

## PRESENTER'S GUIDE

- I. TITLE:** Resilient Transitions
- II. DATE:** September 2015
- III. PURPOSE:** To support a successful transition experience for military personnel and their families by introducing participants to “less obvious” topics such as transition stress, family considerations, the value of a mentor and other issues of concern. These issues may have a significant impact on the transition process if overlooked and need to be considered in the Individual Transition Plan.
- IV. TARGET POPULATION:** Presentation is appropriate for all personnel attending the Transition GPS program in preparation for transition from military to civilian life.
- V. TOPIC OBJECTIVES:** Upon completion of this topic participants will be able to :
- Describe personal symptoms of stress.
  - Identify ways to mitigate transition stress.
  - Identify common family concerns associated with transition.
  - Identify special areas of concern that may impact transition.
  - Identify resources available to address identified transition issues.
  - Identify the value of mentorship
- VI. PROCEDURES AND OVERVIEW:** This program is usually taught during day one of the Transition GPS program. Ideal format is lecture and discussion. The curriculum helps participants identify common symptoms of stress and recognize the very real impact they have on a successful transition if not acknowledged and managed effectively. It emphasizes the impact their transition from active duty to civilian life may have on family, friends, and loved ones and encourages open communication to address concerns, clarify expectations, and mitigate stress. Content acknowledges the reality that some events experienced while in military service may have a lasting impact on the service member and need to be addressed as part of the long term transition plan so they don't sabotage transition efforts. Content also acknowledges the importance of mentorship support to assist in completing a successful transition. The session closes with a review of resources available to support participants as they address identified issues.
- VII. PRESENTATION MATERIALS:** Materials required to support this program include:
- A. Chart paper or dry-erase board
  - B. Colored markers, dry erase or water color depending on medium used
  - C. Computer and projector or video monitor to support slide presentation
  - D. Power Point presentation “Resilient Transitions”

**VIII. OUTLINE:**

- A. Outside the Box: Managing the Intangibles
- B. Common factor-you
- C. If I ignore it, will it go away?
- D. Okay, so what is this "stress" thing?
- E. What am I supposed to do about it?
- F. How do I keep my head in the game?
- G. Anything else I can do?
- H. What were YOU thinking
- I. Do I really have to talk about it?
- J. What can the Family Support Center do to help?
- K. Anyone else?
- L. The value of mentorship in supporting a successful transition.
- M. Okay, let's wrap this up!

**IX. CONTENT:**

**A. Outside the Box: Managing the Intangibles** [Slide 1]

- 1. Introduce self
- 2. Relate experience with topic.

**B. Common factor – you!** [Slide 2]

- 1. When we think of transition, we focus a lot on resumes, job searches, interviews, moving, VA benefits, and tons of paperwork. This is all very important, and must be completed correctly. However, there are other more subtle aspects to transition which are often overlooked despite their potential to affect the transition process. For example, the effect of keeping up with all the tangible items is having on you and your family. The result of overlooking these issues? Subtle-self-sabotage. The value of having others working with you to support your transition.
- 2. There is one common denominator between your military life and your civilian life: You! How well you are functioning will influence how you think, how you act, and the success of your transition. With this in mind, it just makes sense to ensure we do a little preventive maintenance to ensure you can meet the demands of the transition process. Today we are going to spend about an hour talking about some of these issues so we can include them in our Individual Transition Plan (ITP) and manage them, so they don't manage us!

**C. If I ignore it, will it go away?****[Slide 3]**

1. Transition is change, period. Anytime you introduce change into your lifestyle, you induce stress. So, obviously, there will be plenty of stress to go around. The question is, with all the other stuff I have to worry about, do I need to add stress management to the list?
2. A common response in both the military and civilian culture is to ignore stress. Stress is like an elephant in the middle of the living room, we put a table cloth over it, add some pretty flowers and a vase, and call it a coffee table. Statements like “Never let them see you sweat”, or “Suck it up, butter cup” or even “1-800-WAAH!” all represent this attitude. When faced with all the challenges of transition, you may be tempted to just try to “suck it up” one more time. If I ignore the stress, won’t it just go away?
3. **ASK: *How many of you have ever done or said something when you were stressed out that you regretted later?*** Just because we ignore stress, doesn't mean it doesn't affect us, anymore than putting a table cloth on an elephant *makes* it a coffee table. All ignoring it does is to *ensure that we can't manage it...*so it ends up managing us!

