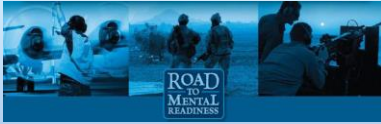


## Resilience & Well-being for Social Workers and Social Service Workers

OCSWSSW Educational Forum  
14 November 2019



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En route vers la préparation mentale

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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)

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## Mental Health & Resilience in the CAF

2002 - 84-96% of CAF members who met criteria for a disorder did not perceive a need for services

2008 - standardized program designed to increase mental health literacy, decrease stigma and other barriers to care, increase early recognition of distress and early care seeking (individual/leadership)

2009 - mandate expanded to include mental preparation and resilience programming for deployments

2015 – mandate expanded to include occupation specific training for all high risk occupations within CAF

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# Road to Mental Readiness for Health Services (R2MR4HS)



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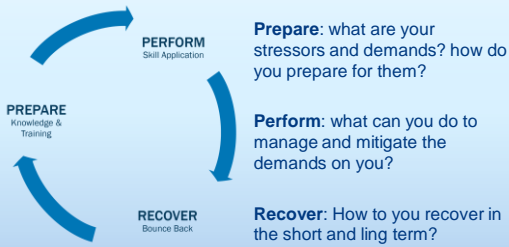
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## Optimizing Performance and Protecting Mental Health



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## Stress

What is stress?

- the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change
- Eustress = positive response
- Distress = negative response



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## Types of Stress

Acute: sudden, typically short-lived, threatening event such as assault, car accident, giving a speech



Chronic: ongoing environmental demand such as unhealthy relationship, high op tempo, prolonged illness



Chronic stress causes an exhaustion of the stress response system when:

- We are exposed repeatedly to the same stressor;
- We are exposed to a variety of stressors on an ongoing basis.

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## What is Pressure?

**Pressure:** stressful situations in which the consequences or results matter or which uncertainty or risk is present

- Not the same as stress
- Occurs when the desired outcome is dependent on performance
- Can experience stress with and without pressure
- Often self-imposed

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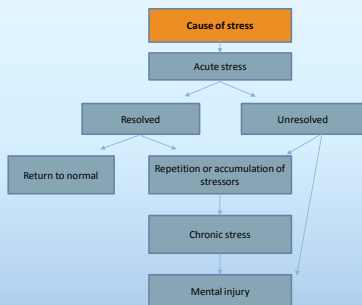
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## Stress pathway




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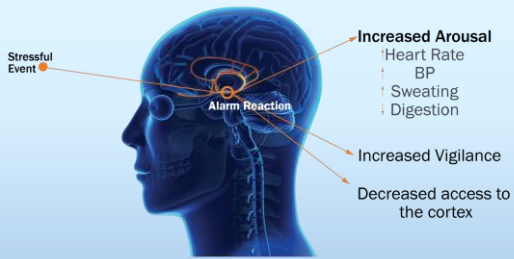
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# The Stress Response



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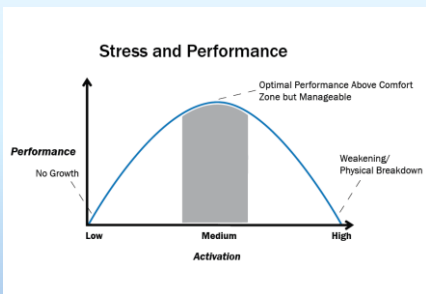
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# Stress & Performance



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# What Makes Something Stressful?

- P** Perceived low control
- U** Unpredictability
- N** Novelty
- T** Threat to ego

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## Role of Perception

Human beings are constantly appraising situations:

- Do these demands outweigh my perceived resources?
  - Yes: Stressful situation is seen as a threat
  - No: Stressful situation is seen as a challenge

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## Optimizing Performance and Protecting Mental Health



Performance requires the application of skills that can be used to manage various stressors.




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## Goal Setting

Goal setting gives the frontal lobes information to help control the amygdala – helps quiet the fear/panic alarm

### 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




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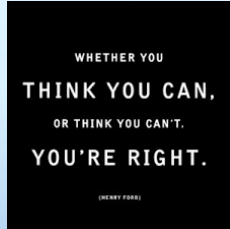
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## What is Self-Talk?

Self-talk refers to our ongoing inner dialogue

What we say to ourselves (self-talk) can make the difference between success and failure

Just because we think something (self-talk), doesn't mean it is true.



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## Challenging Negative Self-Talk

1. Pay attention to what you are saying to yourself
2. Challenge your negative thinking
  - What's the evidence that supports/does not support my thinking?
  - Am I 100% sure this will happen?
  - What would I tell a friend in the same situation?
  - Am I using extreme words in my thinking such as never, always, no one, nothing, everything, should or must?
3. Replace unhelpful thought with answer to question

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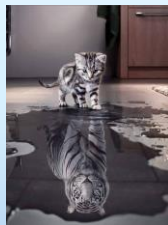
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## What is Visualization?

