

## SHOUT IT OUT

### DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Today we will be talking about operational stress.

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

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

#### **Gain Attention**

Cpl Davis approaches you about some problems he's been having. You go off on him, loudly, in the chow hall, saying, "You think you're having trouble, we all have problems," and launch into why Cpl Davis had no reason to feel the way he did. You realize you've lost your temper and skip eating the rest of your lunch. Tempo is consistently high in your shop and everyone usually pulls together but morale has been low for weeks, in addition you're dealing with trouble at home. You've been increasingly angry and unmotivated in these weeks, this is not like you. When your buddies asked why you're not acting like yourself, you said, "I'm good to go," they don't buy it.

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

- (1) Defining operational stress
- (2) Identifying causes of operational stress
- (3) Identifying signs of operational stress
- (4) Describing protective factors, tools, and resources for addressing operational stress

**Learning Objective:** After this guided discussion, you will have a better understanding of operational stress, its causes, how to recognize it, and how to deal with it.

#### **DISCUSSION**

As Marines, we are known for always being prepared to respond to crisis or conflict. We expect to deal with stress when we see combat or are deployed. But, there are other kinds of stressors we confront. In fact, you don't have to see combat or be deployed to experience stress. Everyday stressors can build up over time and lead to operational stress, which can be as damaging. This makes it important for you to be able to recognize signs of operational stress in yourself and fellow Marines and know how to handle it. We will begin by looking at the definition of operational stress. We will then name specific things that cause operational stress for us.

#### **KEY POINT 1**

1. Operational stress is defined as "changes in physical or mental functioning or behavior resulting from the experience or consequences of military operations other than combat, during peacetime or war, and on land, at sea, or in the air."
2. All Marines experience operational stress. Stress comes from our jobs and from our personal lives. It is very common for us.

3. What are some things that cause stress for you while you are in garrison, both at work and in your personal lives? (The following are examples. The participants do not have to list all of them and may provide different examples.)
- a) Long hours at a desk
  - b) Minor injuries or illnesses
  - c) Lack of opportunities for exercise
  - d) Boredom
  - e) Conflicts with peers or leaders
  - f) Major life event: promotion, marriage, new baby
  - g) Financial problems
  - h) Conflicts with spouse/partner or family
  - i) Relationship breakups
  - j) Death of a family member or friend
  - k) Difficulty balancing military duties and family responsibilities
  - l) Difficulty making sense of what happens
  - m) Strain on commitment to organization
  - n) Disillusionment regarding mission

**Interim Summary:** We just finished defining operational stress and naming some examples of what might lead to it. You can see that everyone has different stressors. Some things that aren't stressful for you might be stressful for another Marine.

Regardless of what you find stressful, there are protective factors you can use to deal with stressors and manage operational stress.

## **KEY POINT 2**

1. Protective factors reduce the likelihood of experiencing behavioral health issues. With practice we can strengthen protective factors and incorporate them into our daily lives (see appendix for more information).
2. What are some protective factors you can employ? (Participants need to provide only five to six of the possible answers.)
  - a) Talk with leaders and peers
  - b) Focus on your mission as a Marine
  - c) Stay motivated and focused on goals
  - d) Adopt a healthy perspective about problems
  - e) Remember your responsibility to be a good Marine
  - f) Hold yourself accountable for your actions
  - g) Consider whether your actions are consistent with the Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment
  - h) Make good decisions
  - i) Build healthy relationships and talk with family members
  - j) Exercise to burn off stress
  - k) Maintain a positive attitude and sense of humor
  - l) Get adequate sleep and good nutrition
  - m) Think about Marine Corps rules
  - n) Consider opportunities and resources provided by the Marine Corps to deal with stress
  - o) Plan & execute recreational activities, especially when you don't feel like it

Utilizing protective factors can help you meet the challenges of operational stress both while you are in garrison and while you are deployed. However, being deployed brings its own unique set of stressors. Let's think about deployment now.

### **KEY POINT 3**

1. How many of you remember the stress continuum? The stress continuum has four zones to help identify levels of stress in units and individuals: Ready-Green, Reacting-Yellow, Injured-Orange, and Ill-Red. (If participants cannot recall characteristics for each zone, review the enclosure.)
2. What are things that cause stress for you while you are deployed but not necessarily in combat? (The following are examples. The participants do not have to list all of them and may provide different examples.)
  - a) Ambiguous or difficult missions
  - b) High operating tempo
  - c) Real dangers
  - d) Increased workload or long workdays
  - e) Unpredictable hours
  - f) Uncertainty or lack of information
  - g) Little time off for rest
  - h) Poor nutrition
  - i) Harsh weather or rough terrain
  - j) Working in isolation
  - k) Cramped, uncomfortable spaces and lack of personal space
  - l) Unfamiliarity with mission or environment
  - m) Hostility from foreign nationals
  - n) Separation from family and friends
  - o) Relationship problems back home
  - p) Worries about welfare of family, helplessness to deal with family problems
  - q) Casualties or accidental injuries in unit

Again, different things cause stress for different people. While each stressor by itself can seem minor, they collectively can induce stress that pushes you along the stress continuum into the orange stress injury zone or red stress illness zone. Sometimes you are able to manage stress on your own and other times you need help. Asking for and accepting help is part of being a strong Marine. There are a number of resources available.

