



# Psych First Aid for Military Families

LCDR Bob Marietta MD  
3d Marine Division Psychiatrist

CAPT Russell Gilbert MD  
III MEF Force Surgeon



# Scenario 1

---

- Spouse presents to FRO in a desperate state complaining that children and husband literally have not had any communication since the second deployment.
- Husband is currently on third deployment.



## Scenario 2

---

- Spouse is depressed, has stopped going to church, keeps to herself and has asked for help from the FRO.



## Scenario 3

---

- Spouse reports that her husband is “not the man I married”. She is concerned that he is showing signs of PTSD.
- The spouse is concerned about what will happen and what to do.



# Quote from Commandant

---

- “I had a spouse down in the Carolina MAGTF tell me; “They interviewed Sergeant Sasquatch over there about four times on every deployment for PTSD, but no one has counseled his two sons yet...””



# Military Families Need Prevention and Training Also

---

- A strong family makes a strong Marine / Sailor
- If the family disintegrates, we lose the Marine / Sailor
- Military family members are an integral part of the unit and require pre-deployment training also
  
- Same problems of stigma and unfamiliarity of mental health issues exists for Family Members and Family Readiness Officers as Marines and Sailors
  - Presented at the USMC COSC conference in 2007
  
- What is the deckplate solution?



# Psych First Aid

---

- Primary prevention, mental resiliency, self, and buddy aid training
  - Corrects knowledge deficit
  - Reduces stigma and improves comfort
  - Improves communication skills
  - Teaches problem solving skills before the stress
  - Creates a support network and builds cohesion
  - Empowers families and others to identify and intervene at the earliest stages
- Useful adjunct for Marine Operational Stress Training (MOST) Program



# Program Overview

---

Community	Workplace	Healthcare Providers
<p><b>Psych First Aid for Military Family Members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Marines are encouraged to attend</li></ul> <p><b>Psych First Aid for Military Teens</b></p>	<p><b>Psych First Aid for Marines</b></p>	<p><b>Psych Life Support</b></p>
<p><b>Advanced Psych First Aid</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Family Readiness Officers</li><li>•OSCAR Representatives</li><li>•Corpsmen</li></ul>		<p><b>Advanced Psych Life Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Medical Officers</li><li>•Nurses</li></ul>



# Psych First Aid for Military Families

---

- Works best as pre-deployment training for family members
  - Can receive a benefit at any phase of deployment
- Ideally taught by
  - Family Readiness Officer
  - OSCAR Personnel (Psychiatrist, Psych Tech)
  - OSCAR Representative
  - Chaplain
- Optimal benefit when Marines attend and participate with their family members



# Training Rollout To Date

---

- 100 Family Members trained
- 15 Family Readiness Officers trained in Advanced Psych First Aid
- Regular monthly and on demand training



# Course Content - Introduction

---

- Why combat and operational stress is important
- Background information
  - Participants learn about the impact of combat operational stress on military families
    - Example review of NMFA Survey of Support
  - Combat Operational Stress Continuum for Families and Marines
    - Injury vs. reaction



# Course Content – What to do

---

- What to do in a mental health situation
- The Four R's
  - Recognize
  - Remove
    - Ensure privacy
  - Replenish
    - Provide information
    - Network between families
    - Give personal space
  - Refer



# Course Content – Awareness

---

- Common pitfalls family members face
  - Communication problems before, during and after deployment
  - Working with and obtaining information from commands
  - What each family member may experience during the different phases of deployment
  - Caregiver Fatigue
  - Not knowing what to do when a friend or loved one is struggling



# Course Content - Intervention

---

- What to look for in family members
  - Families are the first line of defense for mental health issues
    - Identify and intervene at the earliest stages
  - Signs and symptoms of combat stress injury and substance abuse
  - How to utilize family-to-warrior privilege
- Review of emergency situations



# Course Content - Resources

---

- Where to go for help
  - Who to talk to at the command
  - Unit family readiness networks
  - MCCS
  - Medical/Tricare
    - What to expect when talking with a mental health provider
  - Money/Pay
  - Legal Admin



# Sample Small Group Discussion

---

- Your loved one is about to leave on a deployment. You are deciding with your loved one how to communicate from in-theatre.
- What is the best way to do this?



# Sample Small Group Discussion

---

- Soon after your spouse's deployment, your 6-year old's elementary school teacher calls you. She expressed concern that your son's behavior has changed. He seems withdrawn and is no longer social. What do you do?



# Participant Feedback

---

- “The information is pertinent to all military and family members“
- “Real issues were addressed with ways to rectify them“
- “....it is a great way for spouses to address issues that may be affecting them personally.”
- “...it is a powerful tool for our own command teams, MCCS personnel and spouses“



# Participant Feedback

---

- "I think spouses/members should get this training before they deploy at a separate pre-deployment brief. If this was given as a mandatory training maybe many post-deployment issues would be lesser or not an issue at all."
- "This training is helpful to every organization's FRO. Awareness is the key to our success as FROs."



# Scenario 1

---

- Spouse presents to FRO in a desperate state complaining that husband and children literally have not had any communication since the second deployment.
- Husband is currently on third deployment.
- **Spouse feels validated and obtains stress relief by talking with FRO**
- **Completes Psych First Aid for Families**
- **Enrolls in FOCUS**



## Scenario 2

---

- Spouse is depressed, has stopped going to church, keeps to herself and has asked for help from the FRO.
- **Spouse obtains validation and stress relief by talking with the FRO**
  - **FRO discovers husband's unit has experienced several deaths recently and hears of infighting and difficulty grieving**
- **FRO notifies chain of command about concerns and facilitates an in-theatre intervention via Chaplain**



## Scenario 3

---

- Spouse reports that her husband is “not the man I married”. She is concerned about signs of PTSD.
- The spouse is concerned about what will happen and what to do.
- **Spouse obtains stress relief by talking with FRO**
- **Participates in combat stress roundtable for family members**
- **Completes Psych First Aid for Families**



# Discussion

---

- A strong family makes a strong Marine / Sailor
- If the family disintegrates, we lose the Marine / Sailor
- Military family members are an integral part of the unit and require pre-deployment training also
- Optimal benefit from training occurs when Marines and family members participate together
- Family Readiness Officers are first responders to mental health situations just like Corpsmen
- OSCAR personnel can improve unit readiness by providing prevention and training to military family members



# Discussion



# Acknowledgments

---

- Special thanks to
  - MajGen Neller, Division CG
  - CAPT Gilbert, III MEF Surgeon
  - Denise Loftesnes, Division Family Readiness Officer
  - LCDR Alfonzo, OSCAR Psychiatrist
  - LT Francis, OSCAR Psychiatrist
  - HM2 Nicholson, OSCAR Psychiatric Technician
  - CAPT Targonski, Division Chaplain
  - and many others