

Self-Care in Military Operational Settings

Tales from the Sea
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Objectives

- To share life-lessons from an active duty psychologist in an operational military setting by:
 - providing insight into the life of an Early Career military psychologist and experiences that helped prepare for this career.
 - educating early career psychologists in operational military settings about what to expect and how to deal with common threats to self-care.
 - enlightening early career psychologists about the precarious balance between family and work in military operational settings, and how self-care is a crucial ethical consideration.

Self-Care for ECP's in operational Settings

Preparing Yourself Mentally for Deployment

Strategic Approach to Today's Discussion

- Family
- Resilience
- Professional/Personal Relevance

FAMILY

Preparing yourself and your family for deployment is a big part of your self-care plan.

The Emotional Phases Of Deployment

The Emotional Phases Of Deployment

- During deployments, many would agree that the hardest thing to deal with is being separated from your spouse and family. Likewise, this is probably the most difficult aspect for your spouse and family!
- Deployments can produce a variety of feelings but most couples experience a predictable cycle of emotions.
- Different feelings and reactions may occur in each cycle.
- Listed in the next few slides are some of the more common emotions.

Pre-Deployment Phase (6-8 weeks prior to deployment).

- Feelings in this stage may include fear, anger, denial, resentment, excitement, and guilt. Common thoughts include "What will I do without him/her?" "How can I actually leave?!" "How in the world will she cope with the kids?" and "I wish the ship would leave so I could get on with my life!" Reactions during this phase may vary between "honeymoon" like behavior to severe arguments.

Deployment Phase (during the deployment).

- Feelings in this stage may include relief, anxiety, enthusiasm, pride, and sense of abandonment. Thoughts associated with these feelings include "Now I can get on with my job!" "I left them... I actually left them behind" "What if something happens that she can't handle?" and "I'm handling things so much better than I thought I would!". Reactions during this phase may include a change in schedule (eating and sleeping habits), intense busyness, establishing routine. Significant negative changes in attitude can also occur ranging from anger to apathy.

Reunion Phase (1-6 weeks prior to reunion).

- Feelings in this stage may include anxiety, excitement, guilt, fear, and elation. Thoughts associated with this phase may include "Oh no, I didn't accomplish everything I needed to!" "Hey, I'm managing just fine without them!" "I can't wait to see him/her!" or "I wonder if he/she still loves me". All of these feelings and thoughts are normal.
- Reactions to expect from family members/spouse during this phase may include home improvement (cleaning, decorating, etc.) and increased focus on personal appearance (new hairstyle, shopping for a new outfit or lingerie, etc.).

Post-Deployment Phase (1-6 weeks post reunion).

- Feelings in this stage may include euphoria, resentment, and role confusion. Although this is an exciting and happy time for most families, it is often the most difficult period they face. The service member may feel displaced and no longer needed in the day-to-day functioning of the family. The spouse may feel resentful when the service member attempts to take charge of an activity (finances, discipline, parenting). While they are reestablishing intimacy, they are also renegotiating their relationship and redefining roles.

Getting ready for a deployment is one thing. Dealing with one is another

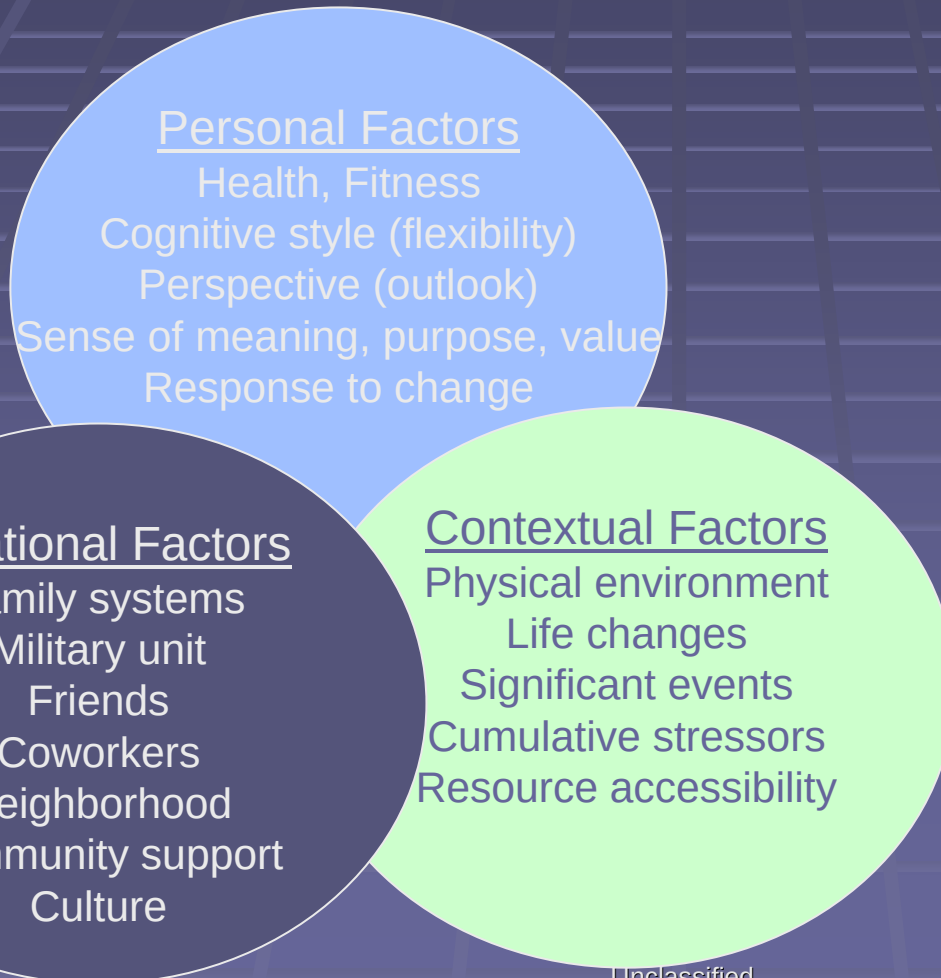
- For your family/significant other, there's not necessarily one big challenge, it's all the little things that add up.
- Taking care of yourself and your loved ones, while keeping the lines of communication open, can help bring balance to life's ups and downs.