**D. Okay, so what is this "stress" thing?****[Slide 4]**

1. Stress Defined
  - a. It is difficult to manage something that we don’t understand. Here are a few definitions to work with:
    - The process by which we respond to challenges to the body, mind, or spirit. (*Navy Center for Combat Operational Stress Control*)
    - The non-specific response of the body to demands placed on it. (*Hans Selye*)
  - b. Both definitions refer to a response to demands or challenges. Let’s take a minute to consider what this stress response looks like.
2. Stress Symptoms – All of these changes occur within seconds, and how long they last and their intensity depends on how serious or stressful you perceive the situation to be.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:** When discussing symptoms of stress, ask participants to identify physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms they experience when stressed out, use newsprint or white board to record responses. Should identify most of the following:

- a. Physical
  - Increased breathing rate
  - Increased heart rate
  - Increased blood pressure.
  - Muscle tension
  - Decreasing skin temperature in extremities
  - Release of “stress” hormones (adrenaline).
  - Headaches
  - Insomnia
  - Indigestion, heartburn, other digestive issues
  
- b. Cognitive
  - Poor problem solving
  - Poor attention/decisions
  - Poor concentration/memory
  - Increased/decreased awareness of surroundings
  - Negative self talk
    - “Why me?”
    - “Oh no...this is...”
    - “I can’t take this”
    - “Really?”
  
- c. Emotional
  - Anxious
  - Overwhelmed
  - Afraid
  - Uncertain
  - Angry
  - Isolated
  - Incompetent

- d. Behavioral
    - Lack of enthusiasm for children, family, work
    - Withdrawal from people/activities
    - Poor diet
    - Skip workouts
    - Change in sleeping patterns
    - All night video games/TV
    - Arguing, yelling, interpersonal conflicts
    - Increase use of tobacco, alcohol, and/or drugs
    - Aggressive movements/pacing
    - Throwing/breaking things
3. Bringing it home
- a. It's not a pretty picture, really. We are physically, emotionally and mentally uncomfortable, and our actions reflect it.  
**ASK: *Based on our discussion so far, why do you think stress management is important? Why do I need to manage my stress during this period?*** (Solicit ideas)
  - b. **ANSWER: *The interview!*** You need to be sharp, on your toes, able think quickly and represent yourself well. Show them that you are not only technically qualified, but also someone they would like to spend 40+ hours a week working with! Here is a novel idea; in the civilian world you actually get to ***choose who you work with!*** Let's revisit what you look like when you are stressed out? No sleep, not eating right, irritable, anxious, cursing, yelling, fidgeting, etc. Would you hire you if you came in like that? Of course not!
  - c. To be fair, stress gets a bad rap, it really isn't a bad thing. Here's the proof: Imagine what you would feel like if you came home at the end of the day, announced "Honey, I'm home!", and he or she responded, "So". Not exactly the response we are looking for.  
**ASK: *How many of you would like to think that your knowledge and expertise is considered a valuable asset by your peers and supervisors?***

Of course we do. However, note that anytime someone loves you, needs you, depends on you, respects you, or has any expectations of you... they are placing "demands" on you. In other words, we need to be under stress in order to be happy and fulfilled!

**ASK: *How many of you have ever had 3 weeks to do something, but waited until 3 hours before it's due to start it?***

Why? Because we work better under pressure! Stress can be an excellent motivator, too!

- d. Bottom line: Stress isn't bad, it's just something to be acknowledged and managed so it doesn't prevent us from being the person, parent, partner, and professional we need to be!

**E. What am I supposed to do about it?**

**[Slide 5]**

1. What to Do?

- a. Keep it simple; apply the same principles as you would if you were preparing your car for a long trip. Would you put water in the gas tank and expect it to run? No. Then don't put junk in your body, skip meals, drink heavy, live on energy drinks, etc. Rather, eat good food and drink plenty of water.
- b. Get rest, that's when your body repairs the damage done by the stress response. If you get no sleep then there is no repair. Unfortunately, this results in cumulative damage.
- c. Exercise: not an option! It releases endorphins, clears your head, and releases muscle tension.
- d. Maintain a schedule. Treat your job search like a job, put in the hours and the work. Don't, however, let it become your entire life. Obsessing over it will actually decrease your productivity. Build time for work, for play, for family time, and spiritual needs. Get up, get dressed, "go to work", then come home and take care of the rest of your life!
- e. Break things down into small chunks. You can't do it all at once, break it down into manageable chunks. Delegate if possible and acknowledge accomplishments.
- f. Let your friends be friends! Don't try to do this alone. How many of you can call someone and after talking for 10 minutes they just make you feel better about yourself and about life in general? **CALL THEM!** Let them help!

