



POWERFUL MOVIES, POWERFUL MEMORIES OF WAR *Advice on Whether and How to Watch*

Movies depicting war, especially those that include live footage from recent or ongoing events, can be very powerful, but they can also evoke powerful memories. The public is at once fascinated and distressed by traumatic events that occur on one's soil or elsewhere around the globe. In addition, the fact that many of these events are historic, or that we know individuals who have been or continue to be affected, often creates a sense that we *should* watch these intense media productions.

The indirect exposure of watching movie and television accounts of war can be difficult and in some instances

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result in discomfort, distress and more serious psychological consequences. Even those movies and documentaries with favorable reviews can stir powerful memories and emotions that can be accompanied by transient or more long-term anxiety and stress.

Each individual and each family should determine their own comfort zone regarding whether to watch or not watch certain movies and television documentaries. This fact sheet provides some guidelines and tips for individuals and families who may want to watch these movies, and for those who decide not to watch.

Watching Painful Reminders: Should I Watch? If so When and with Whom?

Graphic disaster movies can stir strong emotions. These feelings are usually temporary but they may become disturbing and the feelings can last for hours or days after the movie is over.

Before the Movie

- First remember that you do not have to watch the movie, or do not have not watch it now. Consider whether watching the movie now might cause you or loved ones to worry about things for which you have no control, especially if someone you love is presently still affected or involved in responding to the disaster (in the Gulf, Iraq or Afghanistan).
- Perhaps you would rather watch 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 concerns watch the movie at a later time.
- Consider recording the movie or waiting for it as a DVD or tape to watch in the daytime rather than the evening.

- Arrange to watch with a friend or family member so that you can talk during the movie (if at home) rather than sit and only “take it in.” Sometimes individuals who have been affected directly or through personal involvement feel they just can't explain the situation or show their feelings to loved ones during or after a movie.
- If you choose to watch while your spouse is deployed watch with a friend. It is often helpful to have a friend who understands your family's experience available to talk with during or after a movie that stirs powerful emotions or memories.

During the Movie (if at Home)

- Talking during a documentary or movie to another adult can “break the spell” of what you are watching 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.

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- Watch from a different position so you see the entire television set and not only 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. You can always watch the rest at another time.

After the Movie

- 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.

Children, Movies, and Deployment

- Graphic movies about disasters are not appropriate for young children (under the age of 12 or 13). These movies may not be appropriate older children (e.g. those with a history of emotional problems or traumas, or those that are less mature). Remember that in children *intellectual maturity is not the same thing as emotional maturity*.
- These movies may not be helpful for families or children of any age who currently have a loved one in harm’s way. Scenes from these movies may increase children’s fears and worry rather than teach them about the historical significance or any part your family may have experienced in the disaster. Children may only “see” the frightening parts.

Remember

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.

PLACE LOCAL CONTACT INFORMATION HERE



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
4301 Jones Bridge Road
Bethesda, MD 20814-4799
Tel: 301-295-2470
Fax: 301-319-6965

www.usuhs.mil/csts | www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org