

Combat and Operational Stress 101

Part II – Taking Action for Yourself and Your Buddy

(PRESENTATION NOTES ONLY)



Notes from slide 2

Objectives

- Define** stress and stressors
- Understand** the stress response on the mind and body
- Identify** stressors within the military
- Discuss** how some stress is good and necessary for optimal performance
- Explain** the stress continuum
- Become** self-aware of your stress zones and coping behaviors
- Describe** stress interventions for the mind and body
- Define** what buddy care is and is not
- Explain** what encompasses a buddy care interaction
- Identify** available areas support for your buddy

Notes from slide 3

To review from Part I of the presentation, when you are calm and relaxed, it can be difficult to perform optimally. Your body has not prepared for action because there is no threat yet. When we encounter stressful situations, your body prepares to act and to optimize your performance. But you can also become too excited and too worked up; this leads to stress reactions that can impair your performance and eventually burn you out.

Discussion Questions:

- Can you think of a time when stress motivated you to perform at an optimal level? (examples: taking a test, completing a physical training)
- What is your optimal level of stress? Do you have ways of increasing or decreasing your level of stress?
- How can you manage stress to increase productivity and be the most successful?

Notes from slide 4

- Stress Continuum Model

As noted in Part I of the presentation, the Stress Continuum was developed by the Navy and Marine Corps. It is a spectrum of stress responses categorized into four zones which establishes a common language to identify stress responses: Green “Ready” zone, Yellow “Reacting” zone, Orange “Injury” zone and Red “Illness” zone. It is a tool and is a common language that allows us to *identify, engage and intervene* when stress reactions or injuries are present. We have included a Blue “Idle” Zone. The zones are described as:

- Blue “Idle” zone: Unfocused and unmotivated.
- Green “Ready” zone: Wellness and adaptive coping
- Yellow “Reacting” zone: Mild and reversible distress or loss of function
- Orange “Injury” zone: More severe and persistent distress or loss of function
- Red “Illness” zone: Medical disorders arising from stress and unhealed stress injuries

Notes from slide 5

We discussed the Stress Continuum Model in Part I of this presentation to give us tools on how to be self-aware of our stress levels. Now we will focus on the stress indicators of each zone and discuss actions to take in each zone, both for yourself and your buddies. In this first section we will focus on self-care, and how you can be aware of stress indicators to take action for yourself. Later in this presentation, we will focus on talking care of your buddies, and how you can recognize their stress indicators to help them take action.

Notes from slide 8

Facilitator should take attendees through the action plan and ask them to fill it out for themselves.

- Look [in these places] to find tasks that are more challenging
- Talk to [name a trusted NCO] about career development
- Call Military OneSource for career advice (800-342-9647)
- Look [name places or sources] for outside career development opportunities (e.g., getting a new certification or going to school)
- Talk to [name your buddy or other source of support] for ideas
- Ask your leadership for more challenging tasks/responsibilities (“I’m feeling idle right now. What other responsibilities can I take on?”)

Notes from slide 10

Service members in the Yellow Zone are reacting to temporary or mild stress and showing temporary signs of stress that generally go away on their own after the stressor goes away. You want to keep an eye on these indicators and make sure they don't last too long or ramp up into the Orange Zone.

Notes from slide 11

- Recognize when you are in the Yellow Zone and take action to return to the Green Zone.
- Consult peers, family, chain of command, or chaplain before issues become overwhelming. Ensure adequate sleep and rest, PT and nutrition.

Notes from slide 11 (continued)

Facilitator should take attendees through the action plan and ask them to fill it out for themselves.

When I'm moderately stressed, I will:

- Practice [name a mind or body stress reduction technique]
- Talk to [name your buddy or other source of support]
- Notify leadership [name leader you would talk to] and request support (here are some examples, what would you say?):
 - “I feel like I’m not at the level I used to be and I think I need to talk to someone to get back to myself.”
 - “I’m just going through a little bit of a rougher time than usual and I’m really tired. I think talking to someone would help.”
- Call Military OneSource for help (800-342-9647)

Notes from slide 13

We've talked about the Yellow Zone and some simple interventions to reduce stress. Now we'll talk about what happens when stress reactions worsen.

The difference between the Yellow Zone and Orange Zone is one of the most important things to be aware of.

Signs of Orange Zone suggest something more than a reaction; something has changed in the your ability to maintain or regain control. The defining features are moderate to severe distress or alteration in functioning that are not just temporary reactions to stress and are not within the your control. Examples include loss of control of aspects of your body, thoughts, or emotions, occurring either immediately, at the time of the Orange Zone stressor event, or developing later in response to reminders of that event.

This is really the time to invest in yourself; the actions in the next slide can help you get back on the path to optimal performance.

