

REDUCING STIGMA

DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Good morning my name is _____. Today we will be talking about reducing stigma.

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

LCpl Simmons returned from a recent deployment where she suffered a broken hip, only to find out her husband was cheating on her the whole time she was away. To top it all off, her husband emptied their bank account and left her with all the bills. LCpl Simmons' peers are beginning to notice a significant change in her attitude. She was once very motivated, outgoing, and fun, but now she doesn't even participate in unit functions. Even though she hasn't spoken to anyone in her unit about what is going on in her personal life, all of them know her situation. When you ask her how she is handling things, she tells you she is ok and she's moving forward. You've known her since boot camp, so you sense there is a lot more beneath the surface and are really concerned for her. You invite her to dinner and she declines, telling you she has to begin packing to go on leave. Not giving up, you invite her to a movie and she tells you she hasn't been sleeping well lately and would only fall asleep. Since you've been through a similar experience, you offer to help her pack, knowing how hard a time like this can be. You don't take no for an answer. She allows you to come over, but when you arrive you discover the house is a total mess—dishes are piled high, clothes are strewn about, and trash seems to be everywhere. Trying not to appear shocked, you ask her where the garbage bags are and begin cleaning up.

Key points for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Recognizing warning signs in a fellow Marine
- (2) Recognizing when to intervene
- (3) Describing strategies that increase help seeking behavior
- (4) Identifying where to seek assistance

Learning Objective: After this guided discussion, you will be more aware of how to recognize warning signs in yourself or a fellow Marine, knowing when to intervene and how to design strategies that aid in reducing the stigma of seeking help.

DISCUSSION

You finally get LCpl Simmons to talk about the stress she is feeling and her plan to divorce her husband. She tells you she is trying to move on with her life, but feels lost and like a failure. She's also embarrassed over being told by the Sgt in front of other Marines in the unit (including you) how stupid it was of her to leave total control of her finances in the hands of her husband and that with a broken hip and personal drama she wouldn't be promoted any time soon. You simply encourage her and let her know that everyone faces challenges in their lives. Over the next few weeks, you help her get her house together and persuade her to get a much needed haircut and even attend a unit BBQ. You feel confident she is moving in the right direction and you head home on leave for 3 weeks, making her promise to check in with you regularly. She calls you late one night to tell you she found out her husband and his girlfriend are expecting a child. She also tells you her medical appointment didn't go well. Her hip isn't healing as quickly as she'd expected and may require another surgery. You talk to her two more times while you're on leave and she sounds like she's in good spirits in spite of being reprimanded by the Sgt for being late to formation after oversleeping due to the pain meds. She seems to be taking it all in stride, thanks you for being there for her, and insists on taking you to dinner when you get back. You return from leave a week later but before you have a chance to catch up with Simmons, you learn from a few of the other Marines in your unit that she seems out of it and has been giving away a lot of expensive items such as a flat screen TV, brand new furniture, and other things she would need at home. When you finally catch up with her and ask her why she is giving things away, she simply tells you she doesn't need them. You immediately sense something isn't right and decide to enlist your chain of command.

KEY POINT 1

1. What did you see in this scenario that would indicate LCpl Simmons is at risk for suicide?

(Pause and let Marines answer)

1. Isolation
2. Withdrawing
3. Shame
4. Embarrassment
5. Giving away furniture
6. Relationship issues
7. Medical issues
8. Hygiene problems
9. Sudden change in mood

2. What were the triggering events?

- a) Injury
- b) Impending divorce
- c) Being called out by the Sgt in front of other Marines
- d) Feeling lost/ like a failure

KEY POINT 2

1. Marines depend on one another for survival. That is why knowing your fellow Marines is so important. Recognizing the slightest change in your fellow Marine could be the difference between managing a situation before it becomes an issue and losing a battle, whatever that battle may be. This can only be done by being at your best and addressing issues before they become unmanageable.

