ROAD TO MENTAL READINESS
Building a Resilient Mindset

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Presenter Disclosure

**Presenter:** LCol Suzanne Bailey

**Relationships with commercial interests:**
- None.

**Potential for conflict(s) of interest:**
- Nil.

**Mitigating Potential Bias**
- N/A
• What is the Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR)?
  • Evidence-based Mental Health (MH) and resilience training throughout career & deployment cycle, including families
  • Skill-focused, practical application, sports performance psychology skills, tailored interventions for rank/occupation/environment/task

Goals:
  • **Prevention** (increase mental health literacy; decrease stigma and other barriers to care); and
  • **Performance** (enhance well-being, performance, coping & resilience)
Why?

• CCHS CF Supplement 2002: Between 84 and 96% of CF members who could benefit from mental health help *do not even know they need it*
• Ongoing operations in Afghanistan: identified a need to provide skills and knowledge to manage the demands and challenges of operations and recognize when early care seeking would be beneficial
• Standardize training across all occupations and environments, evidence-based and evaluated
Challenge & Scope

• Change attitudes toward mental health in the CAF
• Population 65000 Regular and 30000 Reserve Force
• Army, Navy, Air Force, Special Forces
• 100+ occupations, 40+ locations
• 15+ International Operations
Informed by:

Enhancing Mental Readiness in Military Personnel

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Implementation Principles for Mental Health Training

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An Approach to Mitigation of Operational Stress:
Guiding Principles

Mark Zamorski

Attitudes and attitude change:
Implications for the OSSIS Speakers Bureau Programme

Megan M. Thompson
Donald R. McCreary

What is stress?

Stress is the wear and tear on the body caused by the need to adapt to changes in the environment.

- Acute stress (short-term reaction to an immediate threat)
- Chronic stress (longer-term ongoing situations)
Demands

- **Organizational**: factors that impact the entire organization, routine stressors that anyone can anticipate in their day to day employment, regardless of occupation
- **Occupational**: factors related specifically to employment within your occupational role, regardless of setting
- **Operational**: factors specifically related to where you work and what you do in your current role
- **Personal**: factors that include those individual and family issues that occur outside of our work life
What is resilience?

• The capacity of an individual to recover quickly, resist, and even thrive in the face of direct/indirect traumatic events and adverse situations

• *The ability to modulate and harness the stress response*

“Mental toughness: the ability to bring to life whatever talents and skills you have – on demand. That may come down to an ability to fight sleepiness, or to stay relaxed and calm or to not surrender your spirit when the odds are against you.”
Optimizing Performance

Prepare: Knowledge and Training

- Understanding stress and the stress response
- How to control the stress response
  – The Big Four+
The Stress Response

Stressful Event

Alarm Reaction

Increased Arousal
- Heart Rate
- BP
- Sweating
- Digestion

Increased Vigilance

Decreased access to the cortex
Managing the Demands

Managing our response to stress will enhance our performance, and ability to make good decisions.

- ↑stress = ↑ likelihood of choosing a risky alternative
- ↑stress = ↓ tolerance for ambiguity
- ↑stress = ↑ tendency to make hasty choice
- ↑stress = ↓ productive thoughts
- ↑stress = ↑ in distracting thoughts
- ↑stress = ↑ distortion in perception
Optimizing Performance

Perform: Skill application
- The Big Four +
  - Arousal Management
    - Tactical breathing
  - Visualization
  - Self-talk
  - Goal setting
  - Attention control
Stress is a *reaction* to pressure, not a part of the pressure itself.

We experience stress as a result of a comparison in our brain between perceived demands and perceived resources.

Do we see the demand as a threat or a challenge?

If we can exert influence on our perception of the demand, we can influence where we are on the performance curve.
Perception & Self Talk

• Use your awareness of your beliefs and their consequences through **self talk**
• Based on cognitive behavioural principles: thoughts influence emotional & physiological responses
• Self-talk plays a key role in our reactions to situations: your internal dialogue and beliefs affect your performance
• Self talk can contextualize the experience, calm the amygdala
• Ask yourself:
  – What is the evidence?
  – What are the odds?
  – What would a friend say?
  – Am I using extreme words (never, always, no one, nothing, everything)?
Control

• Focus on your performance objectives through **goal setting**
• Goal setting can begin to give control back to the individual
• Gives the frontal lobes information to help control the amygdala – helps quiet the fear/panic alarm
• Goal setting is an effective resilience skill that has been shown to enhance performance
• Goal setting produces motivation, directs attention to task, mobilizes effort
• Helps you determine: What’s Important Now? (WIN)
SMART Goal Setting

SMART Goal Setting technique:

S  Specific
M  Measurable
A  Attainable
R  Relevant
T  Time-bound

Close focused goal setting:

W  What’s
I  Important
N  Now
Control the Images

• Create and use experiences in your mind through \textit{visualization}
• Creating or recreating an experience in the mind prior to performance: creates a motor program in the central nervous system
• Increases familiarity, decreases anxiety
• Conditions mind into expecting/anticipating what is going to happen and preparing itself for the task to come
• Know detailed steps of task, rehearse contingencies
• See yourself succeeding, imagine how you will feel when you succeed
Emotion regulation

- Manage stress through **tactical breathing**
- Improves precision, accuracy and motor control
- Enhances composure, poise and self control
- Improves concentration and mental agility
- Controls stress response: a slow deep breath stimulates the vagus nerve, activating parasympathetic nervous system
Skill Description

- Breathe from the diaphragm
- Slow cadence - smooth, continuous cycle of breathing
- Control respiration by forcing the lungs to expand to their fullest capacity – bringing in more oxygen to the system
- Full exhalations – expel all of the air as you breathe out through the mouth
- Count of 4’s (if helpful)
Attention Control

Concentrate on the task at hand and minimize irrelevant distractions through **attention control**

![Graph showing the relationship between attention and physiological arousal](image)

- **Attention**: Processing all information in an unfocused manner.
- **Physiological Arousal**: Tunnel vision: focused attention to the point of missed relevant cues.

