

## EMOTIONAL AND STRESS MANAGEMENT SKILLS

### DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Today we will be talking about emotional and stress management skills.

The **ground rules** for this discussion are:

- (1) No personal attacks on anyone's opinions
- (2) Allow each participant to express themselves
- (3) Make head calls at your leisure, just don't interrupt the group
- (4) Keep your language clean as not to offend others
- (5) PARTICIPATION BY ALL!!!!!!

#### **Gain Attention**

Every Marine experiences stress. In fact, stress is necessary to build strength. But, too much stress can harm even the strongest Marine. How many of you remember the stress continuum? The stress continuum has four zones to help identify levels of stress in units and individuals: Ready-Green, Reacting-Yellow, Injured-Orange, and Ill-Red. (If participants cannot recall characteristics for each zone, review the enclosure.) It's important that we learn how to manage our emotions and stress reactions so that they don't interfere with our ability to perform as Marines.

**Key points** for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Identifying emotions and stress reactions
- (2) Explaining the causes of stress reactions and warning signs
- (3) Describing stress management tools and protective factors for dealing with stress reactions
- (4) Explaining the importance of identification and referral for yourself and fellow Marines
- (5) Identifying available emotional and stress management resources for self or peer referral

**Learning Objective:** After this guided discussion, you will have a better understanding of emotions and stress reactions in yourself and fellow Marines. You will also have a better understanding of warning signs and protective factors (see appendix for definition). Finally, you will be equipped with tools, skills, and resources that will help you deal with stress and help other Marines manage their stress.

#### **DISCUSSION**

We will begin by reading a scenario, reviewing facts and discussing relevant questions at the end of the scenario.

PFC Lee lives off base and is always running late for morning formation. He has already been marked UA twice so he is anxious about being on time. One morning, while he is driving to the base, he encounters heavy traffic. He gets stuck behind a slow-moving truck and is barely moving at 40 mph even though the speed limit is 65 mph. Then, another car cuts in front of him with no warning. PFC Lee barely misses hitting it. As he continues to drive, he starts getting angry. He will be marked UA again and his sergeant, whom he looks up to, will chew him out. With three UAs, he thinks he will lose his chance for a promotion and a raise that he really needs. His family relies on his income and definitely will be disappointed if he is not promoted. The more he thinks about it, the more Lee blames the other driver for

his problems. He becomes increasingly enraged and decides to run him off the road. Lee starts speeding up.

### **KEY POINT 1**

1. What emotions and stressors does PFC Lee face? (Participants need to provide only three to four of the possible answers.)
  - a) Heavy traffic and dangerous behavior of other drivers
  - b) Concern about another UA
  - c) Reprimand from leadership
  - d) Potential loss of promotion
  - e) Financial concerns
  - f) Family members being disappointed
  - g) Several emotions: frustration, anxiety, worry, anger, shame, fear, aggression
2. How did PFC Lee react to these stressors?
  - a) Became angry
  - b) Fixated on his problems
  - c) Blamed someone else for his problems
  - d) Engaged in extreme, dangerous behavior
3. What process should Lee use to decide how to respond to his stressors?
  - a) Recognize and check his immediate reaction
  - b) Analyze the situation and consider outcomes
  - c) Make a decision and act

Your decision making should include thinking through the protective factors you can use to protect yourself from stress and negative stress reactions.

4. What are some protective factors Lee could employ? (Participants need to provide only five to six of the possible answers.)
  - a) Talk with leaders and peers
  - b) Focus on his mission as a Marine
  - c) Stay motivated and focused on getting a promotion
  - d) Adopt a healthy perspective about his problems
  - e) Remember his responsibility to be a good Marine
  - f) Hold himself accountable for his actions and being late for morning formation
  - g) Consider whether his actions are consistent with the Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment
  - h) Make good decisions in response to the behavior of the other driver
  - i) Build healthy relationships and talk with family members
  - j) Exercise to burn off stress
  - k) Maintain a positive attitude about how his day will improve
  - l) Get adequate sleep and good nutrition

PFC Lee was challenged by an everyday situation that many of us have probably faced. Based on his immediate reaction, he made a decision with dangerous consequences, both for himself and another person. PFC Lee might have made a better choice if he had followed the right process for handling stress and making good decisions: recognize your immediate reaction, dial back your emotions and analyze,

consider outcomes, and act. He could also have employed protective factors that would have helped him manage his stress in better ways.

