

Managing Combat & Operational Stress

A Handbook for Marines & Families

Headquarters Marine Corps
Combat and Operational
Stress Control (COSC)





“Combat and operational stress can render any Marine incapable of focusing on the mission at hand. It impacts everyone, from the Marine’s family to the unit as a whole. **This issue must be at the forefront of our commitment to take care of one another.**”

You, as leaders, are the key. It is important that each leader in our Corps learns how to better recognize and deal with combat and operational stress. **Talk about it with your Marines.**

Set the example on how to deal with it. **Let your Marines know that it’s okay to get help so that they can get back in the fight.** Then help them to do so.”

— General James F. Amos
Commandant of the Marine Corps



Managing Combat & Operational Stress

Ignoring a stress issue won't make it go away and can make problems worse.

Stress issues are manageable and like physical injuries, treatable. Getting help is the key for Marines and veterans with combat or operational stress issues to move forward. The symptoms don't define your capabilities or your future.

If you have, or think you have, a combat or operational stress injury, including posttraumatic stress (PTS), you shouldn't go through it alone. This handbook provides strategies and resources to strengthen against future stress, mitigate current stress, and address the impacts of stress.

Contents

| | | | |
|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| Unique stresses of military life | 2 | Someone coping with severe stress may experience behavior or personality change | 18 |
| What is Stress? | | Someone with a stress injury | |
| Stress and military life | | Don't be your own enemy | |
| Operational stress | | Self-harm | |
| Stress reactions in a war zone | | | |
| How to better enjoy life | 4 | Using alcohol and drugs can make any combat or operational stress issue worse | 20 |
| Happiness is a decision made daily | | Alcohol and other drugs are not a way to cope | |
| Recreation is important | | Make a change plan | |
| Giving service | | Facts about addiction | |
| Personal growth from stress or deployment | 6 | Your health care provider may recommend various treatments | 22 |
| Thinking styles | | Psychotherapy | |
| Create a personal resume | | Medication | |
| Consider possibilities of posttraumatic growth | | | |
| Setting goals | | | |
| Take care of your body | 8 | Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Posttraumatic Stress (PTS) | 24 |
| Eat a healthy, balanced diet | | TBI and PTS reactions | |
| Regular exercise | | Healing stress illness | |
| Focus on form | | | |
| Making safe choices, reconnecting with others | 10 | Coping with stress issues | 26 |
| Consider moving if you live in an unsafe neighborhood | | Positive coping | |
| Get help to leave an abusive relationship | | Negative coping | |
| Limit exposure to traumatic stories in the media | | Stigma | |
| Constructive worrying | | | |
| Manage finances to reduce stress | | | |
| Consider joining a self-help group | | | |
| Make relationships a priority | | | |
| Relaxation techniques decrease stress on your mind and body, and improve physical performance | 12 | For friends and family | 28 |
| Consciously pay attention | | Effective communication is important | |
| Deep breathing | | Ways you can help | |
| Meditation | | Offer support and safety | |
| Other ways to relax | | Relationship maintenance | |
| | | Maintain routines | |
| | | Be kind to yourself | |
| Spirituality and building resilience | 14 | Sources of help and information | 30 |
| Spirituality | | Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) teams | |
| Prayer | | DSTRESS | |
| The Marine Corps will help | | Marine Corps Family Services | |
| | | Military OneSource | |
| | | Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) Outreach Center | |
| | | Psychological Health Outreach Program (PHOP) | |
| | | National Guard Support Center | |
| | | Veterans Affairs | |
| | | American Red Cross | |
| | | Real Warriors Campaign | |
| | | Afterdeployment.org | |
| | | HQMC Combat & Operational Stress Control (COSC) | |
| | | Behavioral Health Information Network (BHIN) | |
| | | Human Performance Resource Center (HPRC) | |
| Letting go of anger | 16 | | |
| Anger can be helpful | | | |
| Get help for managing anger | | | |
| Pre-emptive strategies | | | |

Unique Stresses of Military Life

What is stress?

Stress is a normal response to life changes — even positive ones. Stress is necessary to build strength. Most military training is based on using stress in controlled situations to strengthen resilience. This is a use of posttraumatic growth (described on **page 6**).

Everyone feels stress sometimes. But, too much stress can interfere with daily life. The negative impacts of stress can include:

- ▷ Physical problems, such as headaches, upset stomach or high blood pressure.
- ▷ Poor concentration, trouble making decisions, problems remembering things.
- ▷ Feeling anxious, frustrated, angry or depressed.

Stress and military life

Marines and their families face challenges everyday. Unique military life stressors include:

- ▷ Dislocation caused by frequent moves; having to repeatedly establish a household and routine.
- ▷ Separation from friends, relatives and support network.
- ▷ Concerns for Marine's safety during training or deployment.
- ▷ Deployments cause additional stress due to increased workload, long workdays or unpredictable hours.
- ▷ Requirements to organize personal affairs (including legal or financial) prior to deployment.

- ▷ Family separations and difficulty staying in contact with Marine—even in noncombat areas.
- ▷ Multiple separations during training or deployment can make family and parenting routines difficult.
- ▷ Marines may experience combat or operational stress.

Operational stress

Marines have tough and challenging duties—even in noncombat areas. Experience or consequences of military operations other than combat can cause changes in physical or mental functioning or behavior. These changes can be positive. Operational stress can take place during peacetime or war and on land, at sea or in the air. Combat adds additional stressors.

Stress reactions in a war zone

are common and nearly all Marines will become stronger and quickly

Stress causes a range of reactions

It's important to recognize signs of combat or operational stress in yourself and in others. The stress continuum is a tool designed to help identify levels of stress.

Green Zone (Ready)

Marines in the Green Zone adapt to cope with stressors and continue to function well. This is not the absence of stress but a mastery of it to enable effective functioning.

Signs of a Ready Marine:

- Remaining calm and steady
- Being confident in oneself and others
- Getting the job done
- Remaining in control physically, mentally and emotionally
- Behaving ethically and morally
- Sleeping enough
- Eating well and the right amount
- Working out and staying fit
- Retaining a sense of humor
- Playing well and often

- Remaining active socially and spiritually
- Being at peace with oneself.

Yellow Zone (Reacting)

Marines in the Yellow Zone feel mild and temporary distress or loss of function due to stress. Yellow Zone reactions are always temporary and reversible and are common, usually in response to something new. All training enhances skills and abilities through repeated exposure to intentionally stressful situations. Yellow Zone reactions can be recognized by their short duration and relative mildness.

Signs of Stress Reaction:

- Feeling anxious or fearful
- Feeling sad or angry
- Worrying
- Cutting corners on the job
- Being short tempered or mean
- Being irritable or grouchy

- Having trouble falling asleep
- Eating too much or too little
- Losing some interest, energy or enthusiasm
- Not enjoying usual activities
- Keeping to oneself
- Being overly loud or hyperactive
- Being negative or pessimistic
- Diminished mental focus.

Orange Zone (Injured)

The Orange or "Injured" Zone has more severe and persistent forms of distress or loss of function, signaling some kind of damage to the mind, brain or spirit. Yellow Zone reactions tend to resolve once the stress ends, but Orange Zone injuries are like a break when bent beyond limits. Like physical injuries, stress injuries occur from the barely noticeable to the more serious that may not heal without professional treatment. Stress injuries may be recognized in their early stages by the severity of the

return to the fight. Those exposed to combat will react in some way (Yellow Zone). Pay close attention to these four stressors that tend to cause stress injuries (Orange Zone):

- ▷ **Life threat.** An immediate threat to your own life.
- ▷ **Loss.** The death of close comrades, leaders or other cared-for individuals.
- ▷ **Inner conflict.** Carrying out or bearing witness to acts or failures to act that do not align with your beliefs.
- ▷ **Wear and tear.** Lack of sleep, rest and restoration, and the accumulated effects of smaller stressors over time, such as from non-operational sources.

Stress injuries may be due to a combination of stressors. Specific causes include the following:

- ▷ Life-threatening situations, such as being fired upon, ambushes or improvised explosive device (IED) blasts.

- ▷ The threat of radiological, biological, chemical or nuclear weapons.
- ▷ Death or serious injuries to peers.
- ▷ Friendly-fire incidents.
- ▷ Harsh living conditions.
- ▷ Overwork, fatigue and sleep deprivation.

Military situations besides combat can also cause stress reactions, including:

- ▷ Handling bodies and body parts.
- ▷ Taking care of the dying or seriously injured.
- ▷ Involvement in peacekeeping missions.
- ▷ Exposure to terrorist attacks.
- ▷ Being taken prisoner of war.
- ▷ Assuming responsibility for enemy prisoners of war.
- ▷ Cleaning up a war zone.
- ▷ Being sexually assaulted or harassed while on active duty.

- ▷ Witnessing training injuries.

Any Marine can have an adverse reaction to stress.

Even the most motivated and well-trained Marines can find themselves challenged by combat and operational stress. Some Marines can overcome these reactions on their own and some are going to need help.

Like physical injuries, stress-related issues heal over time. They differ in that stress-related issues are invisible, harder to recognize, and can carry greater stigma. Stress-related issues are less likely to be voluntarily reported by those affected. Physical injuries and stress-related issues can heal more quickly and completely if they are acknowledged and taken care of.

All Marines and veterans need to be alert for signs of stress reactions in themselves and in their fellow Marines.

symptoms and the intensity of the stressors that cause them. Because Orange Zone injuries may not resolve on their own, signs of a stress injury should always be considered for further evaluation. Those who are injured may not perform as expected and are at risk for future illnesses.

Signs of Stress Injury:

- Having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Waking up from recurrent, vivid nightmares
- Feeling persistent, intense guilt or shame
- Feeling unusually remorseless or emotionally cold
- Experiencing attacks of panic or blind rage
- Losing the ability to remember or think rationally and clearly
- Being unable to enjoy usually pleasurable activities

- Losing confidence in previously held moral values
- Displaying a significant and persistent change in behavior or appearance.

Red Zone (III)

Red is the zone of diagnosable mental disorders in individuals exposed to combat or other operational stressors. Red Zone illnesses are clinical mental disorders that can only be diagnosed by mental health professionals. Still, commanders, unit leaders, peers and family members should be aware of the signs of stress illnesses so they can identify them and make appropriate referrals as soon as possible. The most widely recognized stress illness is posttraumatic stress (PTS), but stress illnesses may take many different forms, often occurring at the same time in individuals.

Other common Red Zone illnesses include depressive disorders, especially major depression; anxiety disorders to include generalized anxiety and panic disorder; substance abuse or dependence.

Signs of Stress Illness:

- Long-lasting and disabling distress or impairment of normal functioning
- Impairment that does not significantly improve within several weeks of returning from deployment
- Symptoms that worsen over time rather than improve
- Problems and issues that return after improving or seeming to resolve.

All these symptoms are in relation to a Marine's normal demeanor and activities; look for changes in behavior.

How to better enjoy life

Happiness is a decision made daily,

but sometimes you need help. Most people tend to be moderately happy most of the time. You *cannot* expect to be completely happy all the time. You *can* expect to bounce back from your lows. Happier people are healthier and more productive at work. You *do not* have to make major changes in your life to be happier; small adjustments in routine and habits are easier and usually more successful.

Everyone experiences stress; you can learn to manage it and enjoy life. Uncontrolled stress can be

overwhelming; identify realistic goals (**see page 7**) and take action to reduce overall levels of stress.

There are positive responses to stress, humor is a great way to let go and feel good. Watch a funny movie, see a comedy show or share a joke with someone.

Pace yourself

Take things slowly. You don't have to do everything at once. Taking small steps will soon result in big changes.

Stress is natural and it can be a motivator to protect ourselves or solve problems. It is when stress is larger than the reality of the

problem, when fears hold you back from solving issues, or when stress is constant or overwhelming, that professional help is required.

The stress continuum (**see pages 2-3**) helps identify levels of stress. If signs are severe, not getting better or lead to thoughts of hurting yourself or others, seek help from a health care professional immediately.

