

STRESS DECISION FLOWCHART

DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Good morning my name is _____. Today we will be talking about the Stress Decision Flowchart.

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

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

Gain Attention

Every Marine experiences stress. In fact, stress is necessary to build strength. But, too much stress can harm even the strongest Marine. Even the most motivated and well-trained Marines can find themselves challenged by combat and operational stress. Some Marines can overcome stress-related issues on their own and some are going to need help. Physical and stress-related injuries differ in that stress-related issues are invisible, harder to recognize, and can carry greater stigma. Stress-related issues may be 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 need to be alert for signs of stress reactions in themselves and in their fellow Marines.

Key points for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Assessing if a Marine is in distress
- (2) Utilizing the Stress Decision Flowchart to identify stress zones and engage a Marine experiencing stress

Learning Objective: After this guided discussion, you will have a better understanding of how to identify stress reactions in yourself and your fellow Marines. You will be equipped with the Stress Decision Flowchart to help identify the stress zones and engage Marines experiencing stress-related issues.

DISCUSSION

By noticing small changes in behavior that indicate a Marine is experiencing a stress-related issue, you can take action to help that Marine. You are the best person to identify subtle behavior changes by knowing the Marines in your unit, their strengths and weaknesses, to include the challenges they face both in the unit and at home. Recognize when Marines' confidence in themselves, their peers, or leaders is shaken or when units have lost cohesion because of casualties, changes in leadership, or challenges to the unit. We must continuously monitor our stress level and the stress level of fellow Marines; this ensures that everyone who needs help gets it.

KEY POINT 1

1. In almost all situations, unit leaders and peers can observe a Marine's behavior and ask questions to open the lines of communications. Remember, it is important to engage the difficult conversations. Use the following tips to help:
 - a) Ask your Marine, "Can we talk about ..."
 - b) Ask open-ended questions
 - c) Make it OK. "Others have been there."
 - d) Listen actively

- e) Facilitators: See the UMAPIT Dashboard Module on “Communication Skills” for more information about how to engage in topic-sensitive conversations.
2. To quickly assess if a Marine is in distress, observe and listen for the following key indicators:
 - a) What stressors have they recently encountered? Watch for stressors during deployment or training. Listen for personal or home stressors like relationship issues or financial difficulties.
 - b) What is the level of their current distress? Watch for uncharacteristic and intense negative outlooks. Listen for troubling thoughts such as guilt or shame.
 - c) Have their functioning and performance been degraded by stress? Watch for changes in job performance, self-care, or getting along with others. Listen for physical signs, sleep problems, or loss of self-control.
 3. 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, but combat adds additional stressors.
 4. How can you recognize stress reactions in your Marines while in a war zone?
 - a) Stress reactions in a war zone are common and nearly all Marines will become stronger and quickly return to the fight.
 - b) Those exposed to combat will react in some way (Yellow Zone); however, 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 friends, leaders, or other individuals you care for.
 - 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.
 5. When you’ve determined a Marine is in distress, you’ll want to follow a Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely (SMART) plan with actions to get them the help they need. Use the points below as a guide for the SMART plan. (Facilitators: Have participants also review “The Stress Continuum” Dashboard module to familiarize themselves with the stress zones)
 - a) Specific—target a specific area for improvement
 - b) Measurable—quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress
 - c) Assignable—specify who will do it
 - d) Realistic—state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources
 - e) Time-related—specify when the results can be achieved

Interim Summary: Let’s discuss the Stress Decision Flowchart, a tool to help you determine how to engage a Marine experiencing stress (pull out Enclosure 1 for flowchart). It is based on the Stress Continuum. We’ll look at what causes stress reactions in Marines and how you can provide assistance.

KEY POINT 2

The Stress Decision Flowchart is a simple tool for leaders to determine where a Marine falls on the stress continuum and shows what to do to mitigate or, if necessary, treat the injury or illness. It can also be used by individual Marines to evaluate themselves or their buddies who have symptoms of stress. This is used by leaders to determine what actions should be taken with Marines experiencing stress issues.

We’ll look at the scenario and talk about the issues, the stress zone, and see how we can address the situation.

Scenario 1

Cpl Nolan arrived at your duty station about 10 months ago. He’s always done his job pretty well and he’s dependable. You’ve even gone to chow with him a few times and all of your conversations have

either been about work or family. He talks about his wife a lot. They are high school sweethearts and it seems that she's used to living a certain way. He promised her, before they got married, that he would be able to maintain her high-maintenance lifestyle. You don't think the woman's ever heard the word "No." Cpl Nolan is afraid his wife will leave him if he doesn't honor his "promise," but he's finding himself feeling resentful because her shopping habits have got them so far in debt. He's been lying to her when she asks for things—"Okay sweetie, I'll order that for you"... "I'll check the Exchange for that after work." He knows she's going to catch on soon, but his main concern right now is the bills they're struggling to pay. He's been having a hard time staying focused at work, and he got chewed out by his GySgt twice this month for missing deadlines. Whenever his phone rings, he jumps and hesitates for awhile before answering, thinking that bill collectors are calling. He's up for promotion in 2 months, but he could lose everything over this...including his wife.