**Interim Summary:** We just finished discussing how one Marine reacted to his emotions and stressors in an everyday challenging situation. We also talked about a process for making good decisions and explored protective factors. Now, let's look at another scenario.

## **KEY POINT 2**

Cpl Brown and Cpl Jones have never gotten along. Their bad history goes back to boot camp. Cpl Brown thinks that Cpl Jones spread rumors about him cheating on a test. Cpl Jones thinks Cpl Brown is a bully. They have barely been able to keep their mutual hostility under control. Lately, it has become even harder because they work in the same hangar and see each other every day. You know that Cpl Brown is having problems with his wife. He is spending very little time with his family and his wife is upset. Cpl Brown has gained weight and doesn't sleep well. He cannot concentrate on his work responsibilities. He drinks at a bar for two hours every night "to let off steam." Cpl Brown hears from others that Cpl Jones has been complaining about him to everyone in their unit. He confronts Cpl Jones about it. Cpl Jones denies everything and accuses Cpl Brown of trying to make trouble for him. The following week, Cpl Brown can't find his work tools. He immediately leaps to the conclusion that Cpl Jones took them. He repeatedly tells you that Cpl Jones is a jerk and needs to pay for what he has done. You observe Cpl Brown following Cpl Jones out to his car one day and they begin arguing.

1. What is the problem here?

Cpl Brown and Cpl Jones don't get along. Their personal dislike has spread into their work lives. Cpl Brown is engaging in unhealthy drinking behavior. His relationship with his wife is also under stress. Cpl Brown's hostility towards Cpl Jones seems to be escalating.

2. What are the risk factors that could worsen the situation between Cpl Brown and Cpl Jones?

- a) History of a bad relationship
- b) Unresolved anger
- c) Cpl Brown's alcohol abuse

3. What are warning signs that Cpl Brown needs help with his stress? (Participants need to provide only three to four of the possible answers.)

- a) Difficulty sleeping
- b) Weight gain
- c) Difficulty concentrating on routine tasks
- d) Difficulty staying calm and controlling anger
- e) Reckless behavior
- f) Withdrawing from family members

4. What can you do to help a fellow Marine under stress?

It is every Marine's responsibility to help a fellow Marine deal with stress-related issues and make good decisions. Talk to your fellow Marine and encourage him to seek assistance.

- a) Tell him you have noticed changes in his behavior and ask open-ended questions, e.g., "I've seen you arguing with Cpl Jones. What's going on? I know you haven't been sleeping well too."
- b) Express a willingness to listen and help, e.g., "Whenever you need to talk, I'm always ready to listen. I want to help you stay in the green zone."
- c) Point to protective factors that could help, e.g., "I know that things seem tough right now, but it

will get better. Let's go for a run together to clear your head."

- d) Encourage him to seek help from other resources, e.g., "The Marine Corps has resources to help you with just about any problem. Take advantage of them. Being a good Marine means that you get help as soon as possible so that you can be in a state of readiness to accomplish our mission. Recognizing that you need help, and asking for and accepting it, are not signs of weakness. Seeking help is a sign of strength."
- f) Follow up to offer support and make sure he is getting help, e.g., "We had a good talk yesterday. I hope you followed through and contacted the chaplain. He's a great listener."

5. What resources are available?

- a) Big five: peers, chain of command, chaplain, medical/Marine Corps Community Services resources, and the DSTRESS Line
- b) Community Counseling Program
- c) Military and Family Life Consultant
- d) OSCAR

Cpl Brown had risk factors that increased his risk for problems with Cpl Jones. Cpl Brown also exhibited numerous warning signs that he needed help with his stress. If you see a fellow Marine who needs assistance to deal with stressors, take steps to talk to him and refer him to useful resources.

### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

Today we discussed emotional and stress management. Managing stress starts with recognizing its causes and how you respond to them. I am confident that you now have a better understanding of tools and protective factors you can use to manage your own stress and to help your fellow Marines deal with their stressors. It is equally important to take advantage of Marine Corps resources. Getting help, and encouraging your fellow Marines to seek help, is essential for ensuring that every Marine is performing at their very best.

#### **Closing Statement:**

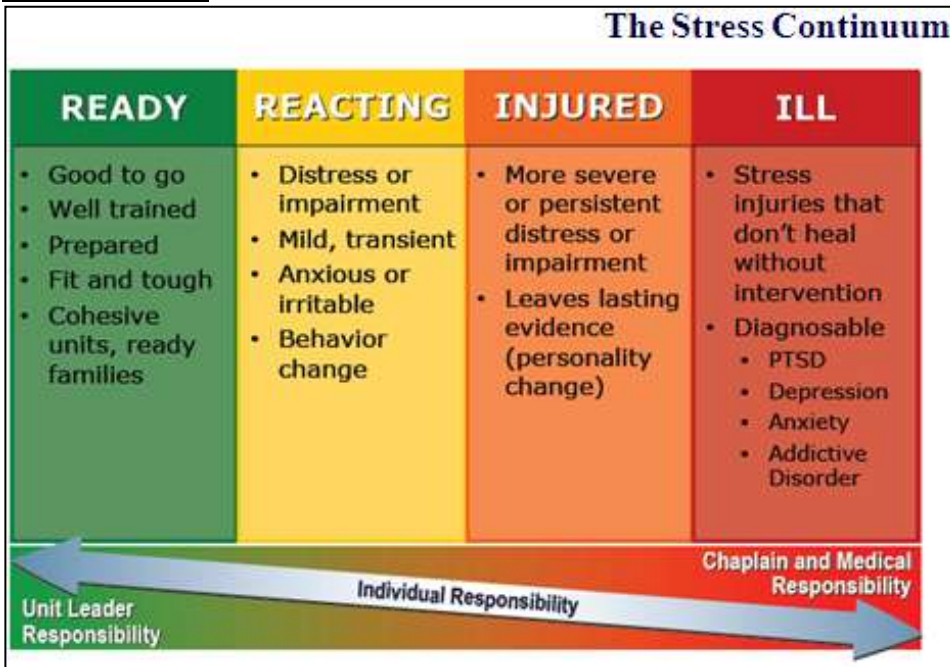
Stress is universal. Although we use stress to build Marines, too much stress can be harmful. Even the most motivated and well-trained Marines can find themselves challenged by stress. The objective for today was to provide you with a better understanding of emotions and stress reactions in yourself and fellow Marines as well as a better understanding of warning signs and protective factors. We also sought to equip you with tools, skills, and resources to help you deal with stress and help other Marines manage their stress. Taking care of problems as they arise, by using protective factors, Marine Corps resources, and other tools, helps us handle whatever the Marine Corps needs of us.

### **END OF DISCUSSION**

### **RESOURCES**

- 1. Combat Stress MCRP 6-11C
- 3. MCO 5351.1 Combat and Operational Stress Control Program
- 4. MAPIT Guide. Retrieved from [http://bhinc.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT\\_Guide.pdf](http://bhinc.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf).