2. Employing the R.A.C.E. method is the only option when identifying a fellow Marine is at risk for suicide. By Recognizing LCpl Simmons is in distress, Asking her what is going on and if she is thinking of killing herself, Caring for and Escorting her to the appropriate resource, you are showing your concern for your fellow Marine's well-being.
3. By not talking to anyone about what was happening, LCpl Simmons missed out on valuable resources that could have helped her begin the healing process early on. Even if she didn't want to speak to anyone in her unit, she could have spoken to the chaplain. Chaplains are committed to caring for all Marines and Sailors and their families with dignity, respect, and compassion, regardless of an individual's faith beliefs.

KEY POINT 3

1. What issues led to LCpl Simmons not wanting to ask for help? (Pause and let Marines answer)
 - a) Being called names by the Sgt
 - b) Having her business discussed in front of other Marines
 - c) Being told her issues would keep her from being promoted
2. If you recognized LCpl Simmons needed to talk to someone about what she was experiencing, what would you say? (Pause and let Marines answer)
 - a) Have you spoken to anyone about what you are experiencing/feeling?
 - b) Do you have a list of resources that can help you?
 - c) Have you considered speaking to the chaplain?
 - d) Do you know what you're going to do?
 - e) Would you like me to go with you to FAP? Legal?
3. What do you think about getting help from a chaplain or other resources? (Pause and let Marines answer)
4. How would you help reduce the perceived negativity of help-seeking in your chain of command? (Pause and let Marines answer)
 - a) Be supportive
 - b) Stand up for your fellow Marine
 - c) Encourage them to seek help
 - d) Assist them in finding the resources they need
5. Does seeking help end your career? (Pause and let Marines answer)
 - a) Seeking help doesn't always mean the end of a career. In fact, seeking help is a sign of courage and determination to do the right thing. It is important to recognize warning signs such as a quick temper, irritability, social withdrawal, trouble sleeping, trouble focusing, or change in appearance or personal hygiene. LCpl Simmons communicated her inability to sleep and isolated herself from the unit. Hygiene and grooming, however subtle, also became an issue for Simmons. If a Marine is having a problem, regardless of whether we view it as minor or severe, it is our duty to try to assist that Marine and help them find a solution. You have a responsibility to intervene to help someone experiencing operational stress.

KEY POINT 4

1. What resources are available?
 - a) Service members and their families have the right and privilege to confidential

communication with a Navy chaplain. Chaplains have the obligation and responsibility to protect and guard the confidential communications disclosed to them. Commanders honor and support the unique, confidential relationship between an individual and a chaplain. Chaplains cannot be compelled by the command, medical professionals or others to disclose what a service member or family member shares in confidence. It is up to leaders to promote a climate of asking for and accepting help when issues arise. Leaders play a key role in growing your protective factors. Those protective factors include adequate sleep and nutrition, good coping skills, a sense of humor, maintaining a positive attitude, mission focus, unit cohesion, and healthy relationships. As a result, it demands a primary focus on the fitness of mind, body, spirit and social dimensions. When we allow our fellow Marines to suffer in silence, everyone is at risk!

- b) If Simmons is still struggling with the loss of her relationship, the Community Counseling Program offers a wide range of resources that can help her cope with the loss. Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) is another valuable resource that helps build awareness and provides strategies to help identify stress reactions.
- c) Big five: peers, chain of command, chaplain, medical/Marine Corps Community Services resources (Substance Abuse Counseling Center (SACC), Community Counseling Program (CCP), Family Advocacy Program (FAP), and the DSTRESS Line (1-877-476-7734)
- d) OSCAR
- e) Military and Family Life Consultant (MFLC)
- f) Military One Source

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

It is important to recognize that everyone will face a stressful situation at one time or another. Knowing when to seek help is as important as having support in doing so. Leaders play a key role in promoting a climate of help seeking. By encouraging Marines to develop their protective factors, promoting unit cohesion, ensuring Marines understand their responsibility to intervene when a fellow Marine is in distress or making poor decisions, and reinforcing a reliance on one another and the resources available to them, the stigma for Marines engaging in help-seeking behavior is greatly reduced.

Closing Statement

It is up to every Marine to know how to identify warning signs of wear and tear and examine their responsibility to seek help for themselves or intervene to help someone experiencing stress.

END OF DISCUSSION

RESOURCES

1. MAPIT Guide: Retrieved from http://bhin.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf
2. MCO 1754.11, Marine Corps Family Advocacy and General Counseling Program
3. Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC) Program