Recreation is important

It is tempting to stop doing once-enjoyable activities when feeling down and unmotivated. But, becoming less active can lead to feeling less and less like doing anything. Hobbies can help reduce stress, lift your mood and increase self-esteem (**see pages 8-9**).

Why do people with stress injuries have sleep problems?

They may be "on alert." Many people with stress injuries feel they need to be on guard looking out for danger, that makes it difficult to have restful sleep. Alertness may cause trouble falling asleep, as well as sensitivity to noise that may cause you to wake easily.

They may worry or have negative thoughts. Thoughts can make it difficult to fall asleep. People with stress injuries often worry about general problems or feel they are in danger. If often troubled getting to sleep, they may start to worry that they won't be able to fall asleep. These thoughts can keep you awake.

They may use drugs or alcohol. Some people with stress injuries sometimes use drugs or alcohol to help in coping with their symptoms. Using too much alcohol can get in the way of restful sleep. Alcohol and other drugs change the quality of sleep and makes it less refreshing.

They may have recurring thoughts or nightmares. Nightmares are common for people after traumatic events. Interruptions from nightmares and thoughts make sleep less restful. Frequent nightmares may make it difficult to fall asleep due to fear of having another nightmare.

They may have medical problems. Medical problems commonly found in people with stress injuries such as chronic pain or stomach problems, can make going to sleep difficult.

What can you do if you have trouble sleeping?

Here are things to do to make sleeping well more likely:

Change your sleeping area. Create a quiet, comfortable sleeping area without noise, or the distractions of too much entertainment, like TV.

Keep a bedtime routine and sleep schedule. Have a calming bedtime routine and a set wake-up time to help the body get used to a sleeping schedule. Other members of the household can help.

Try to relax if you can't sleep. Imagine a peaceful scene and focus on being in a relaxing place. Get up and do a quiet activity, such as reading, until you feel sleepy.

Watch your activities during the day.

- ▷ Exercise early in the day.
- ▷ Limit caffeine, tobacco and alcohol, especially before bedtime.
- ▷ Don't take naps.
- ▷ Don't drink any liquids if you wake up often because you have to go to the bathroom.
- ▷ Avoid taking medicine that may keep you awake.

Talk to your doctor. A professional can help if you can't sleep because you are in pain, have an injury, feel anxious at night; you often have bad dreams or nightmares.

Making yourself stay active and enlisting the company of others can help you gradually enjoy activities again.

Sharing recreational activities with others is an important part of developing supportive social networks which have been shown to help recovery (see pages 28-29).

Recreational and leisure time is one aspect of life where you are completely in control. It's a time when you can really express yourself and what you enjoy in life.

It can also help develop strengths and interests while increasing energy and the ability to deal with challenges.

Giving service

can help you feel you have something to offer others, and it can help you reconnect with your community. Beyond informally helping family and friends, there are many opportunities to give your time and effort.

By becoming a part of the Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) team, you can help other Marines and sailors who have experienced combat or operational stress (see page 30).

Other ways to volunteer:

- ▷ At a school
- ▷ For a youth program
- ▷ At a homeless shelter
- ▷ By giving blood or helping arrange a blood drive
- ▷ At your church or place of worship.

Volunteer links:

- ▷ Redcross.org
- ▷ Specialolympics.org
- ▷ Habitat.org (Habitat for Humanity)
- ▷ Thousandsmiles.org
- ▷ Policevolunteers.org

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Kenneth K. Trotter Jr.



Stay Active

When experiencing stress-related issues, it is easy to forget about enjoyable activities. Or it may feel like nothing could be fun again. Make a plan to do at least one thing every day that makes you happy. Here is a list to start.

Social activities

- ▷ Visit family or friends
- ▷ Go out to eat with family or friends
- ▷ Join a club or attend a club meeting
- ▷ Participate in unit social activities
- ▷ Go to church socials or classes
- ▷ Join or coach a community sports team
- ▷ Join a walking or running group
- ▷ Go dancing
- ▷ Babysit
- ▷ Go on a date
- ▷ Hold or visit a garage sale
- ▷ Volunteer or do community service
- ▷ Play pool or billiards
- ▷ Play board or card games
- ▷ Go golfing with friends
- ▷ Play in a band or sing in a choir
- ▷ Take art lessons
- ▷ Hire a personal trainer.

Active Recreation

- ▷ Camp, hike, rock climb or fish
- ▷ Garden or do yard work
- ▷ Go boating, kayaking, sailing
- ▷ Visit a national park
- ▷ Take a scenic road trip
- ▷ Plan a day trip or a vacation
- ▷ Water-ski, surf or swim

- ▷ Play a team sport
- ▷ Run, jog or bike
- ▷ Go horseback riding
- ▷ Go to a fair, zoo or amusement park
- ▷ Go to the movies
- ▷ Go to a comedy club
- ▷ Go to a museum, theater or concert
- ▷ Go to a college or professional sports event
- ▷ Try creative writing, blogging or journaling
- ▷ Fix a car, bike, motorcycle, etc.
- ▷ Play a musical instrument
- ▷ Start a collection
- ▷ Make art or a craft like woodworking
- ▷ Cook or take a cooking class.

Quiet Relaxation

- ▷ Take a bubble bath
- ▷ Sit in a sauna or jacuzzi
- ▷ Take a nap
- ▷ Read scriptures or other sacred works
- ▷ Read a novel
- ▷ Read a newspaper
- ▷ Try yoga
- ▷ Get a massage
- ▷ Watch a funny TV show or a movie
- ▷ Meditate
- ▷ Practice systematic relaxation
- ▷ Pet a dog or cat
- ▷ Put together a jigsaw puzzle
- ▷ Do word or number puzzles like crosswords, sudoku or word searches.

Personal growth from stress or deployment

Thinking styles

It is easy to criticize, not accounting for personal achievements and successes. Be aware of pessimistic thoughts and taking too much credit for minor faults or misfortune. Positive thinking can be learned improving well-being and the ability to face challenges.

Some sources of stress can be controlled and others can not. Improve your outlook by regularly reviewing personal strengths and accomplishments, they may not seem obvious at first. High expectations can be a strength, unless perfectionism, over competitiveness or a source of self-criticism develop when something doesn't live up to personal standards.

Life is complex. When making sense of it, avoid black and white thinking. In everything and everyone, there is good, bad, strength and weakness.

Approach difficulty in a positive and productive way by thinking of the best outcomes, not the worst. Thinking of the past is helpful when remembering good times or reviewing successes. Practice positive thinking; the future always has potential.

Create a personal resume

Documenting personal successes and strengths helps highlight your ability to overcome challenges. Just like a professional resumé, a private resumé helps identify your best talents and skills to help shape personal goals.

Write achievements down or collect documents and objects, such as certificates, trophies, letters of appreciation, pictures of events or things you have created. Think in the following broad areas:

1. What awards or accomplishments did you receive both before and after entering the military?



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Michael Persheim

2. Do you have thank-you notes or letters of appreciation to include?
3. Are there choices you have made in your life that you believe have been particularly important, and have changed your life for the better?
4. What personal goals have you accomplished about which you are glad?
5. Are there things you have done that you believe family members or friends have particularly appreciated?
6. What recognition have you received for service to others in your community?
7. In what ways are you kind or helpful to others?
8. What mental or physical abilities do you have that you feel are above average?
9. Do you have a particular personality trait or skill that others admire or enjoy?
10. Include brief descriptions or pictures of times in your life that have been particularly positive and enjoyable.

Consider possibilities of posttraumatic growth

after successfully surviving negative experiences. Note any personal improvements, strengthening of relationships and positive lessons learned from these experiences.

Personal Development

- ▷ I can better handle difficulties.
- ▷ I feel more self-reliant.
- ▷ I am better able to accept things.
- ▷ I am stronger than I thought.
- ▷ I have greater courage in the face of fear.
- ▷ I have more confidence in my wisdom and judgment in difficult situations.
- ▷ I have more independence.
- ▷ I have more self-discipline.
- ▷ I am more reliable, mature and dependable.

Relationships

- ▷ I see that I can count on people in times of trouble.
- ▷ I have a greater sense of closeness with others.
- ▷ I am better able to express my emotions.
- ▷ I have more compassion for others.
- ▷ I'm better at accepting that I need others.
- ▷ I put more effort into my relationships.
- ▷ I am better able to work with others.
- ▷ I value my family and friends more.

New Meanings

- ▷ I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.
- ▷ I have a stronger religious faith.
- ▷ I have a broader perspective, a better sense of the big picture.

- ▷ I can better appreciate each day.
- ▷ I have more pride in being an American.
- ▷ I changed my priorities about what is important in life.
- ▷ I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.

New possibilities

- ▷ I established a new path for my life.
- ▷ I am able to do better things with my life.
- ▷ I developed new interests leading to new opportunities.
- ▷ I am more able to make needed changes.

Setting goals

motivates you to achieve.

Effective goals change behavior. Great hopes and good intentions are useless without taking action.

You are more likely to take action:

- ▷ If you have a clear plan for exactly *what* to do and exactly *when* to do it.
- ▷ If focused on manageable goals rather than the big ones. Break long-range goals into *specific*, *short-term* tasks.
- ▷ If your goals are *doable*, but still *challenging*. Goals too hard to achieve will cause discouragement. You will become bored with goals that are too easy.

You are more likely to complete goals that are meaningful to you rather than what other people think you should accomplish.

It is important to set goals that match your resources and personal strengths. Working with your best strengths will be the most productive.

Positive goals focused on accomplishing specific tasks, improving relationships, building character, or finding meaning and spirituality promoting well-being. Goals such as avoiding problems, being better than others or controlling other people are less satisfying and more difficult to accomplish.

It is tempting to change your basic personality. Some core aspects will be very difficult to change and are important to who you are. More surface characteristics such as personal habits, investment in important relationships, education, and personal attitudes or thoughts are much more controllable. Improving these will be more helpful to your general well-being.

Flexibility is important. Adjust goals and work toward something of true interest. Take time to enjoy your achievements.

Self-defeating thinking styles

Personalizing: Blaming yourself completely for problems. Seeing yourself as solely responsible rather than considering the impact of the situation, chance events, or other people's actions.

Over-generalizing: Seeing problems in all aspects of your life that are your fault. Ignoring examples of your own success and focusing only on those instances that fit your "pattern of failure."

Fortune-telling: Somehow knowing your problems will never get better, and they will always be your fault while assuming anything that can go wrong will.

All-or-nothing thinking: Seeing the world in black and white; always and never. Judging past events in terms of complete success or complete failure.

Filtering: Focusing mostly on the negative aspects of the situation even though there may be many good things about it as well.

Mind reading: Worrying about the hidden reasons why people may say or do things. Assuming immediately, for example, that they are thinking poorly of you without investigating if that is truly the case.

Disqualifying: Discounting your successes and others' encouragement or compliments and finding a way to interpret even these good things in a negative light.

Magnifying: Noticing every little mistake or problem and overestimating their importance. Allowing small problems or criticisms to overly affect feelings.

Emotional reasoning: Judging things based on how you feel, not on the facts. Even though everything appears fine, if you are feeling worried, there must be a problem.

Obligating: Feeling obligated to live up to a lot of "shoulds." These may be things you believe you need to do or that other people expect of you.

Labeling: Judging and labeling yourself in a negative way, such as personal name-calling.

Comparing: Measuring self-worth by comparing with other people and thinking about how much better they are at everything in comparison.

Positive Alternatives

Contextualizing: Acknowledge that many things have contributed to this problem. Think of everything that may have played a role, including others' actions, chance events and past history.

Specifying: Think through when you have been able to successfully handle challenges. Recognize when you have been capable and successful.

Delimiting: Acknowledge the unique circumstances of this problem. There may be similarities in future challenges; what you have learned now can help you deal with those in the future.

Balancing: Realistically estimate what percentage of the situation is going poorly and what is still okay. Acknowledge what has gone well despite what could have been better.