### **KEY POINT 4**

1. What resources are available to help you manage operational stress?
  - a) Big five: peers, chain of command, chaplain, medical/Marine Corps Community Services resources, and the DSTRESS Line
  - b) Community Counseling Program
  - c) Military and Family Life Consultant
  - d) OSCAR
  - e) Military OneSource
  - f) Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (CREDO) workshops and retreats
  - g) Personal Financial Management Program

Stress injuries and illnesses are preventable, especially if you take advantage of resources. In order

to prevent stress-related issues, you should also be alert for signs of operational distress in you and your fellow Marines.

### **KEY POINT 5**

1. What are some changes in behavior or functioning that might indicate an issue with stress? (The following are examples. The participants do not have to list all of them and may provide different examples.)
  - a) Difficulty relaxing or falling asleep
  - b) Muscle tension or headaches
  - c) Increased use of sick bay or unit medical
  - d) Weight gain or weight loss, changes in appetite (eating too much or too little)
  - e) Change in appearance or personal hygiene
  - f) Talking too fast or too slowly, becoming uncharacteristically quiet
  - g) Loss of normal energy, enthusiasm, or interest in life
  - h) Ceasing or avoiding physical fitness training
  - i) Difficulty focusing on tasks at hand
  - j) Difficulty remembering or performing calculations
  - k) Difficulty following complex instructions
  - l) Difficulty making sound decisions
  - m) Difficulty staying calm and controlling anger or fear
  - n) Quick temper, snapping at others, irritability
  - o) Apathy or complacency
  - p) Not enjoying usual social or recreational activities
  - q) Withdrawing from normal social interactions
  - r) Questioning previous beliefs about mission and purpose
  - s) Loss of focus on the mission
  - t) Cutting corners in work, decreased pride in work
  - u) Sense of alertness or difficulty adjusting to garrison life after deployment
  - v) Increased alcohol use

When operational stress is not managed, it can diminish your fitness, readiness, and resiliency as a Marine. We all need to be aware of the signs of stress before it becomes overwhelming and we, or our fellow Marines, end up deep in the orange (injured) or red (ill) stress zones.

As Marines, we all need to watch out for each other and reach out to anyone showing signs of stress. If you see another Marine exhibiting the changes in behavior or functioning we just discussed, take steps to help.

### **KEY POINT 6**

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

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

  - a) Tell him/her you have noticed changes in his/her behavior in a non-confrontational way and ask open-ended questions, e.g., "I've haven't seen you doing PT lately. What's going on? You don't seem like your regular self."
  - b) Express a willingness to listen and help, e.g., "Whenever you need to talk, I'm always ready to listen. I want to help you stay in the green zone."
  - c) Point to protective factors that could help, e.g., "I know that things seem tough right now."

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

- d) Encourage him/her to seek help from other resources, e.g., "The Marine Corps has resources to help you with just about any problem. We can take a look at them together. Every Marine is challenged by stress at some point. Being a good Marine means that you get help as soon as possible so that you can be in a state of readiness to accomplish our mission. Recognizing that you need help, and asking for and accepting it, are not signs of weakness. Seeking help is a sign of strength."
- f) Follow up to offer support and make sure he/she is getting help, e.g., "We had a good talk yesterday. I hope you followed through and contacted the chaplain. He's a great listener." Get directly involved: invite to PT together, join your family for dinner. Alert the chain of command if your intervention is not having impact, **you** may also contact the chaplain and discuss your concern. Peer confidentiality is guaranteed.

Again, if you see fellow Marines who need assistance dealing with stressors, talk to them and refer them to useful resources.

### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSION**

Today we discussed operational stress. Although operational stress is common for every Marine, everyone is stressed by different things. You identified a variety of work-related and personal stressors. Some were small and others were significant. Left unchecked, the buildup of even minor stressors can lead to operational stress that moves a Marine along the stress continuum towards injury and illness. When we are under stress, we display signs, many of which we talked about today. It's important for everyone to be alert to these signs in ourselves and others. When we see signs of stress in other Marines, we should take the steps we talked about to assist them.

#### **Closing Statement:**

Even for Marines, combat is not the only source of stress. The challenges of daily life—from work, family, and unexpected events (positive and negative)—can be equally demanding. Unrecognized, unmanaged operational stress can lead to harmful changes in behavior or functioning. The objective for today was to look at the definition and various causes of, warning signs for, and ways to address operational stress. Armed with this information, you can be more alert about staying in the green (ready) zone to be the Marine you want to be and helping others do the same.

