

# Building and Maintaining Stress Resilience in the Marine Corps



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**USMC COMBAT OPERATIONAL STRESS CONTROL (COSC) PROGRAM  
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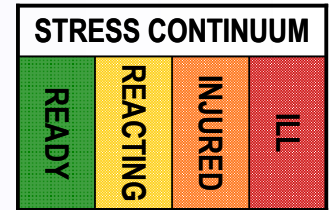
# Combat Operational Stress Control in USMC



- The stress of deploying to a war zone **affects everyone** involved
- Effectively building resilience and managing operational stress at every level is essential
  - **Force preservation** and **readiness**
  - **Long-term health** of our Marines, families, and society
- Resilience and stress control are addressed
  - Throughout the **deployment cycle**
  - Throughout Marines' **careers**
- Building and maintaining stress resilience is the **responsibility of leaders** at all levels
  - Assisted by other professionals



# Commandant's Guidance





# Combat Operational Stress Continuum for Marines



READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good to go</li> <li>• Well trained</li> <li>• Prepared</li> <li>• Fit and tough</li> <li>• Cohesive units, ready families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distress or impairment</li> <li>• Mild, transient</li> <li>• Anxious or irritable</li> <li>• Behavior change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More severe or persistent distress or impairment</li> <li>• Leaves lasting evidence (personality change)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress injuries that don't heal without intervention</li> <li>• Diagnosable               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PTSD</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Addictive Disorder</li> </ul> </li> </ul>





# Stress Outcome Spectrum: Reactions Versus Injuries



## Stress Reactions

- Common
- Always temporary
- Mild distress or loss of function
- Self-correcting



## Stress Injuries

- Uncommon
- May leave a scar
- More severe distress or loss of function
- May heal faster with help



# Sources of Stress Injury



## Intense or Prolonged Combat or Operational Stress

### LIFE THREAT

- A trauma injury
- Due to events provoking terror, helplessness, horror, shock

### WEAR AND TEAR

- A fatigue injury
- Due to the accumulation of stress over time

### LOSS

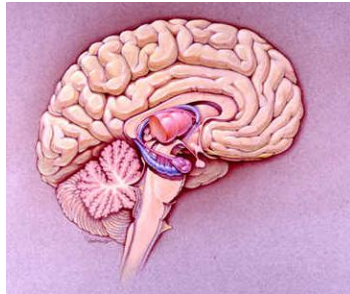
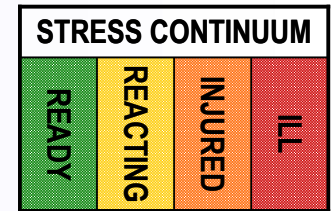
- A grief injury
- Due to loss of people who are cared about

### INNER CONFLICT

- A beliefs injury
- Due to conflict between moral/ethical beliefs and current experiences<sup>6</sup>



# Mechanisms of Stress Injury



## Biological

Memory problems: Damage to memory center  
Overreaction: Lowered threshold for fear response  
Hypervigilance: Neurotransmitters on overdrive  
Depression/anxiety: Neurotransmitters get used up  
Personality change: Diminished control of emotion and impulses



## Psychological

Trouble making sense of fragmented memories  
Severe self-blame or guilt  
Grief over lost friends and acquaintances  
Changes in self-attribution  
Feeling out of control