Problem solving: Do not focus on the things that are going wrong. Instead, focus on the opportunities to make the situation better.

Trusting: Accept that other people will think well of you and treat you well. Second guessing is unproductive. If you are really concerned about what they are thinking, ask about it.

Appreciating: Take time to think about your successes and value them. Remind yourself of your strengths and talents.

Perspective taking: Review the positive facts about the situation in your mind. This includes dealing successfully with challenges.

Grounding: Remind yourself of the facts of the situation. Consider whether there may be any outside factors that influence your feelings.

Gauging: Be flexible and recognize that perfection is not the goal. Remember that your best is what is expected.

Acknowledging: Think of everything about yourself a single label could never capture. Remind yourself how inaccurate it is to pigeon-hole.

Admiring: Think about someone you admire who is good at handling problems. Consider what you have learned from them and how that can help you in the future.

Self-respecting: Compete only against yourself. Think of ways you have improved.

Take care of your body

Eat a healthy, balanced diet

to support your lifestyle and health needs. If you are very physically active, your diet needs to support your fitness goals. If you are bothered by anxiety or you have trouble relaxing, what you eat can make a difference.

- ▷ Eat a variety of foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber. Limit fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars (in food and beverages). The Nutrition Facts label will help.
- ▷ Choose lean, low-fat or fat-free foods — for example, milk and meats. Bake, roast or poach instead of frying. Save higher fat options for occasional enjoyment or special occasions.
- ▷ Avoid caffeine — it can alter moods and make stress reactions worse.

- ▷ Eat regular meals at consistent times to help maintain energy.
- ▷ Be aware of the impacts of supplements.

Regular exercise

can be one of the most important tools in maintaining good health and getting back a sense of routine in a time of transition. It is important to practice good form and safe exercise habits, especially if you are exercising frequently at a high intensity level.

- ▷ Creating relevant goals aligned with a combined program of weight training, cardio and nutrition provides the best results.
- ▷ Any amount of physical activity is better than none; participating in even a small amount of physical activity provides health benefits.
- ▷ Before exercise, warm up for about 10 minutes to reduce the chances of injury by overusing cold muscles.

- ▷ For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least two hours and 30 minutes a week of moderate-intensity, or one hour and 15 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination.
- ▷ For more extensive health benefits, adults should increase their aerobic physical activity to five hours a week of moderate-intensity, or two hours and 30 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination. Additional health benefits are gained by engaging in physical activity beyond this amount.
- ▷ Additional health benefits are gained from doing muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on two or more days a week.
- ▷ After exercise, stretch while muscles are warm. This will lengthen muscles to avoid injury

Eating to improve your mood or to relax

1. Reduce or eliminate alcohol and caffeine from your diet. Use the goal of staying within low risk alcohol limits and no more than one cup of coffee or equivalent per day. Cut caffeine back gradually to avoid headaches.
2. Cut back on sugar and simple carbohydrates such as refined flour in your diet. Eating a lot of sugar can temporarily raise your blood sugar, to be followed by very low blood sugar. Low blood sugar, or hypoglycemia, can lead to symptoms of anxiety such as nervousness, trembling, light-headedness and irritability.
3. Keep blood sugar at optimal levels, by avoiding going for long periods of time without eating. Have a healthy snack between meals.
4. Increase complex carbohydrates such as whole grains and

starches in your diet. These are metabolized slower and may help raise serotonin levels in the brain which can improve not only mood, but also sleep patterns.

5. Eat foods high in tryptophan that metabolizes into serotonin such as milk products, bananas, oats, soy, poultry and nuts.
6. Drink enough liquids to stay well hydrated. Dehydration can affect physical performance, mental ability and mood.
7. Take supplemental vitamins such as B-6, C and zinc to help your body combat stress.
8. Avoid extreme diets. Eliminating any food group from your diet completely may affect your mood.
9. Eat for an active lifestyle to improve your energy and stamina. Work toward a diet of low-fat, moderate protein, high carbohydrates, and high fluids.

FAT

Eat monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, particularly Omega 3s such as vegetable oils, nuts, seeds, avocados and fish.

Avoid saturated and trans-fats as well as cholesterol such as fatty meat, butter, processed foods and fried foods.

PROTEIN

Eat poultry (especially skinless white meat), fish, lean meats, beans and low-fat or fat-free milk products.

Avoid red meats, including pork, especially fatty cuts.

CARBOHYDRATES

Eat whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables that are high in fiber such as sweet potatoes, squash, apples, bananas, avocados and grapes.

and also reduce the amount of soreness felt later.

Exercise has many benefits including:

- ▷ Relief of symptoms such as anxiety and stress reactions.
- ▷ Lifted mood.
- ▷ Improved self-esteem.
- ▷ Improved sleep, which can have additional benefits.
- ▷ Improved physical looks, which also can provide more benefits.

Focus on Form

during physical training to improve performance and reduce the risk of injury.

Building focus has benefits in other areas outside exercise, including:

- ▷ Improved mental skills gained by building a greater attention to detail.
- ▷ Greater body awareness which improves the ability for relaxation.
- ▷ **See pages 12-13** for more about relaxation techniques.

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Gene A. Ainsworth III



Exercise relieves symptoms such as anxiety and stress reactions.

Eating when you exercise

Avoid foods with added sugar and refined grains such as white flour.

LIQUIDS

Moderately active people may need three to five liters of water per day while a very active person may need 10 liters. Monitoring urine color with a urine color chart can help you know your hydration level.

Avoid alcohol and carbonated beverages, which are high in calories and can lead to dehydration.

Guidelines are from the US Dept. of Agriculture and the US Dept. of Health & Human Services. For more info: www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines or www.health.gov/paguidelines

About two to four hours **BEFORE EXERCISE**, eat a high carbohydrate, low-fat meal and drink 17 to 20 fluid ounces of water or a sport drink. Another carbohydrate snack and seven to 10 ounces of additional fluids can be helpful within 30 minutes of intense exercise. Avoid candy and foods high in sugar; these can spike your metabolism and actually lower your blood sugar.

DURING EXERCISE, drink 7 to 10 fluid ounces about every 10 to 20 minutes. Drink enough fluids to avoid dropping more than 2 percent of fully hydrated pre-exercise weight. At the same time, avoid drinking more fluids than your weight loss during exercise; over-hydration also can be a serious health risk. During prolonged

exercise (over an hour), a 6 percent carbohydrate drink is recommended.

Within two hours **AFTER EXERCISE**, drink liquids equivalent to 125 to 150 percent of the difference in your pre- versus post-exercise weight. Avoid alcohol and carbonated soda. A carbohydrate & protein snack of about 300 calories is recommended within an hour of strenuous exercise.

Every athlete has a unique sweat rate. **KNOW YOURSELF.** Monitor changes in your body weight, thirst, and urine color. Watch for signs of dehydration such as feeling thirsty, hot, tired, or lethargic, poor physical performance, flushed skin, cramps, dizziness, headache, vomiting, nausea or chills.

Making safe choices, reconnecting with others

Consider moving if you live in an unsafe neighborhood.

A location with frequent robberies, assaults and drug-related crimes can amplify the feeling of danger. Consider moving to a safer area if possible. Moving is a major undertaking, but it could help lessen stress. Create distance from the unsafe area for an increased sense of safety.

If you are in a stress treatment program, your case manager may have resources to help find new housing.

Get help to leave an abusive relationship.

Family violence is never acceptable and is usually a serious crime. Family violence of any kind will hinder your ability to manage stress and may make feeling safe difficult.

If your spouse or partner is physically, sexually or verbally abusive, put your safety (and the safety of your family) first. Seek help from the Marine and Family Services Center, a chaplain or mental health professional.

If you think you may be in immediate danger, leave at once and call 9-1-1. From a safe location you can call the base Marine and Family Services Center or the National Domestic Abuse Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233).

Limit exposure to traumatic stories in the media.

For a Marine experiencing combat or operational stress, reading about, listening to or viewing stories about traumatic events can trigger stress

symptoms. Think about limiting how much you take in the news, violent TV or movies as they can cause similar issues. Choose positive activities you enjoy instead - such as riding a bike or taking a walk; reading a book or watching an uplifting movie (see page 5).

Constructive worrying

Recognize stress and set aside a time to deal with specific, nagging concerns.

Work through problems to potential solutions or steps to move forward. Make a record for future action.

What is the worst that can happen? This helps prepare for and give perspective on what may not be a significant problem in the bigger picture.

What is the best that can happen? This can provide something to look forward to and might lighten the mood immediately, while providing a longer-term sense of opportunity.

Manage finances to reduce stress:

- ▶ Live within your means.
- ▶ Make a budget.
- ▶ Invest within your risk tolerance.
- ▶ Avoid unnecessary debt.
- ▶ Set financial goals.
- ▶ Avoid gambling.

Consider joining a self-help group.

This includes your unit's OSCAR team where Marines identify and manage combat and operational stress. Talking with other Marines who have experienced combat or operational stress can help. Increasing your contact with others is helpful and if you feel distrustful of others, contact can help you learn to trust again.

You can find self-help groups through:

- Your unit OSCAR team.
- Health care providers, mental health professionals or clinic.
- Marine and Family Services Center.
- Unit post-deployment program.
- Local VA facility.
- Online forums:
 - ▶ www.dailystrength.org
 - ▶ www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/go/find_support_group

Make relationships a priority.

Quality is more important than quantity. Investing in existing strong relationships is usually more valuable and easier to maintain than trying to create additional relationships.

Make a special effort with loved ones.

If you have become distant from loved ones, take small steps to reconnect with them. Be flexible in your expectations of relationships with family and friends.

Make effort to explain how you are feeling to your family and close friends. If you are experiencing marriage or close relationship troubles, seek peer or professional counseling to help create solutions together.

Reach out to your children if not close to them. Show interest in their schoolwork, activities and hobbies. Be there for them when they need you.

Get in touch with close friends if you have lost touch. Call, send a letter or an e-mail. Get together for a cup

of coffee or a short walk. Social networking sites can help you find and retain connections with friends.

Complement and encourage family and friends for positive things they have accomplished and thank them for their support.

Socializing

- ▷ If face-to-face interaction is initially difficult, use e-mail, social networking sites or online forums to begin social connections.

- ▷ Enroll in a class that interests you to meet people with similar interests.
- ▷ Join a book group, hiking group or other interest group.
- ▷ Start a blog. Blogging is similar to journaling, but with a social component.
- ▷ Volunteer. Working together toward a positive common goal builds bonds and provides a sense of accomplishment (see page 5).

While at work

Having good relationships with people at work is one of the most important keys to job satisfaction. There are a number of ways you can improve work relationships. Taking the time to thank people, either in person or in writing, is a great way to improve relationships with coworkers, clients or others with whom you do business. Taking the time to talk with people throughout the day at work is also important. Social connections can help restore relationships if they have been strained by the effects of combat or operational stress.

Marines, attached Sailors, and families call:
Anonymous DSTRESS Line at 1-877-476-7734 and online chat at www.dstressline.com.

Veterans or Service members and families call:
Confidential Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, use the online chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net or send a text message to 838255.

For emergencies call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest Emergency Room.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Tyler Main

Relaxation techniques

decrease stress on your mind and body, and improve physical performance.

Consciously pay attention

to any emotional or bodily changes. Directly try to counteract some of these.

- For example, if you typically find that shoulder muscles get tense when you are angry, try to relax those muscles.
- If you often find yourself clenching and unclenching your hands, try to do something else with them (fold your hands, doodle with a pencil).
- If you breathe faster when you are angry, try taking deeper and slower breaths.

Deep breathing

This simple technique can be used anytime and anywhere.

1. Get in a comfortable position.
2. Exhale first, clearing your lungs completely.
3. Inhale slowly through your nose. Draw the air deeply into your belly to a point below your navel.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth. Push out as much air as possible. Try to make your exhalation twice as long as your inhalation.
5. While exhaling, imagine you are letting go of tension, painful memories or distressing emotions.
6. This may take repeating a few times until you feel calmer.

