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Tips for Handling the Stress of Wartime and Media Coverage

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Tips for Handling the Stress of Wartime and Media Coverage

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Although Americans will undoubtedly have individual responses to the war in Iraq, a counseling psychologist at Illinois Wesleyan University suggests that maintaining mental health during a time of increased stress involves, among other things, being careful consumers of media coverage.

Connie Horton, director of counseling services at Illinois Wesleyan, says that while you cannot control what the news is, you can choose how much you watch it.

“From both professional literature and from personal experience, watching news of the war just before bed often does not lead to a good night’s sleep,” she says. “And watching the news when you can’t sleep probably won’t help, either.”

Horton says it is important to find trustworthy sources for information. “In the rush to beat each other to the story or to create better ratings, some media outlets are being irresponsible. Chat rooms and online sources are certainly suspect,” she cautions. “You should watch out for sources full of speculation. There is enough to worry about without creating more imagined or possible tragedies or threats.”

In addition, Horton believes that it is important to find a balance. “As generations past have taught us, in the midst of even the most serious war, life at some level, for many of us, goes on,” she says.

One source of stress can be conflicts of opinion between individuals. In that instance, says Horton, there are several important ways to minimize the impact.

“When there are conflicts of opinion, it is important to handle them with respect,” she says. “First, you need to listen — really listen. Second, see what values or ideals you have in common. And third, after you have really heard and understood the other person’s opinion, share your own opinion responsibly. We all need support and a sense of community during these times.”

To arrange an interview with Dr. Horton to discuss these issues, call Jeff Hanna or Ann Aubry at 309-556-3181.