformed Services University, Our Nation's Federal Medical School, Bethesda, Maryland • [www.usuhs.mil/csts/](http://www.usuhs.mil/csts/)

## POWERFUL MOVIES, POWERFUL MEMORIES: *Viewing Advice for Military Men and Women*

Movies such as the “The War Tapes” and the HBO special “Baghdad ER” have received critical acclaim for their moving portrayals of our servicemen and women such as yourself. While these films highlight heroism and action, they also graphically depict the ravages and anguish of war. Watching these films may stir powerful emotions in you ranging from sadness, worry, fear and anxiety, to actual pain and flashbacks. These feelings are usually temporary but they may become disturbing and last for hours or days after the movie is over. Military psychiatrists, alert to the possible effects of such viewing, have prepared this fact sheet for returning war veterans, other active duty members, National Guard, and reserve forces, as well as their families. The fact sheet addresses important questions: *Should I watch? If so when, and with whom?*



### BEFORE VIEWING

- First remember that you *do not* have to watch the movie, or *do not have to watch it now*.
- You might consider watching it after reading more about what is in the movie—there will probably be a review in your paper or on the web.
- If you have any of these concerns, watch the movie at a later time – it will probably be rerun.
- One option is to record it and watch in the daytime, rather than the evening.
- Other options are to watch with a loved one that you can talk to during the movie rather than sit and “take it in” alone.
- Or, you might consider watching with a buddy. It is often helpful to have a friend who understands your deployment experience and is available to talk during or after the movie.

### WHILE VIEWING

- Talking during the movie to another adult can “break the spell” of the movie and remind you that you are home or with friends and not in the scene you are watching.
- Get up and move around during the movie — get up to grab a soda or glass of water.
- Watch from a different position so you see the entire television set and not just the screen. Changing your viewing position or watching from a distance can remind you “it is only a movie.”
- If you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed by your emotions during the movie turn it off or walk away.
- “Toughing it out” is not a measure of your courage or fortitude, and may lead to more problems in the long run.
- Remember, you can always watch the movie at another time.

### AFTER THE MOVIE

- It might be helpful to talk about your feelings with your spouse, significant other, close friend or a parent. Talking about strong emotions can be difficult but it is often a good first step in reducing distress and restoring a sense of normalcy.
- If talking is not working or you cannot find someone to talk to, consider clergy (either civilian or military) or contact your local community behavioral health clinic. Counselors and clergy are trained to assist people in stressful situations.

### EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

- Graphic movies are not appropriate for young children (under the age of 12 or 13) and may not be appropriate even for older children depending on the child.

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- While you may be tempted to watch with your children or a younger brother or sister in an effort to show pieces of your own deployment experience, graphic violence is particularly stressful for children.
- Scenes from these movies may increase children's fears and worries, rather than teach them about your experiences. In the event of redeployment, a child may hold onto these fears rather than the importance of the difficult job you are doing.

## SEEKING HELP

You can (and should) discuss your thoughts about watching the movie with your physician if you have concerns before watching. Of course, you should also let your doctor know about any changes in mood, concentration, or sleep that you notice if you choose to watch. Seeking help for emotional issues related to deployment and reintegration into family life and one's routine is a positive step, and one that may occur as a result of watching these movies.



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