Meditation

can help soothe stressful reactions. Over time, it can help you see your feelings and

reactions from a more objective viewpoint. Try this simple technique:

1. Get in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Think of a soothing word or phrase for a focus point, such as “quiet” or “peace.” Or visualize a calming scene.
4. Focus your mind on the word, phrase or image chosen. If other thoughts come to mind, just notice them briefly and let them go.
5. Let your breathing slow down. You may want to silently repeat the word or phrase in time with your inhalation or exhalation.
6. Start with just five minutes. As the process becomes more

Practicing relaxation techniques

- Be as consistent as possible in your practice.
- Practice once or twice a day if time allows.
- Practice in a quiet, relaxing place where you can be alone.
- Turn off the telephone and TV.
- Make sure clothing and room temperature are comfortable.
- After you have tried different techniques, choose the one that works best for you. Stick with it — you may need some practice before starting to feel the benefits.
- Use your chosen technique any time you are feeling particularly stressed or are having stress symptoms.

Note: If any of these relaxation techniques make you feel uncomfortable, stop for a while and then try again when you feel ready. You may want to try them with the guidance of a professional.



comfortable, you can meditate for a longer time.

Mental concentration can be used as a form of meditation. Practice focusing your attention on a very simple thought, sound or image. Whenever you are distracted, simply return your attention to this simple focus. It can also be the practice of being aware or “mindful” of all levels of your current physical and mental experience, starting with awareness of breathing. Meditation is helpful to reduce anxiety, frustration and anger. There are a number of different ways to meditate, and you may already be doing a form of meditation. For example, chanting a short song as a group or by yourself while running is meditative. Prayer is also a form of meditation. Try spending about 20 minutes daily practicing some form of meditation. Two easy techniques include:

- Attention to and awareness of the present moment.
- Be accepting or willing to

experience your thoughts and feelings without judging them.

Try this exercise:

1. Sit in a comfortable chair in a relaxing position. Do not cross your legs. Your feet should be flat on the floor, and your arms should be lying flat at your sides. Close your eyes.
2. Begin by taking several deep breaths. Think of the way your breathing feels as you are falling asleep and practice breathing like that. Pay attention to the air flowing gently in through your nose, into your lungs and out again. It should take several seconds for you to breathe in and out. Take about 10 or 15 more breaths like this.
3. Flex your right foot up. Clench the muscles tightly, but not to the point of pain or discomfort, hold this position for about 5 to 10 seconds.
4. Now relax your right foot as much as you can. Focus on breathing deeply again. Each time you breathe out; try to relax the muscles in that foot just a little bit more. For about 20 to 30 seconds, pay attention to how your right foot feels.
5. Repeat this exercise for your left foot and then for each of the following parts of your body, tensing them and then relaxing them in order:
 - Right leg (lift slightly; tighten quads).
 - Abs (tighten)
 - Left leg (lift slightly; tighten quads).
 - Shoulders (shrug).
 - Right hand (clench fist).
 - Jaw (clench teeth in a big “smile”).
 - Left hand (clench fist)
 - Forehead (screw eyes tightly shut).
 - Right arm (tighten bicep).
 - Left arm (tighten bicep).
6. After you have gone through the whole body exercise, take some time to continue breathing and relaxing your entire body.

Pay attention to which parts of your body feel the most relaxed. Take as long as you like to feel relaxed.

Be in the present

You can use routine tasks, such as taking a bath/shower or washing the dishes, as an opportunity to meditate. Make this task the most important thing in your life at that moment, and every movement about twice as slow as usual. Use this time to pay attention to your experience and each step in the process. The best way to gain the attention of the moment is to focus on your breathing and how it feels to breathe in and out. You may try slowly counting your breaths each time you exhale from one to 10, starting over when the count is 10 or if you lose track of the count. After focusing on breathing for a few minutes, begin to pay attention to the task.

For example, if washing dishes, notice how the water feels on your hands, the texture of the dish and the motion of your muscles as you clean. If a thought about anything other than this task interrupts you, notice what the thought is, acknowledge it and then refocus on your experience of the task. Generally, the best way to refocus is to pay attention to your breathing again. Some of the thoughts that interrupt your focus may be important to consider later, particularly if negative.

Other ways to relax

There are other activities that can also help you calm down and feel relaxed. For example, you could:

- ▷ Listen to quiet music.
- ▷ Draw or write in a journal or blog.
- ▷ Write stories or poetry.
- ▷ Play with your child or with a pet.
- ▷ Talk with a friend or counselor.
- ▷ Exercise, including yoga.
- ▷ Take time for prayer.
- ▷ Read inspirational or spiritual books.
- ▷ Have a massage.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Tommy Huynh

Spirituality and building resilience

Spirituality

generally refers to that which gives meaning and purpose in life, including practice of a philosophy, religion, or way of living. Examples include commitment to family, love of life, esprit de corps and application of faith. Spirituality can help Marines:

- ▷ Understand their stress issues — spiritually, psychologically and physiologically.
- ▷ Rebuild their identity and accept themselves.
- ▷ Gain meaning in daily life.
- ▷ Adopt therapeutic spiritual disciplines to bring them closer to God or sacred Supreme Being.
- ▷ Process their loss and grief.
- ▷ Experience the freeing influence of giving and receiving forgiveness.
- ▷ Strengthen themselves spiritually against future stressors.
- ▷ Connect with the rest of the world and those who will support them.
- ▷ Reintegrate into society as a strengthened man or woman, to include becoming a positive influence on others with stress issues.

Spirituality may affect a number of stress symptoms. Mental health professionals often incorporate spiritual beliefs and practices into courses of treatment.

For Marines with stress injuries, their spirituality could affect important clinical issues.

Drawing on supportive, healthy communities and spiritual connections can help address isolation and social withdrawal.

Spirituality can lead to self-forgiveness and an emphasis on compassion toward self.

Beliefs and practices related to forgiveness can help anger and improve chronic hostility leading to social isolation and poor relationships with others.

Inwardly-directed practices such as mindfulness, meditation and prayer may help reduce hypervigilance.

Focusing on the present with enjoyable tasks to create a self-awareness of the value of life.

Prayer

Regardless of whether or not you are religious you can use prayer or meditation to find peace. If you are religious, you may already use some form of prayer. But, it can be very beneficial to lengthen the amount of time you spend praying daily and put some effort into choosing what to think of during prayer. If you are not religious, meditation can still be helpful to spend quiet time alone thinking through things in your mind that you appreciate from the universe or from a higher power of your choosing. The following are some categories of thoughts you may spend time rehearsing in your mind through meditative prayer.

1. If you have a religious prayer that is meaningful to you, recite this slowly and repeatedly in your mind.
2. Think of a list of things you are grateful for in your life and slowly rehearse in your mind a statement of gratitude for each of them.
3. Think of a list of good things you wish for, for those whom you love or care about. Rehearse in your mind a request for each of those benefits or blessings to come to each of those people.

4. If you have a goal you are working toward in your life, think of the steps you need to take to accomplish it. One by one make a simple request in your mind for help and success in your efforts to complete each step.
5. If you are using prayer specifically as a tool to help relax or feel more peaceful, think of a simple request or

Talk with your chaplain or other spiritual leader

Many chaplains or other spiritual leaders have extensive working knowledge about stress injuries and understand how combat and operational stress reactions can affect a Marine's or veteran's spirituality and daily life. They can help manage stress and provide additional resources.

Marines, attached Sailors, and families call:
Anonymous DSTRESS Line at 1-877-476-7734 and online chat at www.dstressline.com.

Veterans or Service members and families call:
Confidential Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, use the online chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net or send a text message to 838255.

For emergencies call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest Emergency Room.

phrase asking for that feeling in your mind. Keep repeating that statement slowly in your mind.

The Marine Corps will help

Talking to other Marines or service members with similar experiences may be the most useful means for finding practical coping strategies.

Depending on whether you are currently on active duty or a veteran, you can get help from:

- ▷ Your unit's OSCAR team.
- ▷ Your base medical clinic.
- ▷ A chaplain or other spiritual leader.
- ▷ Your Marine and Family Services Center.
- ▷ A Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital or clinic.
- ▷ Private sources, such as a healthcare provider, mental health professional or clinic.

OSCAR teams provide peer support and initial stress identification and referral.

OSCAR is Marine-led training that builds teams of Marine leaders, medical and religious ministry personnel within each battalion-sized unit. This training is designed to give leaders the tools to prevent, identify and manage combat and operational stress issues as early as possible.

These teams are:

- ▷ OSCAR Mentor/Team Members (trained unit Marines and leaders)
- ▷ Extenders (unit medical and religious ministry personnel).
- ▷ Mental Health Professionals (mental health providers and technicians associated with the unit).
- ▷ More info, **see page 30.**

Untreated stress issues tend to become worse

This can cause or worsen additional problems.

- Become isolated from friends and family.
- Use anger to control others.
- Have trouble getting along with co-workers.
- Feel more and more depressed or anxious.
- Try to manage feelings with alcohol or other drugs.
- Find your job performance negatively impacted.
- Become unable to deploy as issues escalate.
- Experience negative effects to your career if stress injury symptoms lead to disciplinary issues.

If you have, or think you have, a combat or operational stress injury, including PTS, you don't need to go it alone. Get the help you need and deserve.

Learning about combat and operational stress is a powerful step.

Learning about combat and operational stress can be the first step to getting better. A health care provider or mental health professional can provide information, you can also use these resources:

USMC COSC website

www.manpower.usmc.mil/cosc

USMC Behavioral Health Information Network websites

www.bhin.usmc-mccs.org/

National Center for PTSD, Dept of Veterans Affairs

www.ncptsd.va.gov

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org

You can manage combat or operational stress issues, including PTS.

Some stress issues can be managed with only rest and support. But other stress issues and injuries such as PTS may require treatment. Treatment may involve:

- Psychotherapy.
- Medications.
- Self-help techniques, such as anger management and ways to control stress reactions.

U.S. Marine Corps photo by LCDR Kasey Peacock

Letting go of anger

Anger can be helpful

Properly channeled anger can motivate us to work towards goals and it alerts us that something is wrong and we need to respond. Marines may use anger to accomplish missions with energy and focus. At home, they may find themselves getting frustrated, keyed up and having a hard time sleeping or relaxing. Anger is normal and natural; it is important to know what triggers anger so it can be controlled. Uncontrolled anger can be a serious problem in relationships.

Pay attention

Think about how you feel when you get angry. Check for any of these signs you may have when you are angry:

- ▷ Tense muscles.
- ▷ Clenched jaw.

- ▷ Tight fists.
- ▷ Racing heartbeat.
- ▷ Feeling shaky.
- ▷ Upset stomach.
- ▷ Loud talking or yelling.

Be aware

The idea is to become more aware of the types of situations that trigger your anger and the types of feelings and sensations you have as you begin to get angry. Awareness helps to better understand a cycle of anger.

Get help for managing anger

Taking control of anger can be challenging. Help is available, such as joining an anger management group. Resources can help with:

- ▷ Understanding why anger is part of stress.
- ▷ Learning what feelings and thoughts signal that you are getting angry.
- ▷ Controlling anger through managing stress.
- ▷ Communicating with others more effectively.

Marine and Family Service Centers offer anger management classes. A treatment program or VA facility can also help you find an anger management group. Ask your healthcare provider, mental health professional or counselor.

Pre-emptive strategies

You can decide ahead of time what you will do and say when angry. The best response may be to just walk away if a problem is not that critical. It may be worth learning



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt Michele Watson

some problem solving skills for more important relationships.

Defuse the situation

Simple one-liners may be enough to exit a potential confrontation. Different situations may require different responses. The following are a few ideas to start:

1. I am sure we can work this out. Can we meet in the middle somewhere?
2. Okay, this day has just been too long for all of us.
3. It is not that big of a deal to me, I am happy to go along.
4. Okay, I'll think about this; we can talk about it later.
5. This is all new to me. I will have to think about it and get back to you.
6. I know, I really hate this situation; I am sorry about it.
7. I had no idea you felt this way. I can see how you feel now.

