

SUICIDE PREVENTION COMMUNICATION SKILLS

DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Good morning my name is _____ today we will be talking about Communication Skills.

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

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

Gain Attention

Sgt Green has been distracted and short-fused lately. He used to interact with most of his peers. Now, when he arrives into the office, he heads to his desk and remains there until chow time. He then takes off only to come back, return to his desk and remain there until the end of the day without speaking to anyone. Marines may not recognize when they are experiencing stress-related issues. Peers, leaders, and even family members often see the signs first. If you recognize any of these signs in a fellow Marine, talk to him or her.

Key points for this discussion will be:

- (1) Recognizing stress-related issues
- (2) Effective communication

Learning Objective: After this guided discussion, you will be able to understand how effective communication assists Marines in successfully managing the rigors and stressors of Marine life in both combat and garrison.

DISCUSSION

You decide to pull Sgt Green aside to ask if he is ok. He shares that he has a torn rotator cuff and in addition to the physical limitations, the medication makes him ill. He says he has no appetite, has a constant headache, and feels jittery. The only thing that calms his stomach and relaxes him is having a few beers. The unit is preparing for an inspection, the PFT is two weeks away and on top of that he and his wife just separated and the children are with him. He expressed feeling overwhelmed but says he guesses he'll manage. You tell him you've noticed some changes and are really concerned. Although he says he'll manage you communicate to him that it is only a matter of time before his situation takes a toll and becomes too much to manage. You reassure him that you are there for him and offer to sit down and help him come up with some solutions that will help him properly manage his situation.

When small everyday stressors build up over time and, not properly managed, it causes wear and tear. We generally talk about the wear and tear of work stressors, but they are also present in our personal life. Trying to balance a rigorous work schedule with personal obligations can cause wear and tear. Perhaps we lose focus on our mission. Perhaps we start making bad choices, such as using alcohol to help us fall asleep. Stressors increase when we are sleep deprived.

It is important to communicate our need for assistance at the first sign of distress. It is equally as important to communicate with fellow Marines as soon as you see signs of distress.

KEY POINT 1

Communication can be verbal or nonverbal. According to Bloomberg Business Week, only a small percentage of communication involves actual words: 7%, to be exact. In fact, 55% of communication is visual (body language, eye contact) and 38% is vocal (pitch, speed, volume, tone of voice). For example, folded arms, lack of eye contact and a closed stance all signal that a person is not open and does not wish to communicate. On the other hand, eye contact and open stance communicate a willingness to participate in an open dialogue.

We are going to practice effective listening skills using the previous scenario as our case study. Here are some skills to keep in mind during the role play:

Practice:

- Listening actively. Let the Marine talk until finished – don't jump in
- Using open-ended questions such as "What are you most frustrated about?" "What other factors are contributing?"
- Maintaining eye contact
- Keeping open posture (don't cross arms)
- Restating what the Marine stated back to them
- Validating what the Marine is feeling – not judging
- Reassuring "there is always a solution and a way through"
- Committing to a follow up plan and delivering on the plan

Avoid:

- Minimizing their concerns
- Giving advice
- Interrupting
- Focusing on your experience

ROLE PLAY

Let's divide up into groups of three to practice active listening skills.

Role 1: At-risk Marine

Role 2: Active Listener

Role 3: Evaluator

Switch roles, repeat the scenario, and evaluate.

Switch roles again, work through the scenario again, and evaluate.

Everyone will have a turn role-playing the at-risk Marine, intervening Marine, and evaluator.

Facilitator: During exercise, walk around the room and check that the intervening Marines are listening actively. At end of exercise ask specific Marines "What was it like being the active listener? What was difficult about it?"

Interim Summary: We just finished discussing communication and practicing active listening skills, now let's talk about elements of effective communication.