## Social/Spiritual

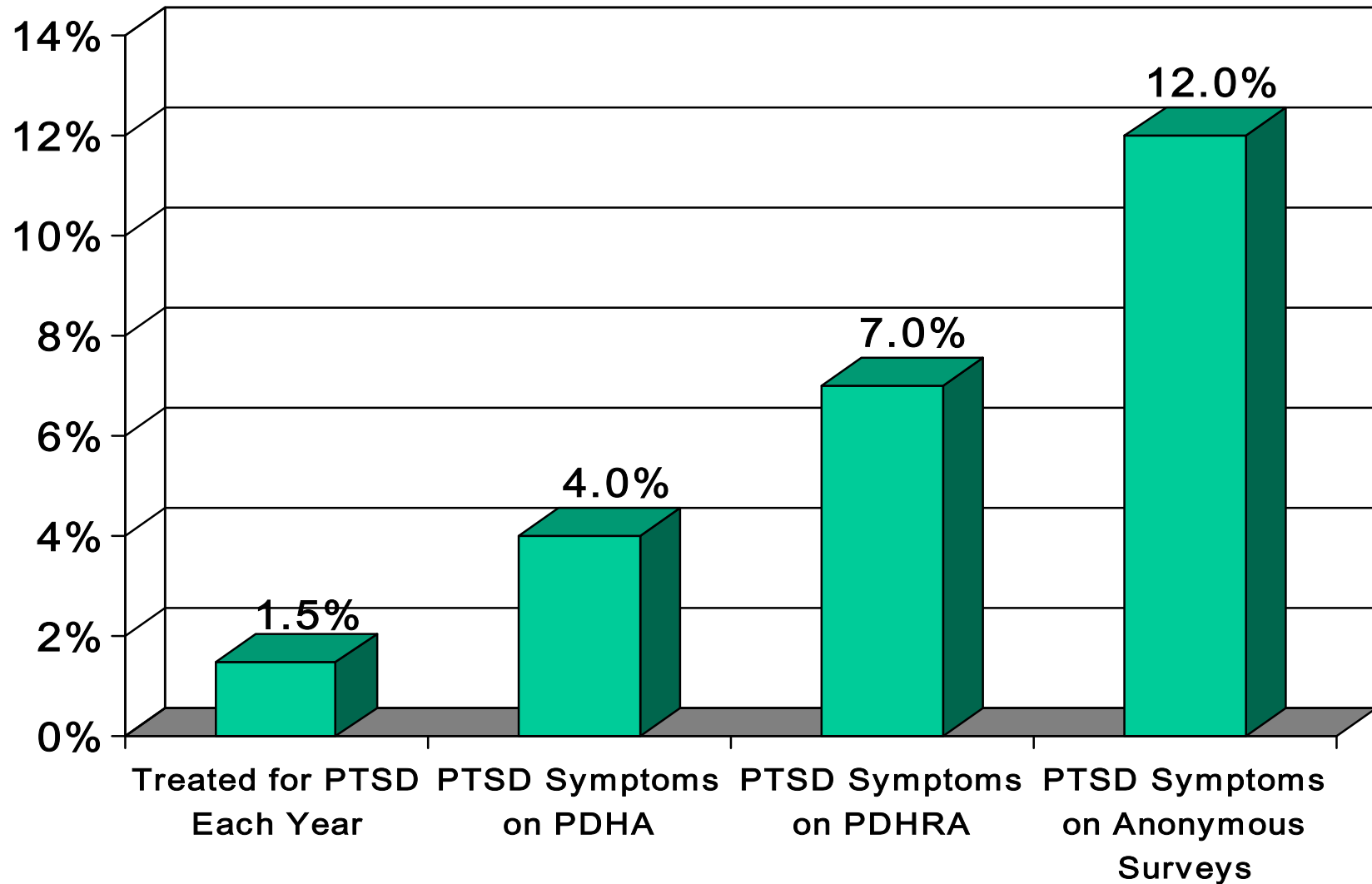
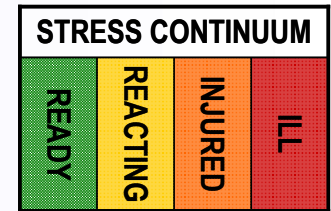
No answers to the big questions anymore

- ✓ Why do things like this happen?
- ✓ What is important anymore?
- ✓ How do I forgive myself and others?
- ✓ Who can I trust?

