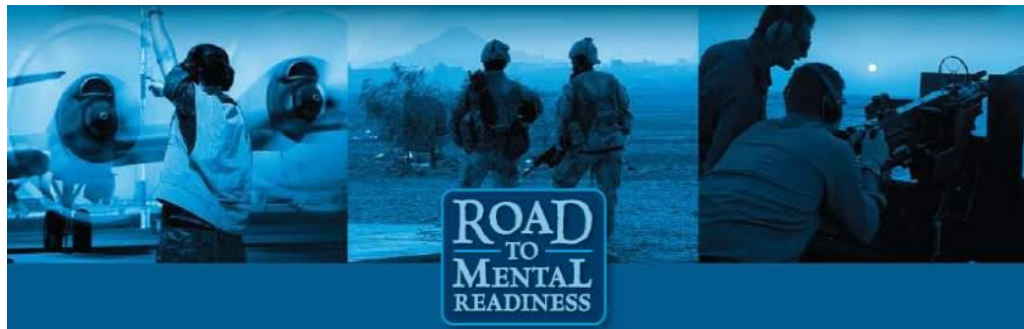




ROAD TO MENTAL READINESS

Building a Resilient Mindset



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Canadian Forces
Health Services Group



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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?

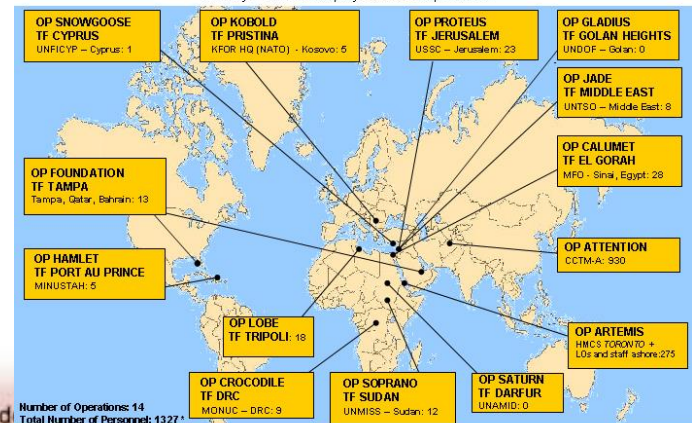
- CCHS CF Supplement 2002: Between 84 and 96% of CF members who could benefit from mental health help *do not even know they need it*
- Ongoing operations in Afghanistan: identified a need to provide skills and knowledge to manage the demands and challenges of operations and recognize when early care 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

CAF Bases, Wings and Selected Installations and Sites across Canada



Number of Operations: 14
Total Number of Personnel: 1327

The number of personnel is approximate and does not include Relief in Place surges, periodic Technical Assistance Visits, other visits, personnel posted to OUTCAN positions (except Op FOUNDATION), or other CAF personnel employed temporarily in locations outside of Canada for training or support purposes. Deployed personnel on leave, temporary duty, or temporarily out of the country they are working in for other reasons, are counted as if they were in country.

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Informed by:

Enhancing Mental Readiness in Military Personnel

Megan M. Thompson & Donald R. McCreary
Defence Research & Development Canada
1133 Sheppard Ave West
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CANADA

Implementation Principles for Mental Health Training

MAJ Carlo Van den Berge

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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

Castro, C. A., & Adler, A. B. (2011). Military mental health training: Building resilience. In S. M. Southwick, B. T. Litz, D. Charney, & M. J. Friedman (Eds.), *Resilience and mental health: Challenges across the lifespan* (pp. 323–339). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.



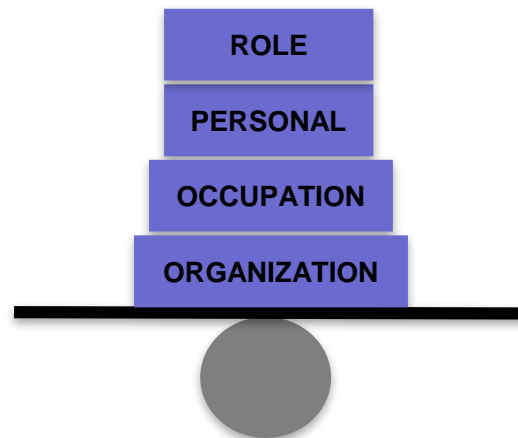
What is stress?