Resilience

Sources of Stress on the ship

ENVIRONMENT	Heat Cold	Dehydration Sleep deprivation	Illness or illness Toxins
THINKING	Being hyper-focused Lack of information	Boredom Too much information	Uncertainty
FEELING	• Fear of injury or death • Hatred	• Fear of failure • Horror	• Guilt or shame
RELATIONSHIPS	• Being away from loved ones and friends • Loss of personal space	• Isolation	
SPIRITUALITY	• Life doesn't make sense like it used to • Challenge of faith	• Moral conflict	

Resilience Factors



- Resilience is exhibiting positive behavioral adaptation when encountering significant adversity or trauma.
(Luther, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)
- Resilience can be described by viewing:
 1. good outcomes regardless of high-risk status,
 2. constant competence under stress, and
 3. recovery from trauma

(Masten, et al., 1990)

Resilience

- Each of you will react to separation differently. Intensity of feelings vary, and normal ups and downs will occur regularly during separation
- In order to prepare, there are some things you can do now to help prepare for the deployment and help develop personal and professional resilience.
 - The Personal Deployment Checklist

Personal Checklist: During Deployment

- *Help your family members/partner to develop and stick to household routines to maintain order.*
- *Make Plans to communicate with the kids (if you have them) and monitor behavior.*
- *Make a Plan to stay in touch with your spouse to keep spirits high for everyone.*
- *Stay Connected*

Just say yes

- Friends and family, support groups and the military itself always are ready to extend a helping hand. Part of the challenge is overcoming the reluctance, especially among psychologists, to reach out.
- Most of us have people around who want to help, but for some reason we feel we have to do everything ourselves.
 - Let your friends and family help you.

Find power in numbers

- List-serves, other professional support groups, or informal peer mail-groups offer a great way to connect with others in similar situations.
- Don't isolate, because misery loves company and if things aren't going well you won't feel so alone.

Keep in touch

- Keeping in contact with a deployed spouse isn't easy, especially with limitations of time zones and poor phone connections. Double-check contact information and have an emergency contact plan in place.
- Avoid confusion with letters and e-mails that may not arrive in order by numbering them - 1, 2, 3, etc.
- While phone calls home may be short and infrequent, even a minute can make a big difference.

Bridge the separation

- Keeping kids involved can help them feel less separated. Try hanging a map of the world with the deployment location marked, and encourage children to send their own letters or drawings to Mom or Dad.
- Talk about your spouse to the children in everyday conversation and avoid using the past tense.

Stick to routines

- Develop routines that cater to the Mind, Body, and Soul
 - On a weekly, if not daily basis:
 - Mind: Do something that engages your creativity or interests outside of psychology
 - Load up your iPOD or Book on tape collection
 - Earn your warfare pin, it will endear you to your command and you'll have fun

Stick to routines

- Develop routines that cater to the Mind, Body, and Soul
 - On a weekly, if not daily basis:
 - Body: Eat, sleep, and play (work out)
 - Soul: Feed your spiritual being or sense of higher strength
 - Get out of the office and see the sun.
 - Put up the Doctor is “out” sign at least once a week.
 - Find some personal support and escape

Personal Support and Escape



DISCRETION

Note to self: Fire Alfred.

- Find your “quiet space” for your reflection time
- Develop a good mentoring relationship or confidant to speak your mind to, when you need it.

Relevance

The List

Dr. Heidi Squires-Kraft

- When working with Marines and Sailors read the book...Rule #2
 - Things That Were Good...
 - Things That Were Not Good
- Try, on a daily basis, to find relevance in your experience.
 - Relevance to your professional development
 - Relevance to your personal development.

Ethical Consideration

- Not taking good care of yourself is not ethical