



Coping with Stress in Stability and Support Operations



The day-to-day stress that comes with stability and support operations (SASOs) can, at worst, be as bad as that of major combat. The danger may be as high, the mission less clear, some civilians hostile, and rules of engagement are stricter. It is hard to recognize threats. Concrete progress is difficult to see. There is boredom, no privacy, restricted movement, and separation from home with poor communication. Under these conditions, anyone can begin to show signs of distress, and it is important to know how you can help yourself and your buddy.

Learn effective relaxation techniques:

- play cards or sports
- write a letter or diary
- take slow, deep breaths
- talk with friends
- read a book
- imagine a favorite place

Relaxation techniques can help you refocus in action, recharge after grueling or boring work, and can help you get to sleep. Request training on relaxation techniques from mental health or combat stress control teams and unit ministry teams in your area.

What to do for yourself:

- Remind yourself that the way you are feeling is normal given the situation that you are in;
- Make certain that you get enough sleep, food, water, and exercise – if you are physically stressed, your ability to deal with the day-to-day SASO stressors is reduced;
- Focus on the mission at hand – break down objectives into smaller tasks and reward yourself with rest breaks after each task is accomplished;
- Stay tied in with buddies in your unit;
- Maintain contact with friends and family at home whenever you can – if something at home is bothering you, talk about it with your buddies, your leaders, or anyone else you trust;
- If things start to feel out of control, get with your unit sergeant, chaplain, medic, or commander ASAP.

Card 2 - front



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Card 2 - front

What to do for your buddies:

- Know the members of your team and welcome newcomers when they arrive—help them learn skills they need;
- Be on the lookout for sudden changes in how your buddies act – if you see such a change, ask them about it;
- Include your buddies and new guys in opportunities to relax;
- Offer encouragement and recognition when your buddies do something well;
- If you're concerned for your buddies, talk to them about how they're doing;
- If you think that your buddy may be having a really hard time and won't talk to you, get with your supervisor and let them know about your concern.

What to do for your subordinates:

- Keep your team informed of new developments as they come up but be careful not to pass on rumors – say you don't know and will tell them when you do.
- Be on the lookout for changes in behavior or performance and act to address issues before they become problems;
- Organize team events to help your soldiers relax and have some fun; give them some private time when you can.
- Check in with team members on how they're handling the deployment and how things are going back home;
- Assure they get a fair share of MWR communication.
- Talk with any soldiers about whom you are concerned and *listen* to them;
- Conduct sensing sessions as frequently as possible, and make sure soldiers' feelings are expressed and heard;
- Refer soldiers to unit chaplains, mental health or combat stress control (CSC) team assets for help if they need it.

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Card 2 - back

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Card 2 - back