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

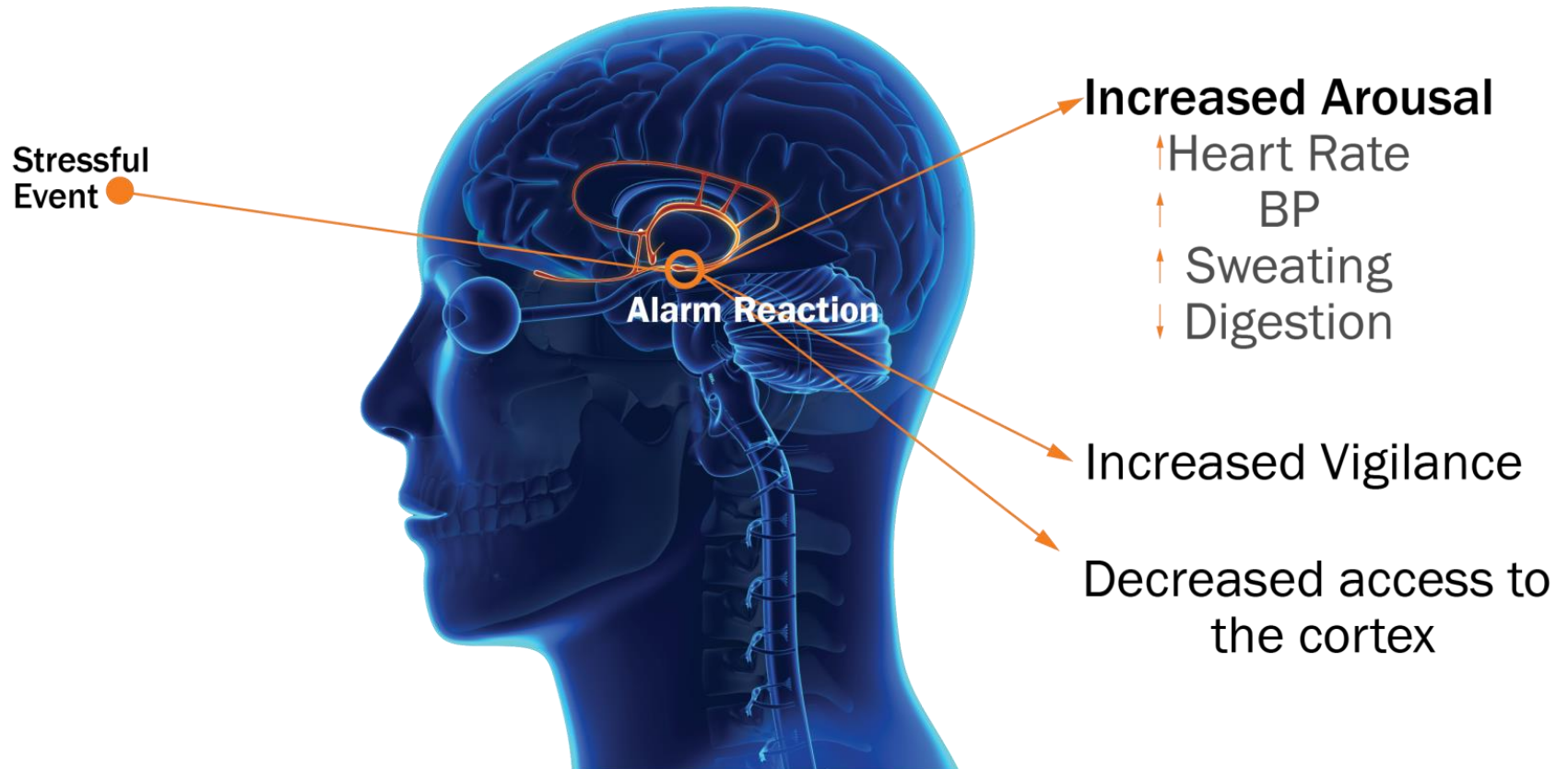


Prepare: Knowledge and Training

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

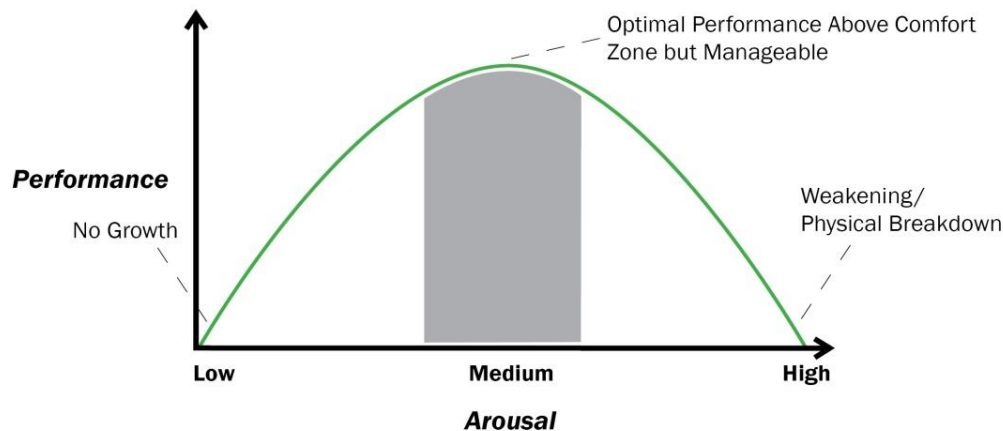


The Stress Response



Managing the Demands

Stress and Performance



↑stress = ↑ likelihood of choosing a risky alternative

↑stress = ↓ tolerance for ambiguity