Relevant information is processed more readily and irrelevant information is more easily ignored.
Refocusing Techniques

- Cue statements
- Goal setting
- Take brief breaks
- Tactical breathing
Building Resilience

- Imitate resilient role models
- Cultivate positive emotions
- Embrace humour
- Solidify moral compass
- Practice spirituality
- Seek social support
- Foster strengths
- Actively cope with stress and face fears
- Train in one or more areas
- Cultivate cognitive flexibility
- Extract meaning from adversity

Southwick, et al, 2005
Highlighting ‘Recovery’

Recovery: Individual & Unit

- Recovery activities
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Spiritual
  - Social
- Potentially traumatizing events
- Coping strategies
- Warning signs
- Barriers to care
- MH Resources
What is Recovery?

• Optimal performance includes recovery
• Key in psychological endurance and preventing chronic stress
• Active recovery is an intentional self-initiated goal oriented activity aimed at regaining one’s level of working capacity
Mental Recovery

- Micro-recovery: employ strategies to reduce arousal levels during performance situations (training and missions)
- Post-training: employ strategies to reduce arousal levels after training scenarios/situations
- Post-mission: requires more extensive activities to offset very intense activity
- Regular training cycles: team/unit recovery periods with activities to ensure well-rested high performing personnel
Strengthen Social Support

• Check in with each other
• Listen attentively
• Normalize feelings
• Use Big 4
  – Encourage SMART goal setting
  – Reminders to use tactical breathing
  – Challenge negative thinking
  – Give each other positive messages
• Watch for behaviour changes
• Suggest resources of support
Mental Health Continuum Model

- **HEALTHY**
  - Good mental health
  - Normal functioning

- **REACTING**
  - Common and self-limiting distress

- **INJURED**
  - More severe functional impairment

- **ILL**
  - Diagnosable mental illness
  - Severe and persistent functional impairment

- **Under-recovery**
- **Burnout**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy</th>
<th>Reacting</th>
<th>Injured</th>
<th>Ill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal mood fluctuations</td>
<td>Irritable/Impatient</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Angry outbursts/aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm &amp; takes things in stride</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Excessive anxiety/panic attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good sense of humour</td>
<td>Sadness/Overwhelmed</td>
<td>Pervasively sad/Hopeless</td>
<td>Depressed/Suicidal thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing well</td>
<td>Displaced sarcasm</td>
<td>Negative attitude</td>
<td>Overt insubordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In control mentally</td>
<td>Procrastination</td>
<td>Poor performance/Workaholic</td>
<td>Can’t perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal sleep patterns</td>
<td>Forgetfulness</td>
<td>Poor concentration/decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few sleep difficulties</td>
<td>Trouble sleeping</td>
<td>Restless disturbed sleep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Normal sleep patterns</td>
<td>Intrusive thoughts</td>
<td>Recurrent images/nightmares</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Few sleep difficulties</td>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Physically well</td>
<td>Muscle tension/Headaches</td>
<td>Increased aches and pains</td>
<td>Physical illnesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good energy level</td>
<td>Low energy</td>
<td>Increased fatigue</td>
<td>Constant fatigue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physically and socially active</td>
<td>Decreased activity/socializing</td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>Not going out or answering phone</td>
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<tr>
<td>No/limited alcohol use/gambling</td>
<td>Regular but controlled alcohol use/gambling</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Alcohol or gambling addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased alcohol use/gambling – hard to control</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other addictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pulse Checks

• Checking your “pulse” is about knowing where the edge is and when we are pushing our limits
• Monitoring stress and energy levels, and then pacing accordingly is about awareness and vigilance; knowing when to extend yourself and when to ease up.
• Watch for:
  – Impact on performance
  – Duration of reactions
  – Intensity of reactions
  – Rumination
Symptoms of Burnout

- Emotional exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Reduced sense of accomplishment
- Worthlessness, Depression, Anxiety
- Critical, defensive, aggressive, irritable
- Overreaction, very emotional, forgetful
- Unreasonably negative, unrealistic judgement, avoiding decisions, irrational
- Increased absenteeism & minor illnesses
- Neglecting personal appearance
Beyond the Optimal Zone: normalizing help-seeking

• The Big Four are helpful skills, but sometimes the demands placed on us outweigh our available resources.

• Just as we go to physio for overuse injuries, we may need to seek additional resources for mental health.
Resources

Family, Friends
Colleagues, Supervisors
Employee Assistance programs
Mental Health Care Providers
Spiritual Leaders
Family Physician
Community resources
Employer Health Care Plan– psychological services
Emergency Room/Hospital
R2MR Mobile Application

• Supplement training using mobile application to practice and acquire the resilience skills without the need for training personnel and, overcomes typical barriers to accessing additional in-person training (e.g. travel, time, and location).

• Application offers a potentially practical and effective on-the-go aid to augment the delivery of R2MR training to trainees