Loss of social support



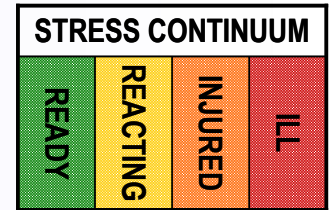
# Post-deployment PTSD Symptoms in Marines







# Leadership is the Key



- **Five COSC Core Leader Functions are how we manage and cope with stress**
  - 1. Strengthen** Marines
  - 2. Mitigate** and remove unnecessary stressors
  - 3. Identify** Marines with stress problems
  - 4. Treat** and coordinate care
  - 5. Reintegrate** back to unit



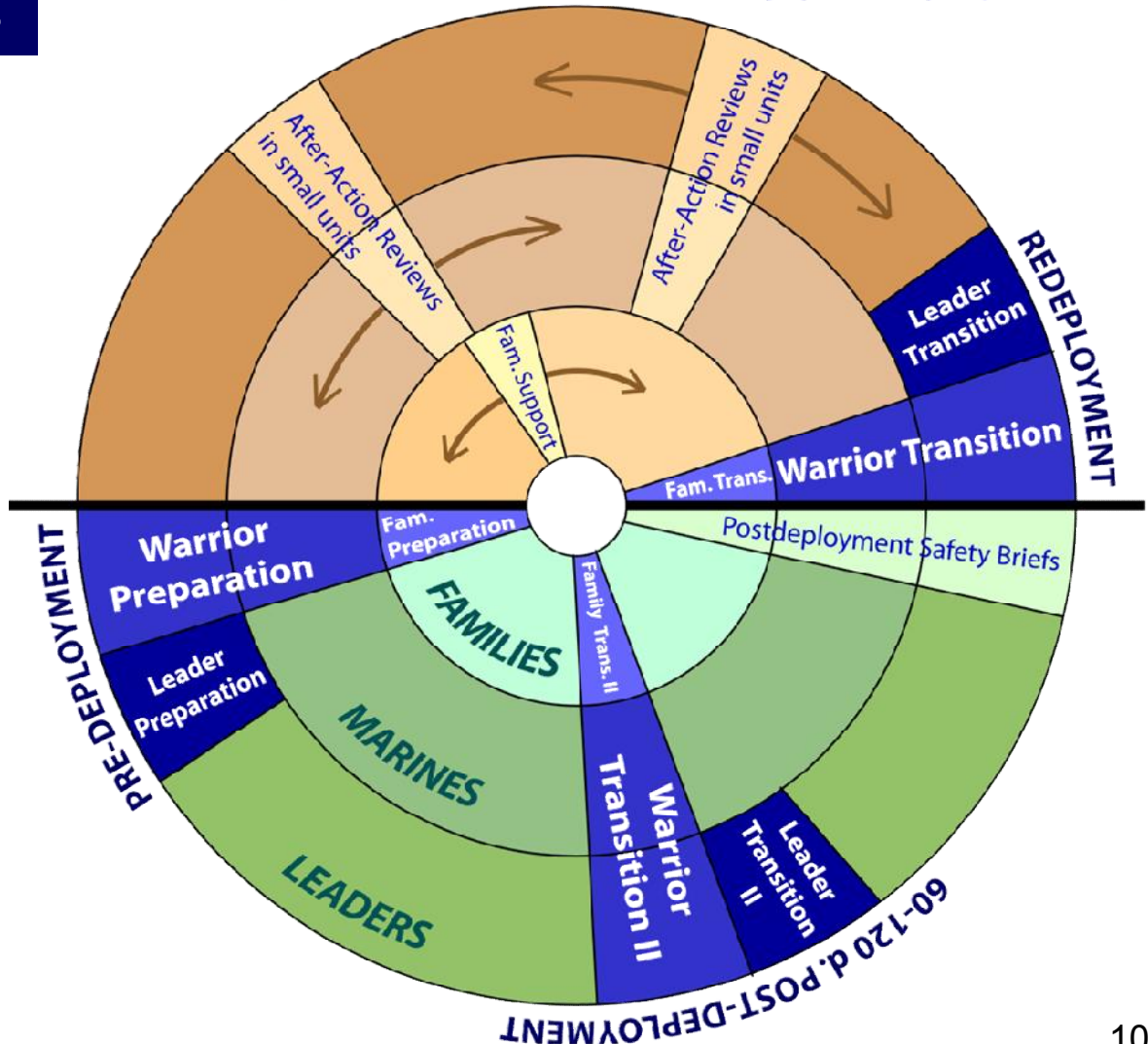
# Marine Operational Stress Training (MOST) Cycle for Deployments