↑stress = ↑ tendency to make hasty choice

↑stress = ↓ productive thoughts

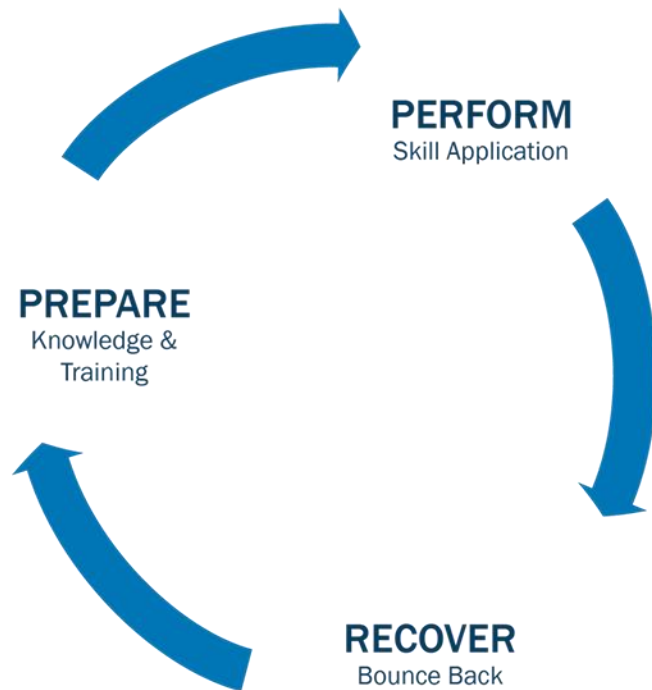
↑stress = ↑ in distracting thoughts

↑stress = ↑ distortion in perception

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



Optimizing Performance



Perform: Skill application

- The Big Four +
 - Arousal Management
 - Tactical breathing
 - Visualization
 - Self-talk
 - Goal setting
 - Attention control