## ENCLOSURE 1



1. Green is Ready. Signs of a Ready Marine, in the Green Zone are:
  - a) Remaining calm and steady
  - b) Being confident in oneself and others
  - c) Getting the job done
  - d) Remaining in control
  - e) Possessing sound mind, body, spirit and social fitness
  - f) Behaving ethically and morally
  - g) Retaining a sense of humor
  - h) Being at peace with oneself
2. Marines in the Green Zone adapt to cope with stressors and continue to function well. The Green Zone is where most of us are most of the time; when a stressor enters the picture, we can slide into the Yellow Zone.
3. Yellow is Reacting. The Yellow Zone is always temporary, common, and reversible. There is some anxiety, irritability, and behavior change, but the Marine is going to go back to Green on his or her own after the stress is removed. Every Marine goes in and out of the Yellow Zone.
4. Signs of stress reaction, in the Yellow Zone are:
  - a) Cutting corners on the job
  - b) Being short tempered, irritable or grouchy
  - c) Having trouble falling asleep
  - d) Eating too much or too little
  - e) Losing some interest, energy or enthusiasm
  - f) Not enjoying usual activities
  - g) Keeping to oneself
  - h) Being overly loud or hyperactive
  - i) Feeling worried, anxious or fearful
  - j) Feeling sad or angry
  - k) Being negative or pessimistic

- l) Diminished mental focus.
5. Marines in the Yellow Zone are reacting to temporary or mild stress and show temporary signs of stress that go away on their own. Even though Yellow Zone stress reactions are temporary, you have a responsibility to engage fellow Marines experiencing temporary stress and help them manage their stress to return to the Green Zone.
  6. Orange is Injured. Marines in the Orange Zone might show a lasting change in behavior or personality caused by more severe and persistent forms of distress or loss of function. Because Orange Zone stress injuries may not resolve on their own and may last for many years; you have a responsibility to engage resources and get Marines in the Orange Zone assistance. In some cases, Orange Zone stress injuries may get worse and go into the Red Zone.
  7. Signs of stress injury, in the Orange Zone, are:
    - a) Having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
    - b) Waking up from recurrent, vivid nightmares
    - c) Being unable to enjoy usually pleasurable activities
    - d) Losing the ability to remember or think rationally and clearly
    - e) Feeling persistent, intense guilt or shame
    - f) Feeling unusually remorseless or emotionally cold
    - g) Experiencing attacks of panic or blind rage
    - h) All these symptoms are in relation to a Marine's normal demeanor and activities, making it vital to know your fellow Marines and look for changes in their behavior. Marines can recover from stress-related issues with the proper support.
  8. Red is Ill. Marines in the Red Zone experience severe distress or some loss of function that has gotten bad enough or persisted long enough to be diagnosable, its symptoms if unmanaged may significantly impact a Marine's career and family. This Marine may have Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS), anxiety, or depression. Only a qualified medical officer can diagnose a Marine in the Red Zone. You CAN help identify symptoms associated with the Red Zone; if you think a Marine is in the Red Zone, refer them for assistance utilizing the assigned representative within your chain of command.
  9. Signs of stress illness, in the Red Zone, are:
    - a) Experiencing attacks of panic or blind rage
    - b) Long-lasting and disabling distress or impairment of normal functioning
    - c) Symptoms that worsen over time rather than improve
    - d) Problems and issues that return after improving or seeming to resolve
    - e) Impairment that does not significantly improve within several weeks of returning from deployment

## **ENCLOSURE 2**



1. Protective factors reduce the likelihood of experiencing behavioral health issues. Imagine that these factors are shields helping to block combat and operational stress, intimate partner abuse and child maltreatment, suicide, and substance use disorder.
2. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines protective factors as: *Individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events. These factors also increase an individual's ability to avoid risks or hazards, and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life, now and in the future.*
3. When protective factors are strong, Marines are better able to withstand life's stressors, such as relationship stress and financial stress, and are more likely to avoid risky behaviors. They are also less likely to have negative reactions to combat and operational stress. They are more likely to develop and maintain resilience.
4. The factors closest to the Marine— in the first two center rings— are internal to us. We are not necessarily born with the internal factors, but with practice, we can incorporate them into our daily lives. Protective factors can be strengthened with practice.
5. As we move outward, we see protective factors that are influenced by others, including peers and leaders. There are times when external resources are necessary to resolve issues. These are not the only protective factors available to us; you may have other things that work for individuals.