## COSC Awareness Briefs

- **Pre-deployment**
  - Leader Preparation
  - Warrior Preparation
  - Family Preparation
- **Before Redeployment**
  - Leader Transition
  - Warrior Transition
  - Family Transition
- **Post-deployment (60-120 days)**
  - Leader Transition II
  - Warrior Transition II
  - Family Transition II

## Marine Operational Stress Training (MOST) Cycle





# Marine or Sailor Under Stress

STRESS CONTINUUM			
READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL

**Green Zone (Ready):**

- Good to Go. Continue to monitor for signs of distress or loss of function in the future if concerned

**Yellow Zone (Reacting):**

- Ensure adequate sleep and rest
- Manage home-front stressors
- Discussions in small units
- Refer to chaplain or medical if problems worsen

**Orange Zone (Injured):**

- Keep safe and calm
- Rest and recuperation 24-72 hrs.
- Refer to medical or chaplain
- Mentor back to full duty and function

**Red Zone (Ill):**

- Refer to medical
- Ensure treatment compliance
- Mentor back to duty if possible
- Reintegrate with unit

NO

Are there signs of **DISTRESS** or **LOSS OF FUNCTION**?

YES

NO

Is the distress or loss of function **SEVERE**?

YES

NO

Has the distress or loss of function **PERSISTED**?

YES

**Distress or Loss of Function:**

- Difficulty relaxing and sleeping
- Loss of interest in social or recreational activities
- Unusual and excessive fear, worry, or anger
- Recurrent nightmares or troubling memories
- Hyperactive startle responses to noises
- Difficulty performing normal duties
- Any change from normal personality

**SEVERE Distress or Loss of Function:**

- Inability to fall asleep or stay asleep
- Withdrawal from social or recreational activities
- Uncharacteristic outbursts of rage or panic
- Nightmares or memories that increase heart rate
- Inability to control emotions
- Serious suicidal or homicidal thoughts
- Loss of usual concern for moral values

**PERSISTENT Distress or Loss of Function:**

- Stress problems that last for several weeks post-deployment
- Stress problems that don't get better over time
- Stress problems that get worse over time