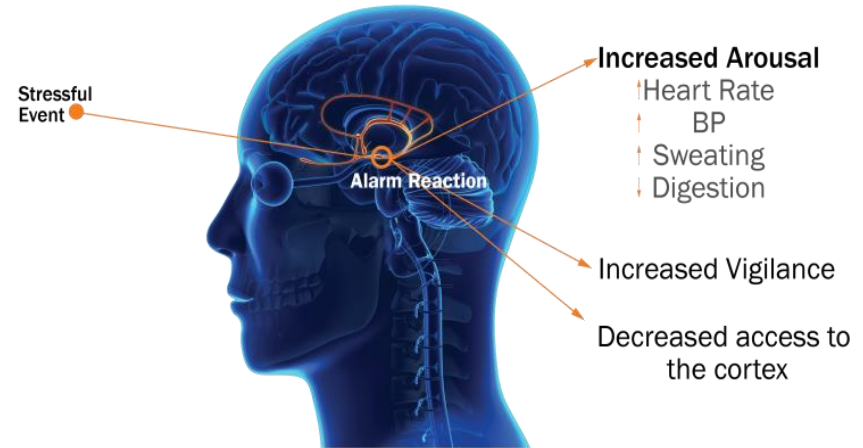
Perception

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

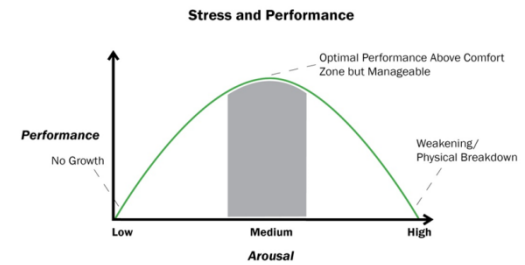
Do we see the demand as a threat
or a challenge?

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



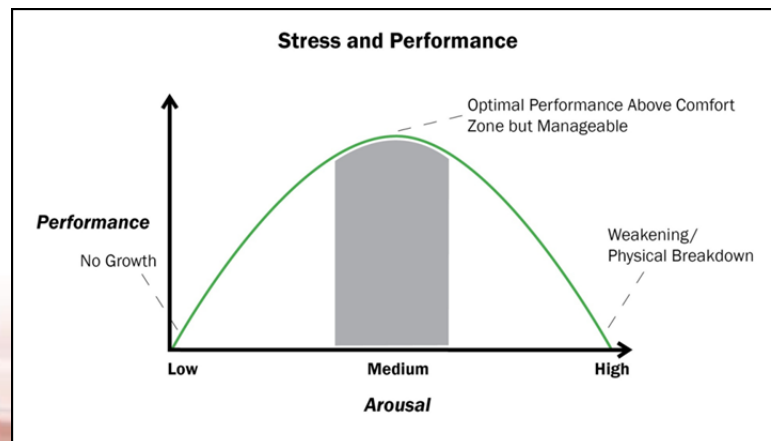
Control the Images

- Create and use experiences in your mind through **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