1. What stress zone do you think Cpl Nolan is in?
 - a) Green—Ready
 - b) Yellow—Reacting (correct answer)
 - c) Orange—Injured
 - d) Red—Ill
2. Marines in the Yellow Zone show signs of mild or temporary stress. These reactions can be recognized by their short duration and relative mildness. What are some Yellow Zone behaviors Cpl Nolan is experiencing?
 - a) He's anxious and afraid
 - b) He's jumpy
 - c) He's having difficulty performing his normal work duties
 - d) His personality has changed
3. Since the Yellow Zone is marked by only mild or temporary stress, shouldn't Cpl Nolan eventually get past this? Does he need to see anyone about this?
 - a) Although Yellow Zone stress is temporary, you should still take action so your stress does not get to the next zone
 - b) Get some rest, speak with a friend or loved one
 - c) Enlist advice or assistance from senior team member
4. What are some of the specific stressors Cpl Nolan is experiencing?
 - a) A high-maintenance wife
 - b) Financial problems
 - c) GySgt is upset with him
5. What changes have there been in his behavior and performance?
 - a) Loss of focus at work and missing deadlines
 - b) Anxiety because of debt
 - c) Lying to his wife
6. If these issues persist and Cpl Nolan says nothing, can it get serious enough for him to end up in the Orange or Red Zone?
7. What could be some signs that Cpl Nolan's situation has escalated? (Participants should reference the verbiage in the Stress Decision Flowchart enclosure)
 - a) Lack of sleep (Orange)
 - b) Panic attacks (Orange)
 - c) Displaying a lack of integrity (Orange)
 - d) Completely withdrawn from interaction with others (Orange)
 - e) Signs of depression (Red)
 - f) Signs indicating suicidal thoughts or ideations (Red)
8. Whether in the Green Zone or the Red Zone, action is always necessary to help maintain healthy stress or alleviate stress. What are some things you can do to help yourself and your fellow Marines stay green? (See protective factors graphic in the Stress Continuum Model module)

- a) Get adequate sleep
 - b) Stay physically fit
 - c) Maintain healthy relationships
 - d) Identify leaders that you can trust
 - e) Stay accountable to a buddy or senior leader
9. In Cpl Nolan's situation, where should he be directed first?
- a) Family Advocacy Program—offers resources and tools to help couples communicate with one another. Cpl Nolan is going to have to learn to say “No” to his wife, and his wife has to learn to readjust her expectations.
 - b) Couples' counseling can help Cpl Nolan and his wife get on the same page, and the counselor can serve as the neutral party Cpl Nolan may need to help his wife understand the situation.
10. Someone may think, “If I am diagnosed with a stress illness, such as Post-Traumatic Stress, anxiety, or depression, it will end my career.” This is false—a stress illness diagnosis, in itself, is not a career-ender. Not getting the help you need could result in behaviors that lead to incidents that could end your career. If a Marine doesn't get the help he or she needs, how can that affect his or her unit?
- a) Loss of morale
 - b) Unit effectiveness
 - c) Loss of credibility as a leader
11. It's important to familiarize yourself with available resources, so you can point your fellow Marines in the right direction if they're in a stressful situation. Some potential resources are:
- a) Peers— Sometimes talking to another Marine is needed to manage issues.
 - a) Chain of Command—You should utilize your chain of command any time you, or someone from your unit, might be having difficulty and need assistance.
 - b) Chaplains— Marines can have confidential communication with a chaplain.
 - c) Medical/ MCCS— At the medical clinic or hospital on your installation, you can speak to medical personnel or a counselor for help. CCP is a good non-medical resource and it's confidential.
 - d) DSTRESS Line (domestic and international 1-877-476-7734)—Another confidential resource where you can speak anonymously with active duty Marines, veteran Marines, licensed counselors, and others who understand Marine culture, 24 hours a day.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Today we discussed assessing if a Marine is in distress and using the Stress Decision Flowchart to identify that Marine's stress zone and intervene or take action to assist that Marine. Marines proactively manage stress by making good decisions. The first step in making good decisions is to recognize your immediate reaction. Then, we analyze the situation and consider courses of action. Next, we make a decision. In some cases, it's as simple as deciding to have a more positive outlook. In other cases, it's about deciding to talk and/or ask for help. We must face our stress head-on, look to Marine Corps Core Values for guidance, and make good decisions. Sometimes managing stress means seeking help; this makes us stronger, especially if we do it before stress becomes overwhelming.

Closing Statement:

Whether you're in the Green Zone or the Red Zone, taking action is necessary. You must recognize where you or your fellow Marine is and help take the steps to get them assistance if necessary.

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://bhin.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf.

ENCLOSURE 1

Stress Decision Flowchart