Creating or recreating sensory experience in the mind

Multiple applications:

- Rehearse and prepare for challenging situations
- Support physical or technical skill development
- Contingency Planning
- Recovery



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### Activation Control: Breathing

Breathing is both voluntary and involuntary: it happens without us having to think about it, but we can also influence it deliberately

We have the ability to slow down our stress response by slowing our breathing

Relaxes central nervous system, calms the body and mind, slows heart rate, decreases blood pressure

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### Optimizing Performance and Protecting Mental Health



Recovery involves bouncing back from stressful events. Everyone experiences stress; what makes the difference is how we react to and recover from it. Some performance and mental health issues stem from our inability to recover from stress.

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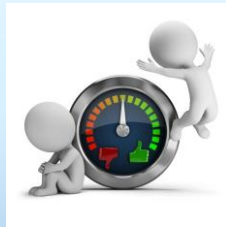
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### What is Recovery?

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




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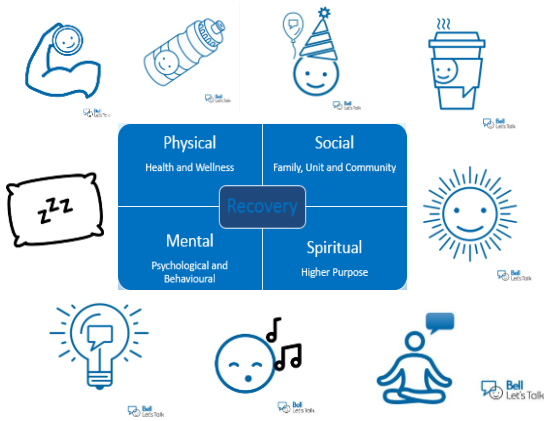
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## Awareness and critical thinking

Awareness to prevent mental injuries:

- Identify why we are vulnerable and sensitive to certain particular stressors;
- Understand our codes and how we personally deal with stress and difficult situations;
- Prepare to deal with the next stressor.

Critical thinking helps to:

- Identify challenges and the changes to be made;
- Choose the best actions for ourselves, for our health and our well-being.




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## Caring for others

It can be gratifying to provide others with helping services and care. Making a difference in other people's lives, in their growth and health can be one of the main motivations for working as caregivers, advisors, therapists, clergy members, teachers, health professionals and many other occupations.

However, this type of work uses up a lot of energy, requires great tolerance for ambiguity, can be a source of daily stress and involves challenges that are specific to the helping professions.

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## Caring for others

- Clients want quick solutions: we disappoint them when the solutions we offer take more time and effort than expected.
- Sometimes we are not the right person to help a particular client.
- Sometimes clients ask for help because they have an unsolvable problem that they want resolved.
- Our motivations and the objectives for change that we would like to pursue are not in sync with our client.
- Sometimes clients project their negative emotions onto the treating clinician.
- Clients may have needs that are beyond the scope of what can be offered.
- Our own difficulty in saying no.
- Continually navigating through negative emotions and suffering.

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## Caring for others

- The nature of the occupation limits professionals from talking to others about their work.
- Constantly demonstrating empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and listening to the other person exclusively.
- Professional regulations and standards of practice are often unknown or misunderstood by those who are not part of this profession.
- Difficulties in measuring the success of care and services.
- Difficulty in accepting that not all treatment is successful.
- Lack of cognitive stimulation and boredom.
- Cynicism, criticism, and lack of understanding on the part of colleagues and managers.
- Legal and ethical fears.
- Risks of emotional traumas.

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## What Does Self-Care Mean?

Providing services and care to others is an inherent part of your role. However, there can be a physical and mental impact associated with our role if we remain focused only on the services or care provided to others.

**Self-care** is any activity that we do deliberately in order to preserve or improve our mental, emotional, and physical health.

It is important to:

- become aware of your own needs;
- be kind to yourself; and
- think about the care that you need to give to yourself.

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## Challenges in Self-Care

Caring is a blend of kindness, concern and attention towards others in a selfless, complete way. What can sometimes lead caring individuals (care providers) to lack this kindness towards themselves?

Check the phrases that apply to you

- I don't have time to think about myself.
- Taking care of myself is not on my list of priorities.
- I didn't realize that the need to be caring applies to me.
- What does taking care of myself actually mean?
- I can wait before taking care of myself.
- The purpose of my work is to provide care to others.
- The purpose of my work is to provide services to others: clients, colleagues, etc.
- Others suffer more than I do.
- The goal is to be high performing and optimize my time for addressing the needs of others/ of those seeking my services.
- If I'm not always strong and steady, what message do I send to others?
- I no longer have time to do the things I enjoy.
- Other reasons

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## Codes

Codes include:

- Rights (what can happen)
- Duties (what must happen)
- Constraints (what cannot happen)




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## Laura's codes



Laura is a social worker and addictions counsellor. In Laura's family, the code requires being very responsible and focusing on the task at hand and on others, which is positive in itself, as it makes her a good caseworker who is dedicated to patient care. She is a responsible, professional colleague and is very involved in her team. However, that code of responsibility and work ethic does not allow her to take time for herself. She often eats in her office while finalizing her notes, she accepts new files even when she feels overloaded and she often stays at the office late. Her code of responsibility and work ethic means that, when she decides to take a sick day because she is not sleeping well and is very tired, she does not truly recover because she feels guilty and worries about the impact of her absence on her clients.