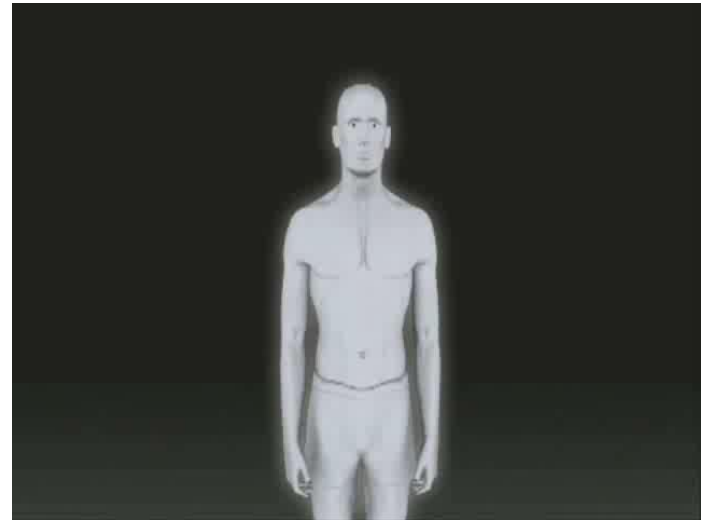
Emotion regulation

- 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



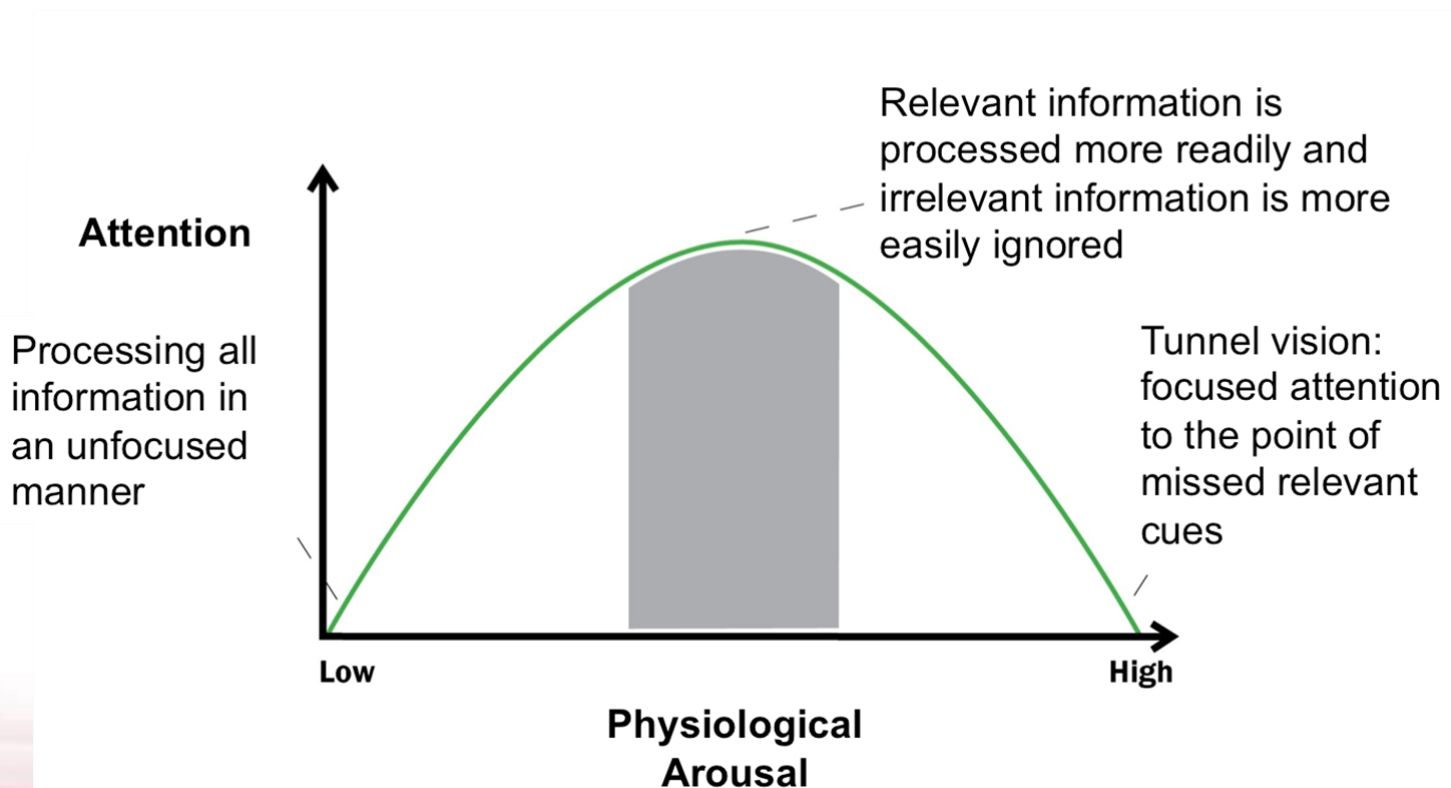
Skill Description

- 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)