**Combat Operational Stress Decision Flowchart**



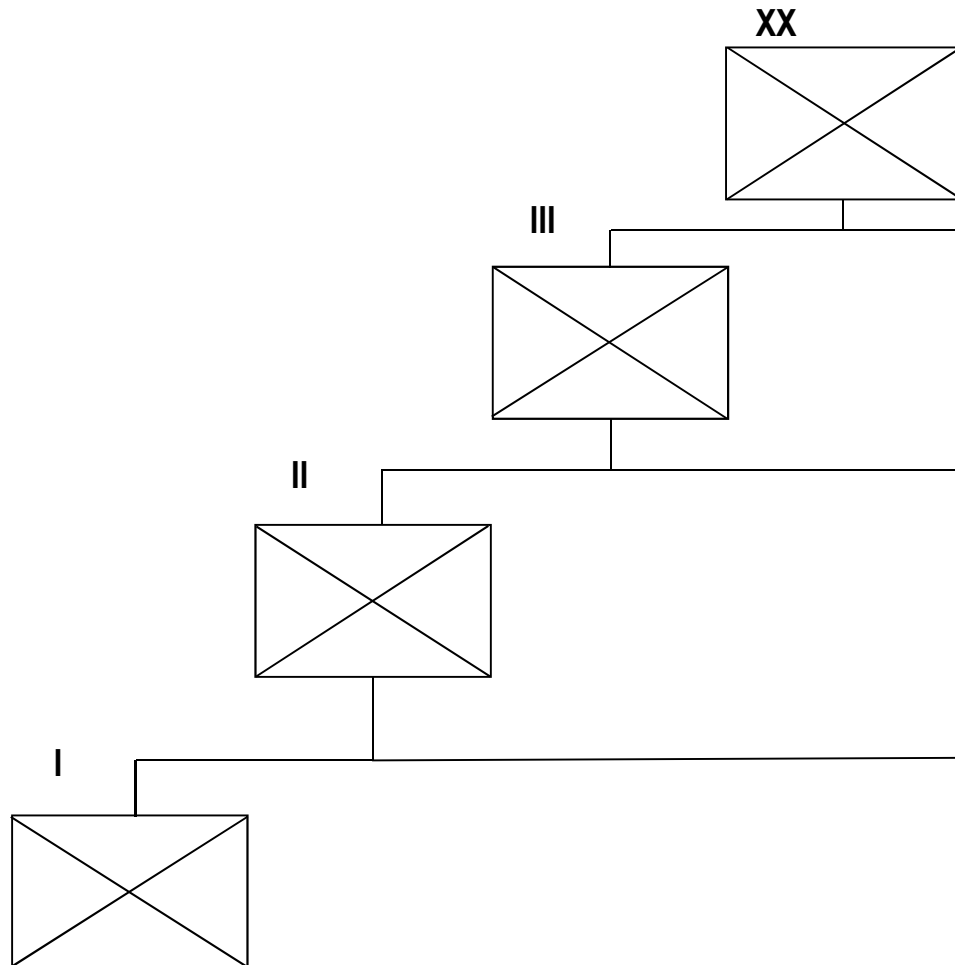
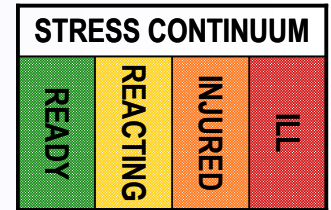
# OSCAR



- **Operational Stress Control and Readiness Program:**
  - Embedded mental health professionals
    - ✓ Divisions and infantry regiments
  - Extended by medical, religious, and warfighter personnel
    - ✓ Battalions and companies
    - ✓ Selected and specially trained to their level of expertise and experience
- **Objectives:**
  - Help leaders build individual and unit strength, resilience, and readiness
  - Serve as a known, easily approachable immediate point of contact
  - Provide advice and support on stress-related issues
  - Encourage others to get help when needed
  - Provide early intervention or treatment as appropriate
  - Help affected Marines and Sailors get back to full readiness



# OSCAR Structure



## DIVISION

Mental Health Providers (3, full time)  
Psych Techs (4, full Time)

## INFANTRY REGIMENTS

Mental Health Providers (2, full time)  
Psych Techs, (2, full time)

## INFANTRY BATTALIONS

Medical Providers (collateral)  
Chaplains (collateral)  
Corpsmen, (collateral)  
Religious Program Specialists (collateral)  
Marine Leaders (XO, SgtMaj, collateral)  
Marine Peers (selected, collateral)

## INFANTRY COMPANIES

Corpsmen (selected, collateral)  
Marine leaders, XO, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt, collateral)  
Marine Peers (selected, collateral)



# Question 1



- In the Marine Corps, building and maintaining stress resilience is the responsibility of:
  - A. Navy Mental Health Providers**
  - B. Chaplains**
  - C. Leaders at all levels, assisted by other professionals**
  - D. Senior Leaders only**



## Question 2



- Which stressors can leaders prevent the most through mitigation?
  - A. Life threat
  - B. Wear and tear
  - C. Loss
  - D. Inner conflict

# Questions? Comments?



[www.manpower.usmc.mil/cosc](http://www.manpower.usmc.mil/cosc)