

# What to say to a veteran

AS Remembrance Day approaches, with Canadian troops fighting and working to help Afghanistan, you may be wondering what to say to a veteran who has been through so much, as well as to men and women who continue to serve.

Although I've been in the military, I have never had a shot fired at me in anger, so I can't presume to speak to what these people have been through. However, wiser men than me have considered this, and I just wanted to share some ideas.

According to psychologist Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, who, with Loren W. Christensen, wrote the book "On Combat" (PPCT Research Publications, 2004), three things are critical to helping the veteran: understanding, affirmation, and support.

You can show understanding by express-

ing your gladness at their safe return, whether it was from a European or Asian battlefield or the Atlantic in the Second World War, the mountains of Korea, the peacekeeping missions that didn't always have a real peace to keep, or most recently from the sandy, mountainous environment of Afghanistan.

If you're curious about what they may have experienced, consider the trauma these men and women have been through. A respectful, open-ended question like "How was it for you?" will let them talk as much, or as little, as they feel comfortable.

You can express affirmation by saying things like, "you did the right thing", "you did what was asked of you", or "I'm proud of what you did."

Wearing a poppy is a typical show of sup-

port at this time of year, but if you're doing anything else to help the troops — sending care packages overseas, helping family members still here, helping take care of a veteran relative, even flying a Canadian flag — let them know.

If all else fails, respectful, simple and sincere works, too, for both vets and serving members.

"You've done a good job."

"You're doing a great job."

"Thank you."

Afghanistan is a politically heated topic, but it is critical to understand that the service member who follows orders of those we elected to make decisions is not the politician or the policy maker.

Complaining about war to a soldier is like complaining to the fire fighter running into the burning building about what city hall is up to. You may not like what politicians are doing at any given time, so it's fair game to complain to them. It is not fair to disparage the courage and commitment of men or women in uniform who do what they're told by those we picked at the ballot box to govern.

In closing, I want to repeat the words of someone who's been there, and done that: "On Nov. 11 this year, do not awkwardly grin and wave at a passing soldier or veteran as they march by on the street; proudly walk up to them and thank them for the job they have done. Engage them in conversation and listen to their stories. And if you can't do that, then quietly visit the final resting place of a soldier, lay a poppy and give solemn thanks for the chapter that they have written." (Major Geoff Abthorpe, Guest Column, Chronicle-Journal, Oct. 7)

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