



## 26TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT COMMANDING OFFICER POLICY STATEMENT



### COMBAT AND OPERATIONAL STRESS CONTROL & SUICIDE PREVENTION

***INTENT: The 26 MEU Team will maximize force preservation and readiness through prevention, identification, and early intervention of combat and operational stress, whether deployed or in garrison. Through genuine, concerned leadership, we will maintain a climate where Marines and Sailors can seek assistance for stress without fear of stigma or reprisal.***

Stress is a natural reaction to perceived or actual threats. In fact, in the short-term, a certain degree of stress is beneficial to performance as it stimulates the body's 'fight or flight' response. However, overwhelming acute stress or chronic stress with no relief causes a severe degradation in performance and physical, psychological, and emotional health. Understanding stress reactions and addressing stressors increases mission readiness, preserves the force, and promotes the long-term health of our Marines and Sailors. The Combat and Operation Stress Control (COSC) five Core Leadership Functions and the timely interventions techniques form the foundation of the 26 MEU COSC and Suicide Prevention Program (SPP):

#### Core Leadership Functions (SMITR)

1. Strengthen. Leaders will use all existing tools for training and developing Marines to strengthen them mentally, physical, spiritually, and socially against the negative effects of combat and operational stress.
2. Mitigate. Risk mitigation also applies to stress. Many stressors can be avoided through planning. The impact of these stressors can be reduced, giving Marines a greater reserve to address the stressors that cannot be avoided.
3. Identify. Promptly identifying and addressing signs of stress in your Marines before they escalate is critical for leaders.
4. Treat. Treatment is about taking action. It begins with self-care and peer support. This may range from addressing personal issues while manageable, talking to a Marine about an upcoming event to share lessons learned, or may lead to referring a Marine for further help.
5. Reintegrate. Regardless of a Marine's treatment level, they will be assisted during the process and will be received into the unit completely and respectfully upon return.

#### Intervention Technique (RACE)

1. Recognize the signals. Be alert to changes in behavior and circumstance of our friends, family members, or fellow Marines that signal something is different in their lives—or is severely bothering them.
2. Ask the question. Directly asking the hard question of "Are you thinking of killing yourself" could be enough to allow the individual to open up and less likely to consider suicide.
3. Care with words and actions. No matter what the individuals says, do not judge. Even if the person is not thinking about suicide, he or she may be experiencing severe distress, and you'll need to offer help.
4. Escort. If a Marine, Sailor or family member expresses suicidal thoughts, you will stay with them until help arrives or you take them to help. Don't let them out of your sight.

The 26 MEU has Operation Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) and Tiger team to assist our capability to cope with stress and develop resilience; however, these teams cannot accomplish this task alone. Stress is inherent to our profession of arms; we will all be subject to it over the course of our high-tempo of operations. Look out for each other, and if you recognize a Teammate struggling with stress, get them the help they need.

  
J. B. REID  
COMMANDING OFFICER

  
C. R. TAYLOR  
SERGEANT MAJOR