Immediate action

When you feel signs that you are getting angry and start thinking angry thoughts, follow these suggestions:

- ▷ Tell yourself: "Stop".
- ▷ Take steps to relax — count to 100, take a walk or take some deep breaths.
- ▷ Leave if necessary — if you feel angry with someone else, tell him or her you need to take a moment.
- ▷ Go to a safe place and calm down.
- ▷ Once you feel more in control, go back and talk with the person or face the situation that triggered your anger.

Thinking of some alternative conclusions can help the situation internally if conversation is not possible or applicable. Some possibilities are:

1. Under other circumstances, I would probably really like this person.
2. This is just a bad day, it will all look different tomorrow.

3. This situation would be hard for anyone.
4. How much do I really care about this? It may not be worth the conflict.
5. Just because this person is acting like a jerk does not mean I should also.
6. It is not personal; we are all just tired and out of patience.

**You can control
your reactions
to events
including anger
—anger does
not have to
control you.**

7. This person is not trying to hurt me; he/she just does not know how to handle the situation.
8. My relationship with this person is worth more than this stupid argument.
9. The most important thing is not justice, it is the kind of person I want to be.
10. I am not going to give this person the satisfaction of pushing my buttons.

Use assertive communication

It is possible to preempt anticipated conflict with important people by addressing the underlying problem proactively. It is important to be able to communicate effectively when there is a problem rather than ignoring your feelings or avoiding the issue, which can make things worse.

1. Schedule a time for discussion with the other party.

2. Make sure you think through the problem beforehand so you can clearly communicate your position.
 - Think of very specific, objective examples of things that have happened to illustrate the problem.
 - How do you feel about the problem and what is your reaction to having this internal view?
 - How specifically would you like to see the problem resolved and what is required from the other person?
 - What is the most practical thing to do and what compromise might be required?
3. Take responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings by using "I" statements. "I" statements focus on the speaker's observations, feelings, desires and intentions and clearly explain them. They are much more likely to be effective than a "You" statement which tends to become accusatory.
4. Stay calm during the conversation. If it will be difficult to remain calm or respectful, a public place may be a good location for the conversation. Planning some break times into the conversation may also be useful.
5. Focus on solving the problem in a way that makes both of you happy. Do not be distracted by other issues such as trying to be right or getting even.
6. Do not purposely push buttons. In every relationship, each partner usually knows what will really upset the other. In addition, it is always critical to stay away from yelling, swearing, insulting or threatening.

Someone coping with severe stress may experience behavior or personality change

Someone with a stress injury

experiences severity and persistence of symptoms (see pages 2-3, Orange Zone). For example, symptoms don't get better after the stress is over; persisting for weeks or even years. Signs can include inability to fall or stay asleep, panic attacks or rage outbursts. If it looks like a Marine has a stress injury, you should get them help with a Senior OSCAR Team Member, chaplain, medical personnel or health care provider. Someone with thoughts of hurting them self or others should not be left alone and needs professional help right away.

Don't dwell in the past. Mistakes are a part of being human; successful people learn from mistakes and find value in the resulting actions. Stress can be helpful if it motivates positive action in the future. Thinking of the past is unhelpful if it discourages you from acting confidently in the present. Identify experiences that may cause a stress injury; keep an eye out for

red flag stressors (see page 3).

Take small, positive actions.

Stress injuries usually heal, but will heal faster and leave less of a scar with help. Behavior or personality changes if untreated could move into a more serious issue.

1. Get some exercise (see pages 8-9). Exercise has been shown to help with stress and depression.
2. Eat nourishing, healthy foods (see pages 8-9). It is hard to be at your best if you don't have the right fuel.
3. Do something enjoyable every day, such as a hobby, watching a movie or going for a walk (see pages 4-5 for more ideas).
4. Stay busy with work, friends and family. If you are depressed, a daily schedule can give you something to look forward to. Also, investing in personal relationships builds emotional support.
5. Volunteer in the community to increase feelings of connection and capability to contribute (see page 5).

6. If you can, get away for a while or go on leave. Sometimes a change of scene can give a new outlook on life.

Act rather than react. If you are still bothered by lingering thoughts or reminders from deployment, or the stress experienced in combat is still causing reactions, it can be helpful to have a plan to act and take some control. Returning veterans report the following are helpful in response to common experiences. Some actions are helpful for more than one issue.

Unwanted memories or thoughts about stressful deployment experiences are common.

- ▷ Talk to someone trustworthy about these unwanted memories; if you feel comfortable, share the experiences with them.
- ▷ Consider finding a buddy with whom you shared these experiences to talk to — often confiding in someone who was there and understands is extremely helpful.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Brian Nygaard



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Chris Stone

Know the warning signs of suicide.

The person may:

- Talk about harming him- or herself.
- Prepare for death — for example, make a will or give away possessions.
- Seem suddenly happier — a possible sign that the person has decided to end his or her life.

Know what to do

If you think someone you know is at risk for suicide, this is an emergency! Bring the person to your installation's health-care facility or a local hospital or clinic. Or call:

- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273 8255 (1-800-273-TALK).
- 9-1-1 or your local medical emergency number.
- Your chaplain, the Marine and Family Services Center, or a mental health professional.
- Do not leave the person alone until he or she has been helped!

Warning: three thinking traps that can lead to a downward spiral

- It's all my fault! (personalizing).
- It's my fault all the time! (generalizing).
- It's always going to be my fault! (fortune-telling) (see more on page 7).

▷ Remind yourself that these are just memories; this is not happening now and you are safe.

▷ Remember that these unwanted memories or thoughts will come less often and be less bothersome in time.

If you feel like you are suddenly back in theater again:

- ▷ Remind yourself of where you actually are. Look around yourself and think of today's date. Tell yourself that you are safe.
- ▷ Get up, move around, and touch familiar objects such as your clothes or the furniture.
- ▷ See if you can find a pattern to when this feeling may arise. What is the trigger?

Acknowledge feelings of inner conflict

- ▷ Do you worry about instances where you believe you failed to follow the rules of engagement?

▷ Do you feel you must keep a secret about something you did in combat because others may judge you for it if they knew?

▷ Do you worry about your responsibility for the death or injury of friendly troops?

▷ Do you worry about your responsibility for the death or injury of noncombatants?

▷ Do you ever think that it would have been better or more just if you had been injured or died in place of someone else?

▷ Do you believe you could have and should have prevented someone else's injury or death?

A healthcare provider or mental health professional can help.

Don't be your own enemy

You may have no trouble arguing with discouraging or critical comments and suggestions when they come from the enemy. But

unfortunately, when they come from within yourself, you may not even question them. That is when you become your own worst enemy.

Self-harm

Since returning from deployment, have any of the following statements been true for you?

- ▷ I frequently feel like life is very hopeless and not worth living.
- ▷ I frequently think about hurting myself or killing myself.
- ▷ I have previously attempted suicide and think about trying again.
- ▷ I have a plan in mind as to how I can kill myself.
- ▷ I have taken steps to get ready to kill myself (written a note, given away possessions, or chosen a method).

If any of these statements are true for you, you should get help from a health care professional right away.

Using alcohol and drugs

can make any combat or operational stress issue worse

Alcohol and other drugs are not a way to cope.

They can:

- ▷ Harm your body and mind.
- ▷ Cause addiction.
- ▷ Cause problems with friends and family.
- ▷ Worsen feeling of anger and depression.
- ▷ Put you and others at risk for car accidents and other life-threatening mishaps.

Get help if you need it.

- ▷ Ask for help from the unit Substance Abuse Control Officer (SACO), at your Marine and Family Services Center, from a chaplain, at a substance abuse treatment program or at a local VA facility.
- ▷ Call the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's Referral Service at 1-800-662-4357 (1-800-662-HELP).
- ▷ Find local self-help groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) in the phone book or by internet search.
- ▷ For more information: www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov.

"Personal" Operational Risk Management (ORM)

ORM is used in decision making to avoid unnecessary risk. It can also be used in personal planning to identify and eliminate disaster.

Identify the hazards. What might go wrong? The drinking scene could create social pressure to drink.

Assess the hazards. How dangerous is that action? It could lead to over-drinking.

Make risk decisions. What can I do to eliminate that hazard or make it less dangerous? Alternate alcohol with soda, water or juice. Have

conversation instead of playing drinking games.

Implement controls. Make changes to create a safer environment. Have a friend step in if needed. Leave the party after three drinks.

Supervise. Check the results; is it effective? If successful, continue to build good habits. If not, review whether different controls will be enough or if a different social scene might be needed.

Make a change plan:

If you are drinking too much, you can improve your life and health by cutting down. It is only your decision to cut back or quit. Once decided, it is easier for you to stay on track for yourself than doing it for some external or not well-defined reason.

- ▷ Determine your reasons to quit or cut back. This will reinforce your goals.
- ▷ Make strategies to help success.
- ▷ Find people or resources to help.
- ▷ Determine what makes your plan successful. What signs will tell you this?
- ▷ Think of what problems may be encountered and how they can be solved.

Strategies to reduce or quit drinking:

Keep track of how much you drink. Find a way that works for you, such as a 3"x 5" card in your wallet, check marks on a kitchen calendar, or notes in a mobile phone notepad or personal digital assistant. Making note of each drink before drinking can slow you down.

Know the "standard" drink sizes to count drinks accurately. Measure drinks at home. It can be harder to keep track away from home, especially with mixed drinks or if a

glass of wine is "topped off" by a server.

Set limits: Decide beforehand how much to drink; number of days a week and how many drinks. Setting a goal helps keep alcohol use in lower risk amounts.

Pace and space: When drinking, pace yourself. Sip slowly and have no more than one standard drink of alcohol per hour. Have "drink spacers" — make every other drink non-alcoholic, such as water, soda or juice.

Include food so the alcohol will be absorbed more slowly.

Find alternatives for the time drinking occupies. Find alternatives for the time drinking occupies. If alcohol creates comfort in social situations, helps manage moods or coping with problems, seek healthy ways to deal with those areas. Fill free time by developing healthy activities, hobbies and relationships.

Avoid "triggers" like certain people or places that make you drink even when not planned. Internal triggers are thoughts, emotions or physical sensations such as tension. Plan something else to do instead of drinking if certain activities, times of day or feelings trigger the urge. If drinking at home is a problem, keep little or no alcohol on hand.

Plan to handle urges when you cannot avoid a trigger:

- ▷ Keep your reasons for change handy as a reminder.
- ▷ Talk to a trusted person.
- ▷ Get involved with a distracting activity that doesn't involve drinking, such as physical exercise or a hobby.
- ▷ Accept the feeling and ride it out without giving in knowing it will pass instead of fighting the feeling and losing.

- ▷ Analyze and challenge the thought leading to drinking.
- ▷ Avoid or reduce high-risk situations. It helps to plan an escape in advance.

Build your “No.” Have a polite, convincing, “No, thanks” ready for the times when someone offers a drink and you don’t want one. The faster and more convincingly delivered, the less likely you are to give in. Hesitation allows time for excuses or well-meaning social pressures to erode your decision. Prepare increasingly assertive responses to deal with objections, and walk away if necessary.

- Direct social pressure is when someone offers you a drink or an opportunity to drink.
- Indirect social pressure is when you feel tempted to drink just by being around others who are drinking – even if no one offers you a drink.

Your doctor may advise you to drink less or not at all depending on your health.

Facts about addiction

- ▷ Addiction can run in families and has many serious long-term consequences beyond impacts to health, including: damaged relationships, unemployment, physical dependence, legal and financial problems, depression and increased suicide risk.
- ▷ Addiction can become stronger over time. Use may increase and associated problems often get worse.
- ▷ Many people can recover from addiction.
- ▷ It is easier to recover from an addiction fairly early on before the problem has progressed very far. Unfortunately, many people do not have the motivation to change until they “hit bottom.”
- ▷ Things that can greatly help in recovering from addiction are getting involved in healthy activities (a hobby, meditating or work), finding a sense of meaning and hope (religion, spirituality or philosophy), and investing in

healthy relationships (friends, family or support groups).