- g. Build stress management breaks into your daily routines. Stress management often gets a bad rap, too. People tend to think of stress management as sitting in a circle burning incense, singing “Kumbaya” and wearing yoga pants. No thanks!  
**ASK: *What are some things you have practiced over the years that give you a little break and help you relax?***
- Answers may include: Drinking coffee on the porch, playing with kids, petting the dog, taking a motorcycle ride, working on an art project, listening to music, reading, writing, talking to friends.
  - Most of us already have a long list of things we find relaxing...the trick is to make them a priority and build them into our daily routine! Stress is a unique experience, so your stress management plan can be tailored to your needs.
- h. Acknowledge and accept your feelings. Expect to feel grief and loss as part of this process. The military was a big part of your life for a long time. Even if you are excited about getting out, you can expect to miss some aspects of the service such as the variety of assignments, camaraderie, sense of purpose, travel, steady income, benefits, pride, etc. An example:  
A service member who had been out about 2 months suddenly felt a weird empty sensation after watching a news cast that was honoring our military personnel. Reason? It suddenly dawned on him that they weren’t talking about him anymore. He used to be in uniform, now he wasn’t. It wasn’t a huge crisis, just an awakening that things were different now.
- i. Monitor who you spend time with. When you are under stress, it is important to surround yourself with folks who are positive and motivating. Beware of the “Chicken-Little’s” in your life who perceive that “The sky is falling!” at every opportunity.

**F. How Do I Keep My Head in the Game?**

**[Slide 6]**

1. ABC Theory of Emotional Arousal (Albert Ellis)
  - a. How we react to a situation may increase our stress or reduce it. What we often overlook is that we make that choice. We have control over our reaction. This idea is the basis of the ABC Theory of Emotional Arousal.

- b.  $A + B = C$  defined
- “A” is the **activating event**, the stressor or the situation, in this case, transition. It is neutral, neither good nor bad.
  - “B” is our **beliefs** or "self-talk" about that stressor.
  - “C” is the resulting **consequence** of the event plus our thoughts or beliefs about it. In this case, the frequency, intensity, and length of time we spend stressed over transition!
- c. Note: As with any mathematical equation, you cannot go from A to C. C is not the result of A alone. You cannot get to C without “going through” B. Often we experience B so automatically that we aren’t even aware of it, but it does occur and has a significant impact on our response. If you want to change a response or consequence, change the beliefs or self-talk and you can generate a different outcome.
- d. Here's some good news.

**ASK: *Who controls what you think?***

**ANSWER: *You do!***

This is the one aspect of transition that you have complete control over. Fortunately, it is a significant factor in determining how stressful the process is.

2. Plus one exercise (Optional). This is a simple but effective way to show participants how ABC theory works. On white board or newsprint, draw 2 columns.
- a. Place a (-) over one column.

**ASK: *What are the aspects of transition that are keeping you up at night? What are you worrying about?***

List answers in the (-) column. Answers may include: unemployment, relocation, financial concerns, kids, and doubts about ability to get a job. Read back list to class in a negative, defeated tone, "So, you're going to be broke, homeless, unemployed, hurt the kids, lonely..."

**ASK: *What's the energy in the room like right now? Are you feeling excited and motivated? Depressed? Bummed?*** Responses should indicate they are not terribly excited, might even tell facilitator they are stressing them out.

- b. Place a (+) over the other column.  
**ASK: *Okay, what are all the good things about getting out of the military?***

List answers in the (+) column. Answers may include No duty, more freedom, can quit, no chits, can be an individual, no deployments, can make more money, live where I want, more family time, etc.

Collect at least one more positive response than you had negative responses in the other column. Read them back in a positive uplifting tone.

**ASK: *What's the energy in the room like now? Feeling a little more motivated?***

Explain to participants that this mood shift is an example of the ABC theory at work. When we focus on the negative aspects of a situation, we tend to get a more negative, stressful response. By shifting focus to more positive elements, we get a more positive response. Encourage them to use this exercise whenever they are feeling overwhelmed or stressed. Write down the things that are bothering them (take the tablecloth off of the elephant) and acknowledge them. Then think about the positives that are also present in an effort to regain a more manageable, balanced perspective of the situation.