Notes from slide 14

- Several of the simple mind and body interventions we discussed for Yellow Zone stress reactions may also work for the Orange Zone; it's also important to recognize that you're overloaded and to ask to take a knee so you can rest and recover.
- Talking to your buddy and letting your chain of command know that you need a break and/or some assistance can be helpful.
- You can either walk in to your BAS or behavioral health clinic for immediate assistance, request to speak with a chaplain, or schedule an appointment with behavioral health.
- Remember: **The earlier a stress injury receives needed attention, the more likely it is to heal quickly and completely.**

Notes from slide 14 (continued)

Facilitator should take attendees through the action plan and ask them to fill it out for themselves.

When I'm very stressed, I will:

- Practice [name a mind or body stress reduction technique]
- Talk to [name your buddy or other source support]
- Notify leadership [name leader you would talk to] and request support (here are some examples, what would you say?):
 - “Hey sir/ma’am, I am not suicidal but I am having a really rough time. I need some help getting stuff off my plate.”
 - “I am having a difficult time right now with some personal things. I am not thinking of hurting myself but I want to talk to behavioral health before things get worse.”
- Call the Psychological Health Resource Center (866-966-1020)

Notes from slide 16

It is very important recognize the possibility of Red Zone stress so medical/mental health professionals can evaluate and intervene. Red Zone stress does not automatically render you unfit for duty, but you should seek professional help.

You might delay seeking medical care with the hope that, in time, your problems will go away. Sometimes they do, but often those in the Red Zone don't realize that they need help until important relationships have been lost, violations of UCMJ have been committed, or other life or career damage has been done.

Untreated diagnosable issues like anxiety or depression impair your performance and may also increase the risk of suicide. It's critical that you help identify Red Zone signs and get assistance promptly!

Notes from slide 17

- **IMPORTANT** – If you find yourself in the Red Zone, **SEEK HELP!**
- Red Zone Reactions require medical attention. Recovery is possible, but early intervention is important. Consider someone with pneumonia; without professional help, the condition will not improve and continue to progress and get worse. With medical treatment, pneumonia will heal, but will take time. Like a long-term illness, a stress illness is the same way. If pneumonia is caught early and treated, the patient can recover relatively quickly and get back to full health.
- Red Zone stress reactions require professional help, but can heal, and the sooner the reactions are addressed, the better it is for everyone involved.

Notes from slide 17 (continued)

Facilitator should take attendees through the action plan and ask them to fill it out for themselves.

- If I'm thinking about harming myself, I will:
 - Call the Military Crisis Line (800-273-8255, Press 1)
 - Go to the emergency room
- If I'm overwhelmed, I will:
 - Go to the BAS or the behavioral health clinic
 - Notify leadership [name leader you would talk to] and request support (Example: "I am having a difficult time right now. I have thoughts about harming myself but haven't acted on those thoughts. I would like to see behavioral health before things get worse.")
 - Contact the Military Crisis Line with your buddy for support via phone (800-273-8255, Press 1) or text 838255

Notes from slide 18

Here's a summary of the examples of things to say to leadership that we discussed.

Notes from slide 19

We have created plans for each of these zones. Now, what can get in the way of you taking action?

Discussion Question

- Do any of these barriers apply to you?
- Can you think of good reasons to overcome the barrier?

Notes from slide 19

Discussion Questions:

- Which of the above is most important to you?
- How can these motivators help you address any barriers that you have identified?

Notes from slide 21

Let's review: we have talked about what stress is, what stressful demands we might face in the military, how our body reacts to stress, how to become aware of our stress levels, and what to do when we are so stressed that we can't perform at our best. Now we will discuss Buddy Care – what it is, how important it is, and what you can do for your buddies

Notes from slide 22

What is Buddy Care?

When we talked about self care, we introduced the stress continuum and the yellow, orange, and red zone indicators. We also talked about strategies to reduce stress in yourself for each zone. Buddy care is similar – it just applies to your buddy instead of you, and it adds specific things you can do to help. We broke it down into 3 steps:

1. Be aware of your buddy! You are aware of your friends' regular mood and habits; many times, you can sense something is wrong when you notice big differences in their mood and habits.
2. When you notice something markedly different, talk to your buddy about it, ask questions, get more info, provide support.
3. Choose the appropriate follow up actions.

First, we'll go through the yellow, orange, and red zone indicators to watch out for in step 1.

Notes from slide 24

As mentioned in the previous slide, buddy care is being a friend and being aware of your buddy's moods and habits. These are signs to watch for and statements to listen for.

Some other signs to watch for are a decrease in your buddy's energy ("I'm tired all the time and I don't know why"), muscle tension or headaches ("I've been waking up with headaches for the past three days in a row"), or being unusually quiet ("Hey, I've noticed that you haven't been your usual self, and you've been quiet a lot lately. How are you doing?").

Notes from slide 25

Yellow Zone stress reactions that continue, day after day, for many months suggest an Orange Zone injury instead. Buddies should pay special attention to changes in behavior and functioning as this can indicate that a stress injury has occurred.

Remember that the difference between the Yellow Zone and Orange Zone is one of the most important things to be aware of. You can be very helpful to your buddy if you can recognize these signs, and encourage your buddy to act. Getting help here might keep your buddy out of the Red Zone.