### **END OF DISCUSSION**

### **RESOURCES**

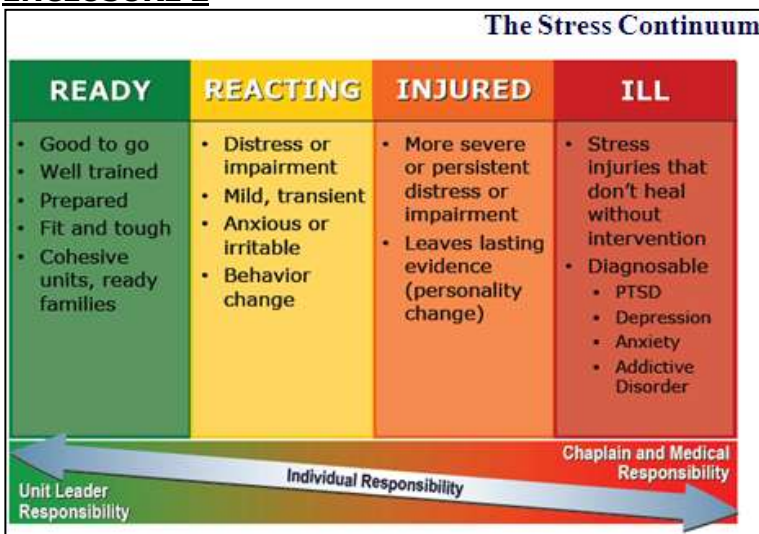
1. Combat Stress MCRP 6-11C
2. MCO 5351.1 Combat and Operational Stress Control Program
3. MAPIT Guide. Retrieved from [http://bhini.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT\\_Guide.pdf](http://bhini.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf).

## ENCLOSURE 1



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

## ENCLOSURE 2



1. Green is Ready. Signs of a Ready Marine, in the Green Zone are:
  - a) Remaining calm and steady;
  - b) Being confident in oneself and others;
  - c) Getting the job done;
  - d) Remaining in control;
  - e) Possessing sound mind, body, spirit and social fitness;
  - f) Behaving ethically and morally;
  - g) Retaining a sense of humor;
  - h) Being at peace with oneself.
2. Marines in the Green Zone adapt to cope with stressors and continue to function well. The Green Zone is where most of us are most of the time; when a stressor enters the picture, we can slide into the Yellow Zone.
3. Yellow is Reacting. The Yellow Zone is always temporary, common, and reversible. There is some anxiety, irritability, and behavior change, but the Marine is going to go back to Green on his or her own after the stress is removed. Every Marine goes in and out of the Yellow Zone.
4. Signs of stress reaction, in the Yellow Zone are:
  - a) Cutting corners on the job;
  - b) Being short tempered, irritable or grouchy;
  - c) Having trouble falling asleep;
  - d) Eating too much or too little;
  - e) Losing some interest, energy or enthusiasm;
  - f) Not enjoying usual activities;
  - g) Keeping to oneself;
  - h) Being overly loud or hyperactive;
  - i) Feeling worried, anxious or fearful;
  - j) Feeling sad or angry;
  - k) Being negative or pessimistic;
  - l) Diminished mental focus.
5. Marines in the Yellow Zone are reacting to temporary or mild stress and show temporary signs of stress that go away on their own. Even though Yellow Zone stress reactions are temporary, you have a responsibility to engage fellow Marines experiencing temporary stress and help them manage their stress to return to the Green Zone.
6. Orange is Injured. Marines in the Orange Zone might show a lasting change in behavior or personality caused by more severe and persistent forms of distress or loss of function. Because Orange Zone stress injuries may not resolve on their own and may last for many years; you have a responsibility to engage resources and get Marines in the Orange Zone assistance. In some cases, Orange Zone stress injuries may get worse and go into the Red Zone.
7. Signs of stress injury, in the Orange Zone, are:
  - a) Having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
  - b) Waking up from recurrent, vivid nightmares
  - c) Being unable to enjoy usually pleasurable activities
  - d) Losing the ability to remember or think rationally and clearly
  - e) Feeling persistent, intense guilt or shame
  - f) Feeling unusually remorseless or emotionally cold
  - g) Experiencing attacks of panic or blind rage
  - h) All these symptoms are in relation to a Marine's normal demeanor and activities, making it vital to know your fellow Marines and look for changes in their behavior. Marines can recover from stress-related issues with the proper support.

8. Red is III. Marines in the Red Zone experience severe distress or some loss of function that has gotten bad enough or persisted long enough to be diagnosable, its symptoms if unmanaged may significantly impact a Marine's career and family. This Marine may have Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS), anxiety, or depression. Only a qualified medical officer can diagnose a Marine in the Red Zone. You CAN help identify symptoms associated with the Red Zone; if you think a Marine is in the Red Zone, refer them for assistance utilizing the assigned representative within your chain of command.
9. Signs of stress illness, in the Red Zone, are:
  - a) Experiencing attacks of panic or blind rage.
  - b) Long-lasting and disabling distress or impairment of normal functioning;
  - c) Symptoms that worsen over time rather than improve;
  - d) Problems and issues that return after improving or seeming to resolve;
  - e) Impairment that does not significantly improve within several weeks of returning from deployment.