

Stress Management Training Guide

Semper Fit

Discussion points

Section Five: Operational Stress

I. What is operational stress?

An operational stress reaction is a normal reaction to an abnormal or extreme situation that occurs as a result of a combat situation, deployment, military exercise, or humanitarian mission. It is negative stress reaction that may result from the intensity of an extreme situation.

Examples of situations where a operational stress reaction may occur include:

- War
- Disasters
- Military operations other than war
- Peacetime training

Any of these situations can lead to operational stress reaction.

You should know that:

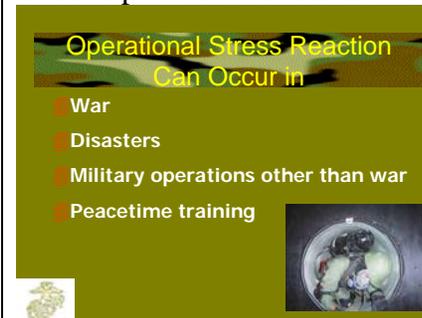
- Operational stress reactions are real
- They are not something to be punished.
- They should be taken seriously.
- They can be controlled.

Related slides

Slide: Operational Stress Defined



Slide: Operational Stress Can Occur



Discussion points

Related slides

II. Physical and Mental Stressors

Certain Physical and Mental Stressors can increase the likelihood of operational stress reaction.

Physical Stressors include:

- Exposure to prolonged or severe operational environment
- Decreased sleep
- Heightened level of alertness
- Extremes of weather, temperature or noise

Psychological Stressors include:

- Pre-deployment worries/ pressures
- Worries about what is going on at home
- Fear of death or disability
- Injured/wounded and killed companions

III. What are the signs and symptoms?

Common symptoms of operational stress reactions include:

- Hyper-alertness
- Irritability & anger
- Headache
- Upset stomach
- Insomnia
- Fear & anxiety
- Grief & self-doubt
- Shakiness/ trembling/fumbling
- Poor concentration

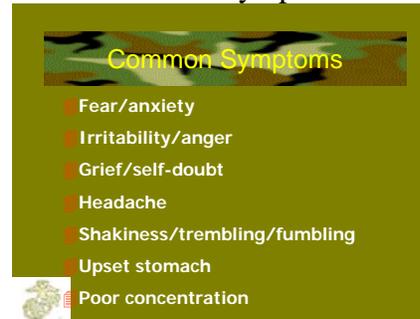
Slide: Physical Stressors



Slide: Psychological Stressors



Slide: Common Symptoms



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Warning signs, which are indications of serious operational stress problems include:

- Impaired duty performance
- Freezing/immobility
- Erratic actions
- Terror/panic
- Total exhaustion/apathy
- Loss of skills
- Memory loss
- Confusion
- Hallucinations
- Bizarre behavior
- Social isolation/ withdrawal
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Depression/suicide
- Misconduct

[Note: The warning signs listed here should be taken seriously.]

IV. What do you do?

If you notice the common symptoms in your self or your fellow Marines these tips may help to prevent the onset of the more serious warning signs.

- Focus on the mission
- Continue duties and stay on task
- Think about succeeding
- Take a deep breath, be calm, stay in control
- Remember that stress is normal
- Talk with fellow Marines

Related slides

Slide: Warning Signs



Slide: Self & Buddy Aid



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When Tactical Mission and safety permit the following steps should also be taken to reduce the likelihood of operational stress symptoms:

- Welcome new members to the team
- Drink plenty of water
- Eat warm food
- Dry off, cool off or warm up
- Wash up, shave, change clothes, put on dry socks
- Use relaxation techniques
(such as meditation or breathing techniques)
- Clean weapons and gear, prepare for the next mission
- Joke and laugh off stress
- Stay physically fit
- Help each other, work together
- Keep informed, ignore rumors
- Try to get at least 4 hours of sleep each day
- Do not use alcohol or drugs

When early signs are present:

- Focus here should be on the four Rs:
Reassurance, Rest, Replenishment, and Restoration.
- Note that people usually get better.

When serious negative stress reactions are seen or experienced, such as those listed in the warning signs you just saw, the chain of command should be made aware that there might be a problem. Talk to the Chaplain or Medical Officer.

It is important to try to intervene with reassurance, rest, replenishment, and restoration before symptoms get to the level of the serious reactions.

Related slides

Slide: When Tactical Mission & Safety Permit



Slide: Four R's



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V. Marines taking care of Marines.

Note that usually at the earliest detection of symptoms the situation can be handled at the unit level.

It is critical the leadership recognize the signs that members of their unit are at an increased likelihood for operational stress reactions and take whatever preventative measures are feasible at the time.

Marines should also be aware of what their buddies are going through. Talk to your Chaplain or Medical Officer if you suspect an Operational Stress Reaction in yourself or your fellow Marine.

Related slides

Slide: Marines Taking Care of Marines