Notes from slide 26

Awareness, Awareness, Awareness! Be aware of these indicators, really listen to your buddy for clues, and take note of marked changes in behavior (for example, your buddy appears very depressed and unhappy, or your buddy is drinking excessively).

Other indicators to listen out for: “I’ve been so worried about seeing my family that I haven’t eaten much in weeks”, “I might lose it and hurt somebody”, and “I don’t see any reason to go on living.”

Along with family members, buddies are in the best position to recognize the signs that a stress illness may exist in order to ensure early diagnosis and treatment

This is step 1, recognizing the zone, now we’ll do step 2 (listening) and step 3 (follow up action plan)

Notes from slide 27

This is an important part of buddy care. Sometimes when we're talking to friends, we don't listen as closely as we should. But these steps help to understand clearly what your friends are saying and gain some awareness of their current mood and whether they need help.

Connected Listening

Another aspect of communication is the way you listen to other people and how well they understand you. This involves not only hearing words but also putting yourself in another person's "shoes" to understand their perception of a situation. Connected listening is not about "fixing" someone else's problem. Go beyond listening, demonstrate understanding by listening to your buddy and respect their opinions:

Notes from slide 27 (continued)

Perspective taking

- Imagine yourself having the same experience as your buddy
- Use your own similar past experience to understand your buddy's situation

Stay out of judgement

- Be aware of your body language (Are your arms crossed, is your brow furrowed, are you shaking your head with disappointment when your buddy is talking?)
- When you speak to your buddy, are you blaming them, are you criticizing them, are you jumping to conclusions without all the details?

Notes from slide 27 (continued)

Recognize emotion

- Is your buddy getting more agitated and frustrated while speaking to you?
- What is your buddy's body language (Are your buddy's arms crossed, is their brow furrowed, are they shaking their head in disappointment when you are talking?)

“Reflect” your understanding

- Repeat what your buddy said to you in your own words (“I’m hearing that you are really stressed about how you’re going to pay your bills next month. Is that what’s on your mind?”)

Now that you’ve listened you have a better handle on what’s going on with your buddy. You are better positioned to take the appropriate follow up action, in step 3.

Notes from slide 29

If you notice that your buddy is in the Yellow Zone, these actions can help your buddy move back to Green. Talking with your buddy can make a huge difference. Sometimes your buddy just needs to get things out to someone they trust to make improvements. Take talking with your buddy seriously and use the connected listening strategies.

Guiding your buddy through some of the mind and body interventions discussed earlier can also be helpful.

You can give your buddy the phone number for the Psychological Health Resource Center or even ask them if you can call and then hand the phone over. You can also offer to go with your buddy to visit a chaplain or mental health provider.

In any case, continue to follow up with your buddy; check in with them regularly.

Notes from slide 30

If your buddy is the Orange Zone, they are approaching the Red Zone where serious behavioral problems can occur. Here you might have to be more proactive (“Hey, I really think you should visit a chaplain or go to the BAS. I’ll go with you.”; “Look, I’ll call the Psychological Health Resource Center for you and put the call on speaker phone. Will that work?”).

Always consider professional help in this zone.

The earlier you get your buddy help, the higher the possibility your buddy will heal.

Remember to follow up with your buddy.

Notes from slide 31

If your buddy is in the Red Zone, you must be very proactive and a strong support.

IMPORTANT TO REPEAT – If you find your buddy is a danger to themselves or others, **SEEK HELP AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!** Contact your chain of command and let them know that your buddy could possibly harm himself/herself or others.

If your buddy is not a danger to themselves or others, but you have observed Red Zone indicators such as talk about suicide or homicide; excessive alcohol or drug use; depressed mood over many days; excessive, constant worrying; severe fatigue; insomnia or other trouble sleeping (includes nightmares); intense anger and lashing out; or disruptive attention and memory problems, then take action. (“Hey, I really think you need to go to the BAS. I’ll go with you.” “Hey, there’s Chaplain Smith. Let’s go talk to her.”)

Notes from slide 32

Here are examples of things to say to your buddy when you notice they are in the Yellow, Orange, or Red zones. What are some other things to say?

Notes from slide 33

Remember that buddy care is being a friend. You are noticing that your buddy is behaving differently or speaking differently and you're taking action to see if your buddy is OK. If you notice changes, you can take some of the actions that we have discussed. But you're not your buddy's savior; you are your buddy's friend and you're supporting them the best way you can.

Remember, you're not your buddy's counselor and we don't gossip about our buddies! Keeping confidence and maintaining your buddy's trust are essential. Buddy care is **not**:

- A therapy session
- Being a "counselor"
- Pressuring someone to seek treatment
- A way to discuss private or damaging information about other Service members
- A means of gossip

Notes from slide 33 (continued)

Discussion Questions

What could happen if you violated your friend's trust?

Has anyone ever broken your trust?

How did that feel?

How long did it take for you to rebuild that trust (or was that bridge burned permanently)?