KEY POINT 2

Effective communication consists of many elements. If you begin with a friendly tone you are more likely to get your point across. A friendly tone encourages open, honest dialogue. Another element is your level of confidence. Confidence can be conveyed by making eye contact; this reinforces that you are sincere, not arrogant and are more likely to follow through with what you are saying. Being empathetic, having an open-

mind, being respectful, providing feedback, and choosing the right medium to have conversations all contribute to effective communication. It is important to remember not to force communication or judge.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Any changes in a Marine's normal demeanor and activities should cause you to take notice. A change in behavior or temperament is a key warning sign for suicide. With proper support, we can recover from stress-related issues. Even the most motivated and well-trained Marines can find themselves challenged.

Some Marines are able to overcome stress-related issues on their own and some will need help. Getting or giving help is aligned with our Corps Values: honor; courage; commitment. It's important to accept help and encourage fellow Marines to seek help because there are personal and professional consequences of unmanaged issues. Teamwork is important; it is your responsibility to intervene when a fellow Marine is in distress.

Increased stress such as injury, illness, and distressing events can impact anyone's ability to perform their job duties. These stressors may lead to depression, anxiety, and isolation. Social isolation is a risk factor for behavioral health issues, including suicide. Good peer support can mitigate social isolation.

Communication is needed to build strong relationships with others. Effective communication is the first step to understanding your needs and the needs of others. Equipping Marines to be good peer supporters keeps the entire Marine Corps more fit and ready.

Closing Statement:

Today we discussed the components of effective communication and practiced active listening skills. I am confident that you now have a better understanding of how to identify potential stressors in yourself or a fellow Marine and know that addressing the stressors is the first step to building resiliency.

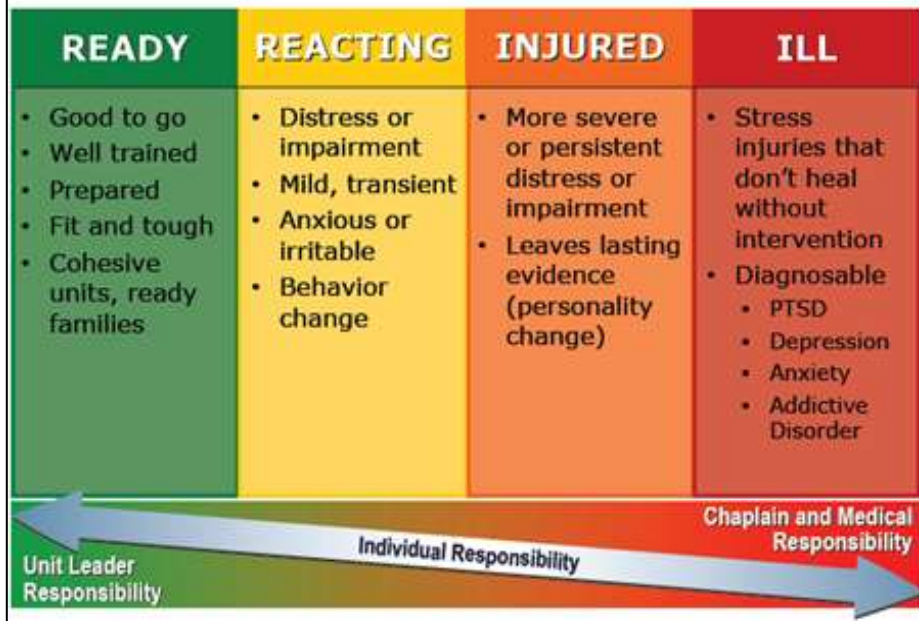
END OF DISCUSSION

RESOURCES

1. <http://www.dstressline.com/>
2. MCRP 6-11B W/Ch 1, Marine Corps Values: A User's Guide for Discussion Leaders
3. MAPIT Guide. Retrieved from http://bhin.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf.
4. Gallo, C. (2007, February 14). Body Language: A Key to Success in the Workplace. Bloomberg Business Week.
5. Enclosure: The Stress Continuum

ENCLOSURE 1

The Stress Continuum



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

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