What counts as a drink?

A typical serving of an alcoholic beverage contains the same amount of alcohol, although different types will vary.

12 oz. beer = 8 oz. malt liquor = 6 oz. wine = 1.5 oz. 80 proof spirits

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Alcoholism recommended low-risk drinking limits:

| No Risk | 0 drinks per day; appropriate if underage, when pregnant or with some health issues | | |
|-----------|---|---|----------|
| Low Risk | No more than | Men | Women |
| | Per day | 4 drinks | 3 drinks |
| | Per week | 14 drinks | 7 drinks |
| High Risk | Over 1 drink per hour | More than either or both the single-day or weekly limit | |

Reduce your risk to avoid injuries or health problems including birth defects and alcohol-use disorders. Low-risk drinking can have health benefits.

Do you have a problem?

Do any apply to you?

- I sometimes feel I should cut down on my drinking or drug use.
- I have tried to cut down on my drinking or drug use, but I can’t.
- Other people have criticized my drinking or drug use.
- I sometimes feel guilty about my drinking or drug use.
- I sometimes have a drink or use other drugs first thing in the morning to steady my nerves or get rid of a hangover.

If any of these statements apply, you may have a problem with alcohol or other drugs. Talk to a substance abuse counselor (SACO), healthcare provider or mental health professional.

How do you know if you drink too much?

Answer “yes” or “no”:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won’t?
- Do you ever forget what you did while you were drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hang-over after you have been drinking?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a drinking problem. Check with your doctor to be sure. Your doctor will be able to advise you whether you should cut down or abstain.

If you are alcoholic or have other medical problems, you should stop drinking completely, not just cut down. Your doctor will help you decide what is right for you.

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Rachael Moore



Your health care provider

may recommend various treatments

Psychotherapy

aims to increase a person's sense of own well-being. It can use a range of techniques to improve mental health. Any therapy will require commitment and regular practice to be effective, similar to physical training.

Cognitive processing therapy

helps by giving skills to handle distressing thoughts and gain an understanding of triggering events. This can give insight on why recovery has been hard and help show how going through a combat or operational stress changed the way a Marine looks at the world, themselves and others.

Beliefs about safety, trust, control, self-esteem, other people and relationships can change after experiencing combat or operational stress. Cognitive processing

therapy can help to find a better balance between the beliefs held before and after combat and operational stress.

Prolonged exposure therapy

works by helping Marines approach triggering thoughts, feelings and situations they may have been avoiding due to the distress they cause. Repeated exposure to these thoughts, feelings and situations at a comfortable pace helps reduce the power they have to cause distress. With the help of a therapist, Marines can change how they react to stressful memories. This allows mastery of stressful situations and returns control of life back to the Marine.

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)

EMDR is another type of therapy that can help change reactions to triggering memories for some people.

While thinking of or talking about memories, the therapist will provide other stimuli like eye movements, hand taps and sounds for focus. Experts are still learning how EMDR works. Studies have shown that it may help relieve stress injury symptoms, but research also suggests that the eye movements are not a necessary part of the treatment.

Spiritual counseling

Can often help a Marine regain a sense of safety and purpose in

The Marines Corps encourages Marines to seek mental health treatment for issues related to combat or operational stress. Untreated stress can hurt a career.

Questions to ask about therapy:

- Have you worked with people who have been through stress injury symptoms?
- Do you have special training in PTS treatment?
- What can I hope to achieve in therapy?
- Which kinds of treatment(s) will help me the most?
- Are there risks with this treatment?
- How long will I require this treatment?
- When should I start to feel better?

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Brofer



life after stress issues. A chaplain, minister, priest, rabbi or other spiritual leader can help the person find meaning and reconnect with his or her spirituality.

Group therapy

In group therapy, Marines can talk about their stress injury with others who have had similar experiences.

This can help them feel more comfortable talking about the stress injury and help cope with symptoms, memories, and other parts of life. Group therapy helps build relationships with others and teaches how to deal with emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, rage and fear. Sharing with the group builds self-confidence and trust.

combat or operational stress. This therapy helps Marines understand how their past affects the way they feel now.

Medication

Most of the time, medications provide a symptom reduction and are best used with a program of psychotherapy. There are also other medications to manage specific symptoms that have been used with some success. Talk to your doctor about which medications are right for you.

Selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are a type of antidepressant medicine that appear to be helpful and very effective in helping some people feel less sad and worried. SSRIs raise brain levels of serotonin, a chemical affecting feelings of well-being.

If you become more depressed, anxious or suicidal while taking antidepressants, get medical help right away. Never change the dose, start or stop taking them, without direction from your healthcare provider.

Note: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has added warnings to some antidepressants as there is a risk of worsening depression or increasing thoughts of suicide. Discuss all risks and benefits of any medication with your healthcare provider.

Questions to ask when taking medication:

- Is this medication potentially addictive and what signs should I look for when taking it?
- How will this medication interact with other medications prescribed or available over the counter? Will foods or herbs interact with this medication?
- How long should I expect to be taking the medication?
- Review regularly which medications to continue and whether they are all still required.

It also builds focus on the present, rather than feeling overwhelmed by the past.

Family or marriage counseling

Stress injuries can affect the whole family when children or a partner may not understand the anger, or why their Marine is under so much stress. The family may feel scared, guilty, or even angry about the condition. Family therapy is a type of counseling that involves the whole family and can augment individual therapies. A therapist helps families to communicate, maintain good relationships, cope with tough emotions and learn more about stress injuries or illness and treatments.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy

teaches ways of dealing with emotional conflicts caused by



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Aquila Brown

Please read: This handbook is not able to list all the risks, benefits, side effects and special precautions for each medication discussed. Patients should talk with their healthcare provider about these issues for each medication prior to use. Use medications only as prescribed or directed by your healthcare provider.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Posttraumatic Stress (PTS)

TBI and PTS reactions

A TBI is basically a concussion that can occur even when there is no direct contact to the head and even when wearing a helmet. For example, when a person suffers whiplash, the brain may be shaken within the skull. Many of the symptoms that follow a TBI overlap with the common stress reactions, so it can be hard to determine the underlying problem and since the two often occur in the same person, the presence of one should alert leaders and caregivers to the possibility of the other.

It is important to be assessed because those who sustain TBI should not use some medications as the effects could be serious, no matter how mild or severe the injury.

TBI can be caused by:

- ▷ Explosion or blast.
- ▷ Fragment striking the head.
- ▷ Blunt object strike.
- ▷ Fall.
- ▷ Motor vehicle crash.

- ▷ Gunshot wound.
- ▷ Other.

Common symptoms following a TBI

These symptoms are part of the normal process of getting better, but are not signs of lasting brain damage.

Physical

- ▷ Headache.
- ▷ Feeling dizzy.
- ▷ Being tired.
- ▷ Trouble sleeping.
- ▷ Vision problems.
- ▷ Feeling bothered by noise and light.

Cognitive (Mental)

- ▷ Memory problems.
- ▷ Trouble staying focused.
- ▷ Poor judgment and acting without thinking.
- ▷ Being slowed down.
- ▷ Trouble putting thoughts into words.

Emotional (Feelings)

- ▷ Depression.
- ▷ Anger outbursts or being quick to anger.
- ▷ Anxiety (fear, worry or feeling nervous).
- ▷ Personality changes.

Getting the right diagnosis is important

Only a healthcare provider or mental health professional can diagnose PTS. Generally, a diagnosis of PTS is based on a person:

- ▷ Going through a traumatic event (or events) that caused intense fear, helplessness or horror.
- ▷ Suffering from symptoms (described on **page 3**, Red Zone) — reliving the traumatic event(s), avoiding people or situations and acting as though danger is still present — after the traumatic event(s).
- ▷ Experiencing significant distress from symptoms.
- ▷ Having symptoms for a longer period of time.

PTS is a severe, prolonged reaction to traumatic stress.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Mondo Lescaud



A healthcare provider or mental health professional can also determine if a person has some other stress issue, even if that person does not meet the criteria for a PTS diagnosis.

Some Marines may be at a higher risk for stress issues.

Not all contributing factors for stress illness are known and why Marines react differently to similar circumstances is not well known. Studies have highlighted various risk factors.

This includes people who:

- ▷ Were physically or sexually abused as children.
- ▷ Are or were victims of domestic violence.
- ▷ Have other mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression.
- ▷ Have witnessed or been victims of other traumatic events such as car accidents, earthquakes, rape or terrorist events.
- ▷ Have other major problems in their lives, such as financial, legal or relationship problems.

Here are some ways to better understand stress illness:

- ▷ Stress illnesses are a medical condition that can be treated.
- ▷ Talk about your recovery to help others understand the challenges of recovery.
- ▷ Show strengths and use your talents. Don't let stress illness stop activities.

- ▷ "You are the message." Show how you wish to be treated by actions. Treating yourself with respect sets an example for everyone.
- ▷ Accept that you may need breaks during activities. Stress illness symptoms may make it harder to focus for very long.
- ▷ Work with your family and doctor to set manageable goals and make changes as you needed.

Coping with stress actively reduces feelings of helplessness.

- ▷ Accept the impact of stress on life and take direct action for improvement.
- ▷ Taking direct action to cope with stress dictates a position of power.
- ▷ Active coping is a way of responding to everyday life. Regularly building active coping into everyday solidifies a healthy habit.

Healing stress illness

is similar to physical injuries: it is a process. Just like someone with a physical injury, those with stress illnesses must account for changes in abilities. This does not mean disqualification from life. Maintain hope and do not quit.

Acknowledge the illness to realize the need for help. Some people are unaware that significant impacts to career or behaviors and relationships are signs of a stress illness. Often they

will self-medicate as they try to figure out what is wrong which can make it worse. They may be aware of stress illnesses or PTS but deny they could have either due to stigma (see page 27).

Name it and understand it: Learning how to manage stress illnesses can begin once it is acknowledged.

Move forward: In the event of a setback, plan to regroup and continue. Be realistic about expectations, know what will trigger problems and find ways to mitigate.

Always reassess: Based on personal history, reassess healing and interacting with the environment. In the event of a setback, figure out what happened and why. Then set reasonable goals and keep going.

*Marines, attached Sailors, and families call:
Anonymous DSTRESS Line at
1-877-476-7734 and online chat
at www.dstressline.com.*

*Veterans or Service members and families call:
Confidential Military Crisis Line at
1-800-273-8255 and press 1,
use the online chat at
www.veteranscrisisline.net or send
a text message to 838255.*

*For emergencies call
9-1-1 or go to your nearest
Emergency Room.*

Coping with stress issues

Positive coping

Reminder: recovery is a process.

- ▷ Stressors will not simply disappear; plan how you will respond and take control.
- ▷ Many others face similar stress-related issues; you are not alone. Others can offer support through their experiences.
- ▷ Practice relaxation methods (see pages 8-9 and 12-13).

Coping with the symptoms of stress:

Unwanted distressing memories, images, or thoughts

- ▷ It's natural to have memories of the combat or operational stress.
- ▷ Discuss this with a trusted person.
- ▷ Remember that reminders of combat or operational stress often lessen with time.

Sudden feelings of anxiety or panic

Stress reactions often include heart pounding and feeling light-headed compounded by rapid breathing.

- ▷ These reactions are not of themselves dangerous.
- ▷ The accompanying scary thoughts are what make these reactions so upsetting.
- ▷ Slowing down breathing may help.
- ▷ It will soon pass.
- ▷ Responding in positive ways will help it happen less often.

Feeling like the combat or operational stress is happening again (flashbacks)

Reminder: this is common after combat or operational stress.

- ▷ Note current surroundings.
- ▷ Remind yourself that you are safe. The combat or operational stress happened in the past - not in the present.
- ▷ Get up and move around. Reestablish the present with

simple tasks like drinking water or washing hands.