#### **G. Anything else I can do?**

**[Slide 7]**

1. I want to share with you 5 concepts that you can apply to each aspect of your ITP in order to mitigate the stress as much as possible for you and those you care about. The concepts are Predictability, Control, Relationships, Trust, and Meaning. You might want to write these down on your ITP in the margin. These are referred to officially as The Principles of Resilience, but for our purposes, let's just call them confidence boosters! Basically, when these are present, stress is lower and confidence is higher. Let me explain:

- a. **Predictability:** Stress is lower when we can predict the outcome, higher when we don't know what to expect. How do we develop predictability about new situations? Education, mentorship, experience, consistency, communication. Get the necessary information so we can make the unknown known.
- b. **Controllability:** When we feel like we have no control, stress is high, when we identify areas we do control, even if it is only in how we respond, confidence increases. For example, we are trained to fight shipboard fires, we have emergency response plans for hurricanes and allow a child pick which stuffed animal he or she bring to the shelter. Each aspect adds a small dimension of control to a situation that appeared uncontrollable. Your attendance in these classes will help develop predictability and identify areas of control for transition. Give control when you can, clarify what you do and don't control, and develop preplanned responses.
- c. **Relationships:** When faced with stressful events, knowing someone has our back can make all the difference. Any opportunity to improve relationships throughout the transition process needs taken advantage of. Thus, the recommendation to maintain balance, communicate openly, and support each other through the emotional ups and downs of transition is crucial to the success of the process. A positive relationship with mentors career counselors, and other professionals can also keep your stress down and confidence high.
- d. **Trust:** Knowing that we can trust the people or organizations we are working with to have our best interest at heart can be a real stress reliever and confidence booster. This can be fostered by being predictable and consistent in relationships. Also, by researching your prospective employers, and working closely with career management professionals you can see who really is on the same page with you and your values, beliefs, and goals.
- e. **Meaning:** When we believe that what we are doing is meaningful and has purpose, it makes it easier to work through the challenges! Stay in touch with the big picture, share your vision, and validate roles and accomplishments of family, friends, mentors, and yourself. Remind yourself why you are doing this in the first place.

2. As you go through the rest of the program, look for opportunities to build these confidence boosters into you ITP. Ask yourself, “What can I do to help myself set realistic expectations, identify areas of control, develop appropriate responses and improve relationships along the way? How can I involve my family and let them feel some sense of control and feel like a meaningful part of the process? What opportunities are present to help me improve my personal and professional relationships? Are there training workshops, counseling opportunities, research sites, mentors, or job fairs that I can use?”

**H. What were YOU thinking?**

**[Slide 8]**

1. We need to consider how transition effects more than ourselves. How many of you have a family? Describe your family. Would it be fair to say that the military has influenced the relationship you have with your family? Do you think they are going through a transition as well? Are they being included in the transition planning and education process? Do they feel left out/forgotten in all this? Are they supposed to just “suck it up” one more time?
  - a. Do you think they may have expectations about what you “getting out” is going to mean? Might there be differences between what they expect and what you expect? Could there be some Fantasy thinking going on? For example, your spouse might be thinking, “We’ll be together all the time now.” or “No more moves, no more stress, and civilian pay will be so much better.” Parents and siblings might be thinking; “He or she will be able to come to all family events, or can move back home and help on the farm, or help with elderly relatives.”
  - b. Consider some questions about change that you or your partner might be thinking about: What are their hopes, dreams and fears? What changes can they expect to experience now that you are out? Benefits? Loss of their military identity and privileges? Leave and vacation? Time apart? Rules and responsibilities shifts? How will the family structure, roles, rules and responsibilities be affected? What about your spouse’s career? Is it their turn to be priority #1 now? Are you staying in the area, or moving back home? Whose home? Are you going where the jobs are? Who will be the primary breadwinner in the household? What changes are in going to be necessary in the family budget during transition? Afterward? What gets cut? Kids activities? Clubs? Gym memberships? How are these decisions being made?

- c. Remember, our families are made of people! Are there symptoms of stress? Kids acting out? School problems? Illnesses? Fear? They will have responses in the same way we will, but because the responses are non-specific, it will look different from person to person.
2. It sounds pretty overwhelming, so many questions with no immediate answers!

**ASK: *What do you think you can do to begin to deal with these issues and manage them effectively?***

**ANSWER: *Communicate!*** Open the line of communication with your family, immediate and extended, spiritual leaders, teachers, and other community support agencies.