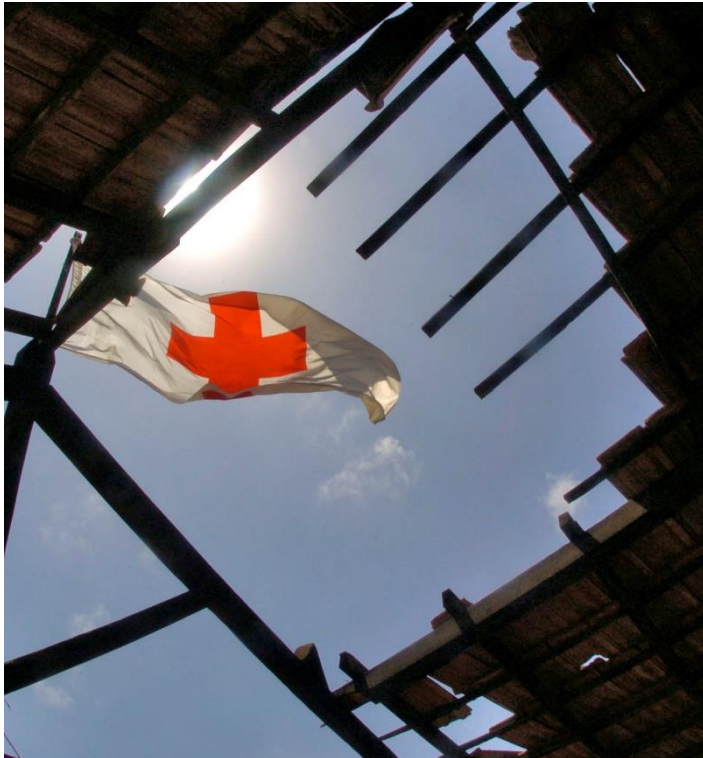


Attention Control

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



Refocusing Techniques



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

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Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR)