- ▷ Call a trusted person to talk.
- ▷ Discuss with a counselor or doctor.

Dreams and nightmares related to the combat or operational stress

Reminder: this is a dream and not real danger.

- ▷ Orient to the present by getting up from bed.
- ▷ Engage in a pleasant, calming activity like listening to music.
- ▷ Talk to someone if possible.
- ▷ Discuss with your doctor. Certain medications can be helpful.

Difficulty falling or staying asleep

- ▷ Keep to a regular bedtime routine.
- ▷ Avoid heavy exercise for several hours just before going to bed.
- ▷ Avoid using your sleeping area for activities beyond sleep or sex.
- ▷ Avoid alcohol, tobacco and caffeine.
- ▷ Do not lie in bed thinking or worrying. Get up and enjoy something soothing or pleasant. Read a book, do a quiet hobby.

Irritability, anger and rage

- ▷ Walk away from the situation to take time out to think and cool off.
- ▷ Use daily exercise to reduce body tension and relieve stress.
- ▷ Don't stay angry: it increases stress and can cause health problems
- ▷ If you blow up at family members or friends, find time as soon as possible to talk about it. Let them know what you are doing to cope with your reactions.
- ▷ Talk to a counselor or doctor about anger. Take classes in managing it.

Difficulty concentrating or staying focused

- ▷ Slow down for better focus.
- ▷ Write things down; lists may be helpful.
- ▷ Break tasks into smaller chunks.

- ▷ Plan a realistic number of events or tasks for each day.

Trouble feeling or expressing positive emotions

This is a common reaction to combat or operational stress.

- ▷ Continue enjoyable activities even if initially difficult.
- ▷ Show loved ones you care in various ways: write a card, leave a small gift or phone someone and say hello.
- ▷ Try different methods to see which are most helpful. As other skills, it is improved with practice.

Negative coping

Some common behaviors don't help and may make a situation worse in the long run.

Substance abuse is taking drugs or alcohol to feel better. This might be to escape problems, help sleep or ease stress symptoms. Substance abuse can lead to bad decisions that risk relationships, employment and health (See pages 20-21 for mitigating strategies).

Avoiding others

- ▷ Fear of social situations can lead to avoiding others. Social support is part of healthy coping.
- ▷ If distanced from others, problems may seem to build up and cause more negative thoughts, sadness and fear, reinforcing a sense of aloneness.
- ▷ Take part in social activities even if it doesn't sound good initially. It will increase chances of feeling good and having fun.

Staying always on guard may seem reasonable after experiencing combat or operational stress, this only causes more stress, fearfulness and drains energy (See pages 12-13 for mitigating strategies).

Avoiding reminders of the combat or operational stress by shutting out

feelings may seem reasonable but doesn't work because the effort takes a lot of energy and prevents progress in coping.

Anger and violent behavior

- ▷ Anger may cause a loss of temper and reckless actions. It can distance people who may try to help.
- ▷ It's natural to feel angry after going through combat or operational stress. Uncontrollable anger and violent behavior can cause other problems and reduce access to help by alienating people (See pages 16-17 for mitigating strategies).

Dangerous behavior

- ▷ It is common to try coping with risky or dangerous activities, such as driving too fast or starting fights. This can cause injury to self or others.
- ▷ Smoking is dangerous to health.
- ▷ Overeating to relieve stress can cause weight gain which can also compromise health.

Working too much

- ▷ Work is a good thing for learning new things, interacting with

others, and gaining confidence but too much can be a form of avoidance.

- ▷ It may lead to putting off seeking help by diverting attention.
- ▷ It reduces time with family and friends and their support.
- ▷ It can impact sleep and eating right, both important to recovery.

Stigma

is negative views about things people don't know much about, such as mental health. Everyone has a role in reducing stigma.

Stigma occurs when others think:

- ▷ Stress injuries and illnesses can't be treated.
- ▷ Stress is someone's fault or is something to get over.
- ▷ It is contagious.
- ▷ Stress injuries make people dangerous.
- ▷ Stress injuries and illnesses aren't real.

Stigmas can keep someone from seeking or receiving treatment. Leaving stress untreated allows it to become worse.

You have control of how you are viewed. Actions and treatment of others will influence people's attitudes about stress injuries and illnesses. When people understand health injuries, they are more likely to rise above negative views. Self respect is an important part of recovery.

Peer Support

Others who have experienced combat or operational stress are good sources of understanding and support. Contact with others who have had similar experiences will reduce isolation and distrust of others. OSCAR Team Members are trained Marines, many with similar experiences. Veterans may find benefit in joining a veterans' organization.

It may be hard to join a peer support group. It may not seem useful or it may be difficult to trust new people. It can be a great relief to take positive action and learn that others are dealing with the same issues. Working with others can also develop into friendship in time.

**“It's okay
to not be
okay.”**

— General James F. Amos
Commandant of the
Marine Corps



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl Michael Petersheim

For friends and family

Effective communication is important

- ▷ Focus on making communication as non-confrontational as possible ... this can be easier said than done during a stressful transition period.
- ▷ Make time for the family to talk together, including any children. Even “too young” children respond to company and conversation.
- ▷ Be respectful to each other when discussing issues, especially in front of children.

Ways you can help

Learn as much as you can about stress issues. Knowing how stress affects people may help you understand what your Marine is going through. The more you know, the better you and your family can handle stress issues.

Tell your Marine you want to listen and that you also understand if he or she doesn't feel like talking. Let your Marine talk about the combat or operational stress event at his or her own pace.

Offer to go to doctor visits with your Marine. You can help keep track of medicine and therapy, and you can be there for support.

Plan family activities together, like having dinner or going to a movie.

Do physical activities together like taking a walk, going for a bike ride, or some other things you enjoy. Exercise is important for health and helps clear your mind.

Encourage contact with family and close friends. A support system will help your Marine get through difficult changes and stressful times.

Your Marine may not want your help. If this happens, keep in mind that withdrawal can be a symptom of stress. Give your Marine space, but tell him or her that you will always be ready to help.

Offer support and safety

Just being there for your Marine can be a tremendous comfort. It can help your Marine avoid the isolation that often comes with combat and operational stress. Some other ways to offer support:

If your Marine wants to talk about his or her experiences, be there to listen. Believe what your Marine tells you. Don't minimize what he or she has been through.

Avoid trying to solve your Marine's problems or telling him or her what to do. Reassure your Marine that you care about him or her no matter what.

Respect your loved one's wishes.

Allow your Marine to make his or her own decisions. It can help him or her to feel in control again. Additionally, your loved one may need a lot of time to heal from combat or operational stress, and may not feel like participating in some activities.

Suggest sources of help.

Encourage your Marine to get the help he or she needs — but don't force it. You can help your Marine find healthcare providers, mental health professionals or a treatment program. You should also encourage him or her to maintain friendships, stay in touch with other family

“It is critical that we work together to prevent stress issues and reach out to any fellow Marine who is showing signs of stress. We must ensure every Marine understands that seeking help for these issues is not a sign of weakness. The negative impact of stress is an invisible enemy we can't afford to ignore.”

— Sergeant Major Michael P. Barrett,
Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps

Personal growth links:

- Joesgoals.com
- [Posttraumatic growth inventory](#)
- milblogging.com

members or join a self-help group (see pages 30-32 for more sources of help).

Relationship maintenance

The best thing for the relationship is to make time for each other. This can be as simple as setting aside a few hours as a couple once a week. If you need to get a babysitter, do so. Make an effort to foster intimacy and closeness.

Spouses may experience several emotions, from relief to gratitude to irritation. Being left alone for a long time and forced to become very independent can lead to frustration at the loss of privacy or independence they didn't realize they wanted before their Marine left. This may also cause feelings of guilt along with the sense of relief their Marine is alive, safe and home.

How to create a better family climate

- Talk to each other.
- Be kind and thoughtful even when it isn't easy.
- Spend time together, such as eating dinner together and doing other fun activities like games and outings.
- Make your relationship a priority and focus on the present while paying attention to your children.
- Focus on the positive by capitalizing on strengths and cheerfully compensating for any weaker areas to create a sense of being a team.
- Focus on relaxing and creating a sense of normalcy through routine tasks.
- Keep interactions upbeat when parting even if you have a disagreement.
- Remember quality of time spent together is more important than the quantity of time.

Prior to deployment, there was a whirlwind of emotion to manage. At some point during the deployment, it normalized as the routine developed with day-to-day life and everyone became used to their Marine being gone. Now that the Marine is back, the whirlwind begins again.

Any Marine can have an adverse reaction to stress.

Even very experienced Marines can be affected. That's why all friends and family members should stay alert for stress reactions in their Marines.

Get counseling if needed.

Your Marine's reaction to combat or operational stress can seriously affect your relationship. For example, you may:

- ▷ Be fearful of talking about the triggering event.

- ▷ Have difficulty talking to your loved one.
- ▷ Feel emotionally cut off from him or her.
- ▷ Be discouraged that your loved one has not recovered from the stress.

Marital or family counseling can help you and your Marine deal with these issues together. Even if he or she does not want to go to counseling, get help for yourself.

To find a mental health professional or counselor who can help you cope with your Marine's combat or operational stress, contact your Marine and Family Services Center, your chaplain or other spiritual counselor, your base health clinic, a VA facility, or a private mental health professional or clinic (**see pages 30-32** for more sources of help).

Maintain routines

This can give you, your family and your Marine a sense of order and comfort in that some things have returned to normal. For example, if you usually have dinner together every night, stick to that routine as much as possible.

Be kind to yourself

It is easy to neglect yourself if you are taking care of others. But to most effectively help others, you need to take care of your own needs.

- ▷ Eat healthy foods and get enough exercise. Talk to your health-care provider before starting an exercise program.
- ▷ Relax, rest and get enough sleep. Keep in touch with friends. Do things you enjoy.

Sources of help and information

Operational Stress Control & Readiness (OSCAR) teams

OSCAR is Marine-led training that builds teams of Marine leaders, medical and religious ministry personnel and Mental Health Professionals who work together to provide a network of support within each battalion-level unit. OSCAR teams serve as known, easily approachable immediate points of contact, noticing small changes in behavior and taking action early on stress-related issues; encouraging those who need help to get it. Providing early intervention as appropriate, OSCAR teams help Marines maintain full readiness. OSCAR Team Training occurs across the total force supporting Marines in theater, in garrison, and at home.

OSCAR Mentor/Team Members

Identify, support, and advise their fellow Marines on stress-related issues to help prevent stress from becoming a more serious issue.

OSCAR Extenders

Provide counseling and referral as required. They are medical personnel including medical officers and corpsmen and religious ministry personnel including chaplains and religious program specialists assigned to Marine Corps commands.

OSCAR Mental Health Professionals

Provide follow on in-depth mental health care. They are assigned to some Marine Corps commands and are available at most installation medical treatment facilities (MTF).

DSTRESS

is anonymous and open 24/7/365, providing counseling services (on various topics) to Marines, attached Sailors, and family members who speak with "one of their own."

▷ Voice/Text (domestic and

international) 1-877-476-7734

- ▷ Okinawa (DSN) 645-7734; (local cell or local land line) 098-970-7734; (US based VOIP) 1-877-476-7734
- ▷ MCAS Iwakun (DSN) 645-7734; (local cell or local land line) 098-970-7734
- ▷ www.dstressline.com

Marine Corps Family Services

Offers classes, information, referral, and counseling on a wide range of topics. They are located on Marine Corps facilities.

- ▷ East of the Mississippi River: (800) 336-4663
- ▷ West of the Mississippi River: (800) 253-1624

Military OneSource

Available to assist service members and families throughout the deployment cycle, on any topic, 24/7.

- ▷ CONUS: (800) 342-9647; OCONUS: (country access code) (800) 342-9647 (dial all 11 numbers); International: (800) 464-8107.
- ▷ www.militaryonesource.com

Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) Outreach Center

provides 24/7 information and

resources about resilience, recovery and reintegration.