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## The Robinson family code



The Robinson's are very responsible people and, when the level of challenge increases, they "roll up their sleeves" and continue to move ahead by being strong. They have a right to express anger, which helps relieve tension, but they must not express weakness or vulnerability that could be contagious. They have no time to complain. They must not express sadness because tears "are for the weak." The Robinsons feel that sadness serves no purpose and that they must push ahead.

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## How are you coded?



Codes determine:

- Values
- Identity
- Beliefs
- Attitudes
- Behaviour and coping mechanisms
- Choices

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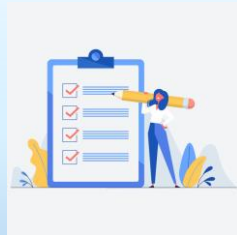
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## Codes

Possible types of codes for social workers and social service workers:

- Family
- Professional/Occupational
- Health care
- Leadership/Managerial



**Cumulate and intensify**

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## When codes become problems

- Similar codes combine and become overly intense
- Imbalance:
  - Situations that conflict with our codes
  - Non-code situations



Having very intense codes or repeatedly being "non-code" can be factors that lead to mental injury.

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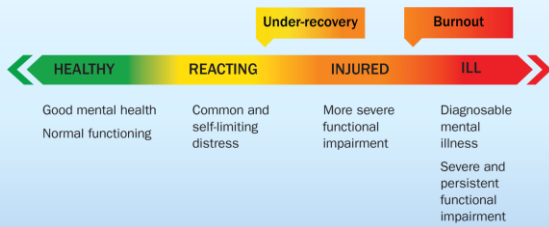
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## Mental Health Continuum Model



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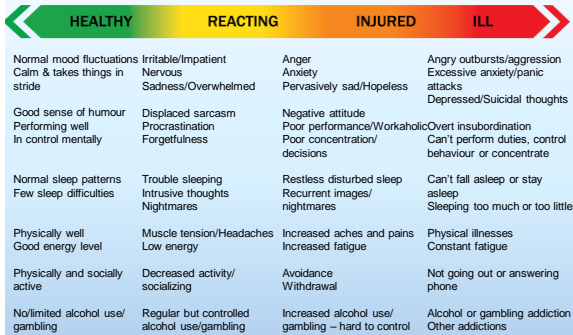
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## Mental Health Continuum Model



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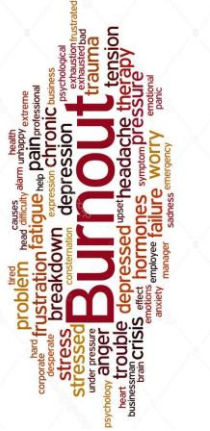
## Burnout

Burnout:

- prolonged exposure to stressors
- little recognition and support
  
- accumulation of fatigue
- distancing self from work
  - poor concentration or reduced attention
  - increased emotional reactions

The individual is no longer able or motivated to do their job optimally

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Burnout is more likely when we:

- Expect too much of ourselves
- Never feel that the work we are doing is good enough
- Feel inadequate or incompetent
- Feel unappreciated for our work efforts
- Have unreasonable demands placed upon us
- Are in roles that are not a good job fit

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## Compassion fatigue

In addition to mental health continuum signs, there can be:



**Changes with clients/patients** (signs of compassion fatigue)

- Avoiding certain types of clients/patients or resentment toward certain clients/patients
- Cancellation or postponement of appointments or strategies to limit the number of clinical hours on the agenda
- Being concerned about clients/patients outside of work
- Feeling cornered or a sense of powerlessness in the role of helper
- Exaggerated sense of responsibility
- Sense of futility or incompetence
- Reduced tolerance and empathy
- Change in work behaviour (e.g. barriers, tone, discourse)

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### Barriers to Care-Seeking

- Prefer to manage it ourselves
- Professional consequences
- Stigma
- Negative beliefs about treatment and treatment effectiveness
- Too busy/Scheduling issues
- Confidentiality
- Privacy, confidentiality, anonymity
- Role adjustment
- Threats to reputation
- Delaying treatment (down-playing symptoms, self-treatment)
- Stigma/Self-stigma
- Career consequences
- Competing priorities
- Past negative experiences (treatment)

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### Questions for self-reflection, self-care, and alignment of values

- How can I take care of myself so I can be of service to others?
- How can I strive for excellence and at the same time have compassion for myself when I don't have all the answers or I make a mistake?
- How can I offer my expertise in order to provide services to others and at the same time stay open to what my clients have to teach me about their own healing?
- How can I maintain an empathetic connection with my clients and at the same time protect myself?

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### Remember...

Performance is a whole-life skill and is supported by having many things that give your life meaning, not just your job.

Family, sports, hobbies and other interests can grow and enrich your life and make you more resilient to the negative effects of stress as well as all of these specific mental toughening techniques.




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