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



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



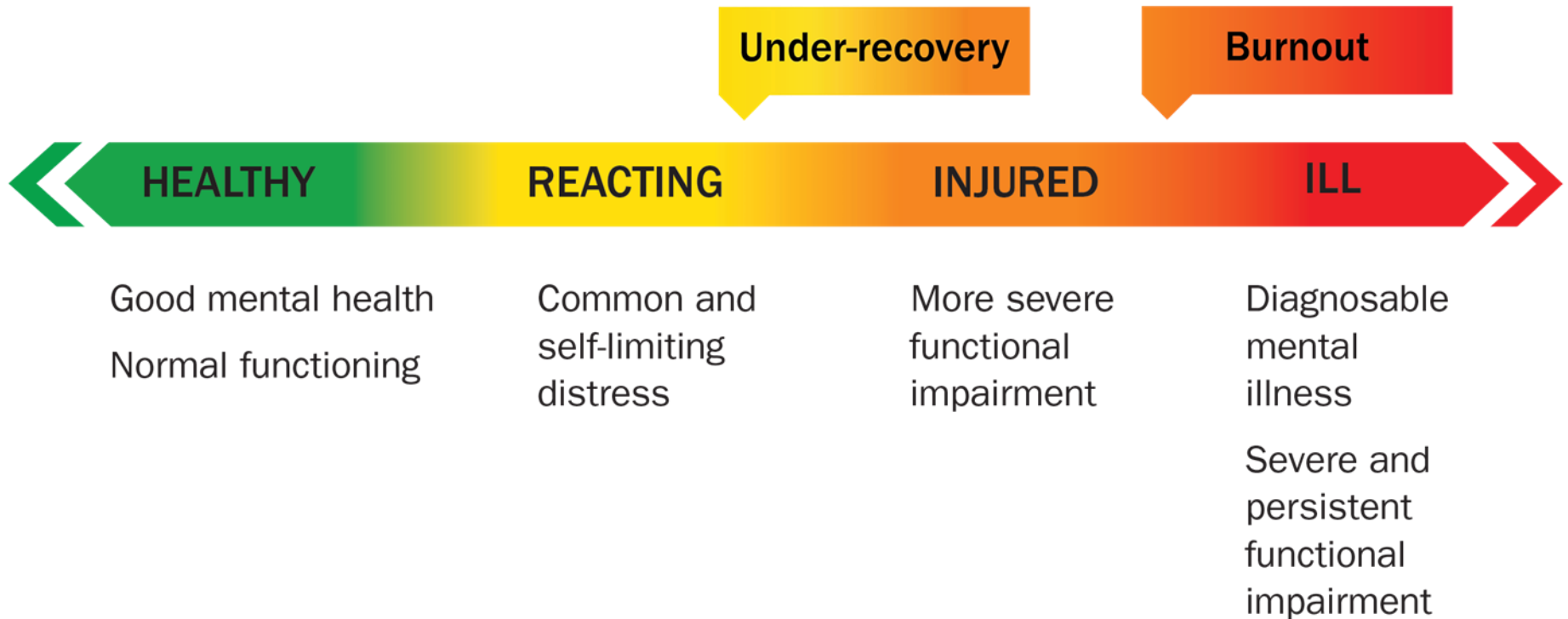
Strengthen Social Support



- 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



Monitor Health

HEALTHY

REACTING

INJURED

ILL

Normal mood fluctuations
Calm & takes things in stride

Good sense of humour
Performing well
In control mentally

Normal sleep patterns
Few sleep difficulties

Physically well
Good energy level

Physically and socially active

No/limited alcohol use/
gambling

Irritable/Impatient
Nervous
Sadness/Overwhelmed

Displaced sarcasm
Procrastination
Forgetfulness

Trouble sleeping
Intrusive thoughts
Nightmares

Muscle tension/Headaches
Low energy

Decreased activity/
socializing

Regular but controlled
alcohol use/gambling

Anger
Anxiety
Pervasively sad/Hopeless

Negative attitude
Poor performance/Workaholic
Poor concentration/
decisions

Restless disturbed sleep
Recurrent images/
nightmares

Increased aches and pains
Increased fatigue

Avoidance
Withdrawal

Increased alcohol use/
gambling – hard to control

Angry outbursts/aggression
Excessive anxiety/panic attacks
Depressed/Suicidal thoughts

Overt insubordination
Can't perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate

Can't fall asleep or stay asleep
Sleeping too much or too little

Physical illnesses
Constant fatigue

Not going out or answering phone

Alcohol or gambling addiction
Other addictions



Pulse Checks

HEALTHY

REACTING

INJURED

ILL

- 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

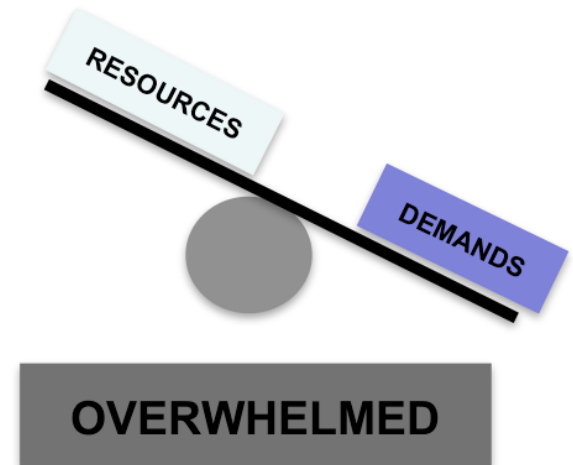
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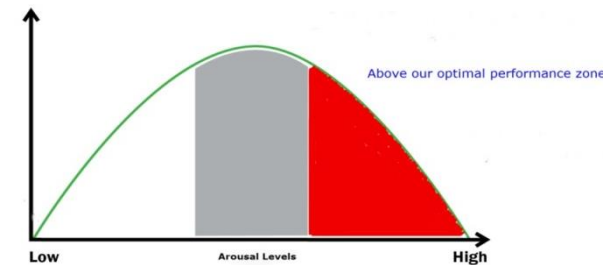
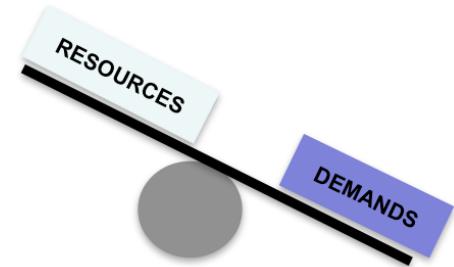
Symptoms of Burnout

- 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

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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

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