- ▷ (866) 966-1020
- ▷ E-mail: resources@dcoeoutreach.org
- ▷ www.dcoe.health.mil/24-7help.aspx

National Guard Support Center

Assists National Guard and other reserve service members.

- ▷ www.jointservicessupport.org

Veterans Affairs

Healthcare information, VA medical center facility locator and benefits assistance for veterans.

- ▷ (877) WAR-VETS (927-8387)
- ▷ VA facility locator: www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp. Each VA medical center and many VA clinics have stress injury and PTS specialists.
- ▷ VA PTSD program locator: www2.va.gov/directory/guide/PTSD_flsh.asp?isFlash=1

American Red Cross

provides confidential counseling, guidance, information, referrals and other services at offices on Marine Corps installations and their worldwide network of chapters.

- ▷ Active-duty service members can call (877) 272-7337.

Psychological Health Outreach Program (PHOP)

Assists Navy and Marine Corps reservists with psychological health services.

| Region | Locations | Phone Numbers |
|------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Atlantic | HQ Co., H&S BN, 4th MLG (Marietta, GA) | 678-655-7177 / 679-688-7179 |
| Mid West | 24th Marine Regiment (Kansas City, MO) | 816-843-3675 / 816-843-3678 |
| North East | 25th Marine Regiment (Devens, MA) | 978-796-2306 / 978-796-3633 |
| North West | 4th LSB, H&S Co. (Ft. Lewis, WA) | 253-477-2611 / 253-477-2612 |
| South | HQ, MARFORRES (New Orleans) | 504-678-6188 / 504-678-6186 |
| South West | 23rd Marine Regiment (San Bruno, CA) | 650-244-9806, ext. 1007 / ext. 1503 |



Depression is treatable

Psychotherapy, medication and self-help techniques can help ease depression. If you feel depressed, seek treatment from a healthcare provider or mental health professional. In the past month, how much have you been bothered by any of the issues below?

- ▶ Feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
- ▶ Little interest or pleasure in doing things?
- ▶ If you have consistently had either of these issues in the past month, you should be evaluated by a health care professional.

Stress issues are manageable.

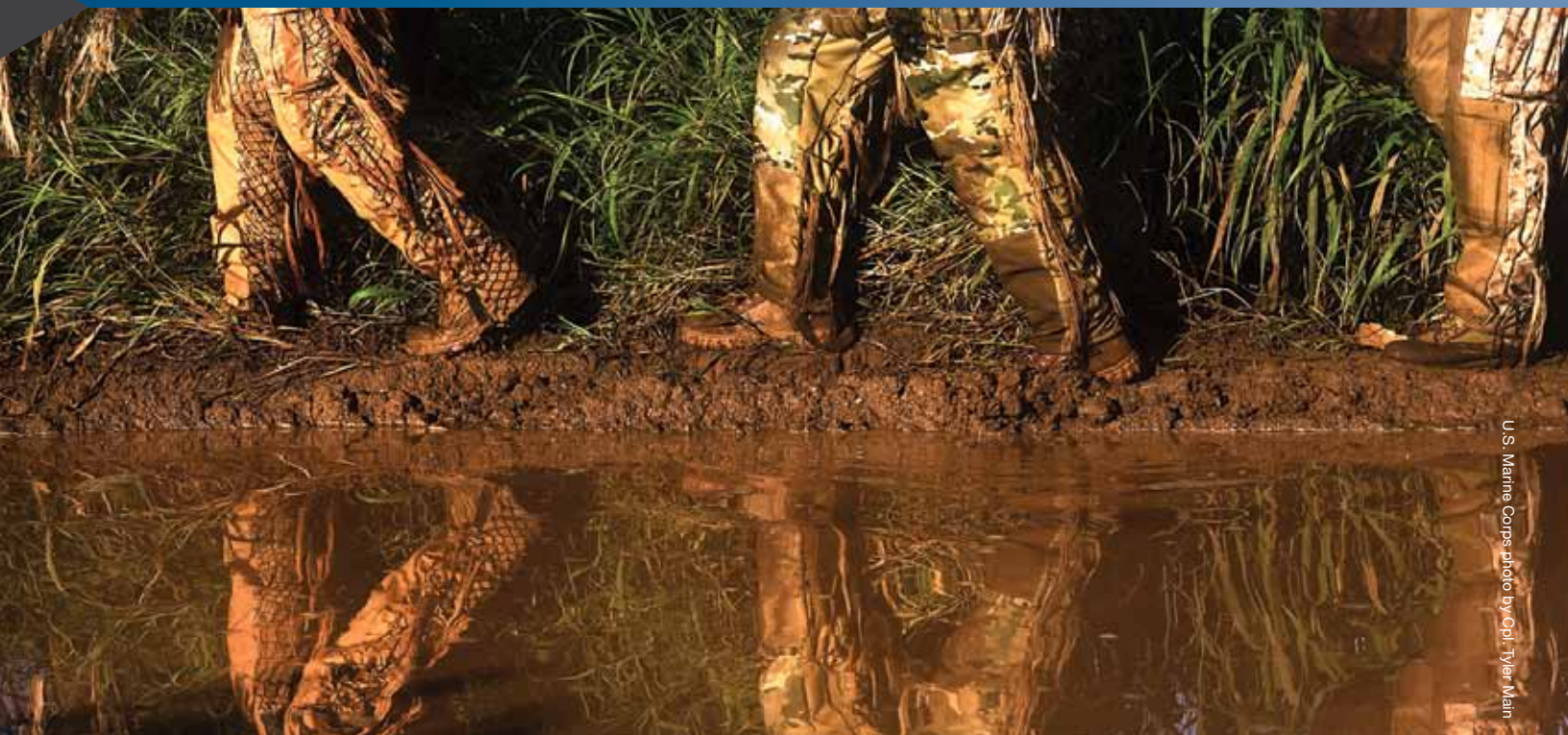
With treatment, most Marines and veterans with combat and operational stress issues can move on to full, satisfying lives. Generally, symptoms lessen over time.

Some may experience continuing flare-ups of their symptoms — for example, when they are exposed to a situation or an event that reminds them of combat or operational stress. Daily management of symptoms becomes easier with practice.

Marines, attached Sailors, and families call: Anonymous DSTRESS Line at 1-877-476-7734 and online chat at www.dstressline.com.

Veterans or Service members and families call: Confidential Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, use the online chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net or send a text message to 838255.

For emergencies call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest Emergency Room.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Tyler Main

Real Warriors Campaign

Real stories of strength and hope along with other useful news and information to build warrior and family resilience to support return and transition. Sponsored by DCoE.

▷ www.realwarriors.net

Afterdeployment.org

Information and self-guided solutions for dealing with health and wellness, stress, relationship problems, children and deployment, conflict at work, anger, living with physical injuries, sleep problems, depression, posttraumatic stress and war memories, alcohol and drug abuse and spiritual guidance and fitness.

▷ www.afterdeployment.org

Military Pathways

provides free, anonymous mental health and alcohol self-assessments for service members (including the National Guard and Reserve) and families, available online and over the phone. The self-assessments help create a picture of how an individual is feeling and whether they could benefit from talking to a health professional.

▷ www.militarymentalhealth.org

HQMC Combat & Operational Stress Control (COSC)

assists commanders and leaders in maintaining their warfighting capabilities by addressing the impacts of stress. COSC activities enhance force preservation, readiness and the long-term health and well-being of Marines and their families. COSC efforts include OSCAR, Deployment Cycle Training (DCT), and COSC plans, policies, tools and resources. These initiatives prevent, identify, and manage combat and operational stress-related issues and increase access to mental health care by breaking stigma; raising awareness; providing education and resources to support Marines. COSC is the lead for all matters pertaining to combat and operational stress control in the Marine Corps.

▷ www.manpower.usmc.mil/cosc

Behavioral Health Information Network (BHIN)

is an information clearing house, providing the latest information, tools and resources related to

behavioral health, free for Marines, Sailors and families. Sponsored by HQMC Behavioral Health.

▷ www.usmc-mccs.org/bhin

Human Performance Resource Center (HPRC)

Addresses the mind-body connection in wellness and recovery.

▷ <http://HPRC-online.org>

Marines, attached Sailors, and families call:

Anonymous DSTRESS Line at 1-877-476-7734 and online chat at www.dstressline.com.

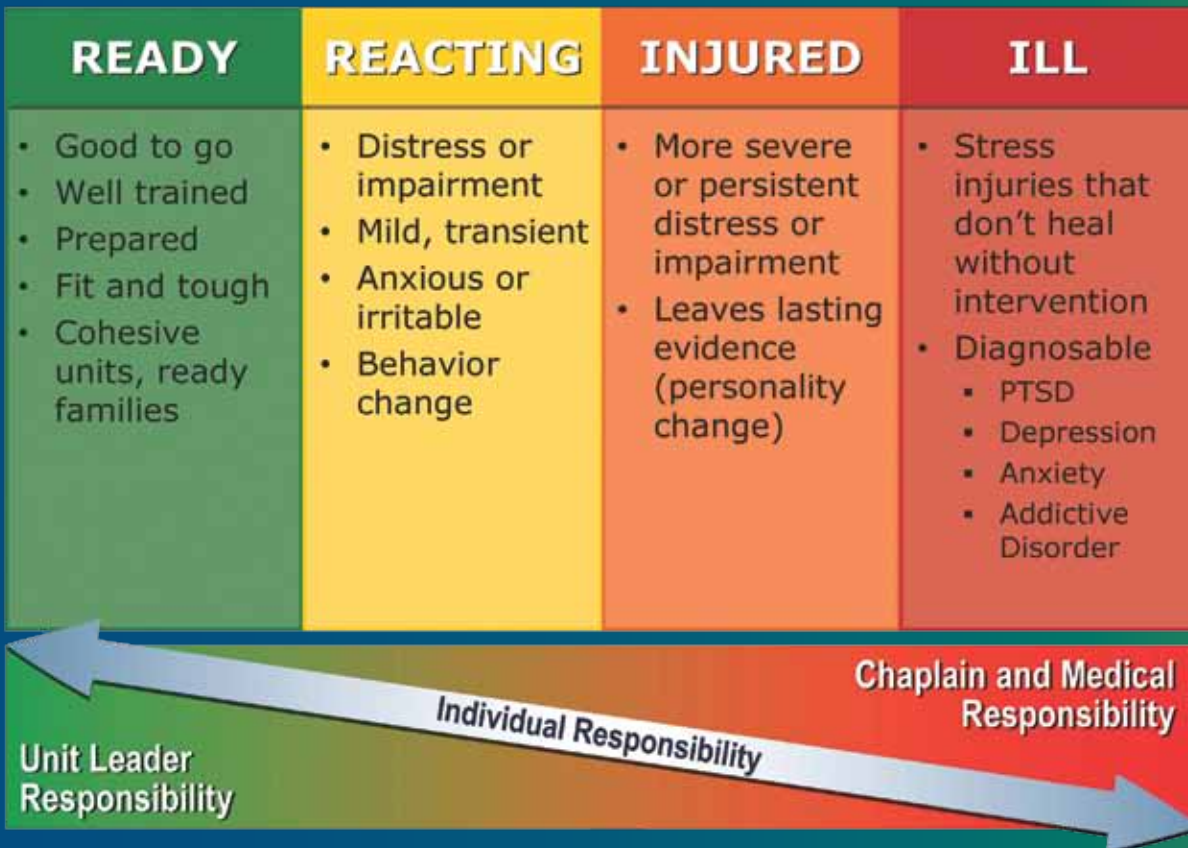
Veterans or Service members and families call:

Confidential Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, use the online chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net or send a text message to 838255.

For emergencies call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest Emergency Room.

Even the most motivated and well-trained Marines can find themselves challenged by combat and operational stress. Some Marines can overcome these problems on their own and some are going to need help. Early intervention is key.





For more information:
 Combat & Operational Stress Control
www.manpower.usmc.mil/cosc