- a. Share concerns, expectations, fears, and opportunities.
- b. Engage them in the planning process.
- c. Include them in educational opportunities. Invite them to training and classes, share handouts and notes with them, explore resource websites together, and delegate transition tasks so everyone feels they are a contributor.
- d. Acknowledge the challenges your transition presents to them, too. Look for signs and symptoms of stress. Discuss them openly and patiently. You are all making adjustments, so mistakes can and will happen. Reassure them that these are normal experiences associated with transition.
- e. If they are not comfortable discussing issues with you (afraid to add to your stress?), encourage them to talk to friends, family, or professionals who can answer their questions and relieve their concerns.
- f. Seek assistance from the Family Support Center, Military One Source, the VA, National Resource Directory, other local support agencies if things seem to be getting out of hand.
- g. Practice reframing using the “Plus 1” exercise practiced earlier to keep things in perspective.

3. Note: Ensure your conversations are constructive and inclusive; avoid "Dumping" on each other. "Venting" should be reserved for a friend, counselor, or mentor who is not as emotionally invested. If you have trouble in this aspect, consider attending a communication course individually or together. You may also choose to make an appointment to work with a counselor regarding specific transition issues that affect the family.

**I. Do I really have to talk about it?**

**[Slide 9]**

1. Quick question: How many of you in this room will be veterans when you get out? Seems like a silly question, but some studies indicate that female service members often do not view themselves as veterans, and as a result, don't avail themselves of their benefits. So, just wanted to make sure everyone here knows that they ARE VETERANS. You served, you earned it!
2. While on the subject, another consideration for female veterans is the culture change of leaving a very "male-oriented" work environment where the way orders are given, tone of conversation, and even sense of humor can be very different than in the civilian workplace. Some female veterans expressed difficulty fitting in and relating with their co-workers because they came across as being too aggressive and direct. This can be said for both male and female veterans, but seemed to bother female veterans a little more. It may be necessary to observe your new coworkers in your new work environment to see how they do business, and then make adjustments based on your observations. It is okay to ask questions regarding the appropriate way to get things done in your new work environment. Asking about protocol actually shows an interest in doing things their way.
3. As you know, there are some events from our past that may have had an impact on our ability to adjust to and/or perform effectively in the military. We may have needed extra support, mentorship, counseling, or training to make the necessary adjustments. The same applies to military service. Sometimes we experience things while in uniform that may make transition more challenging.
4. **ASK: *What are some experiences that may affect or "stay with us" after we transition out of the military?*** Answers may include combat experiences, TBI, PTSD, medical injuries, sexual assault or harassment, substance abuse, or domestic violence.
  - a. Managing the needs of a special needs child can be intimidating in the absence of the military support system.

- b. You might miss the excitement and variety of assignments; feel bored, as if your life lacks meaning.
- c. The circumstances of your transition (ERB, PTS, etc.) can affect your mindset regarding transition.

These can all affect confidence by impeding your ability to establish predictability, controllability, relationships, trust, and meaning in your life.

- 5. The reality is that these experiences are real, they do occur, and they do impact those who were affected. The other reality is that, with appropriate help and support, we can move past them effectively, and there is plenty of help out there! In no way would I ask you, in a classroom forum, to discuss these issues. However, I do want to emphasize the importance of acknowledging these issues, ensuring they are documented appropriately in your medical records if appropriate, and addressing them as part of your Individual Transition Plan. Ignoring them can derail your best efforts.
- 6. Know where your local Family Support Center is located. If relevant to you or your family members, give them a call and set up a counseling session to discuss you options, resources, and support in a more confidential private setting. If you would rather use another agency, the Family Support Center can help identify alternate resources. The important thing is that you recognize that these issues are a part of who you are and need to be addressed as part of your individual transition plan.

**J. What can the Family Support Center do to help?**

**[Slide 10]**

- 1. Provides a wide variety of Life Skills training programs including stress management, anger management, communication workshops, conflict management, and relationship building programs.
- 2. Counseling services are available for individuals, couples, families, and children. Counselors also facilitate support groups addressing a variety of issues.
- 3. Financial Education programs provide education and financial counseling for all levels from basic money and credit management to home buying and retirement savings and investments.
- 4. Sexual Assault Prevention and Response professionals and Family Advocacy Program professionals provide education, advocacy, and referral services for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

5. Career Development and Resource Center professionals provide training on resume writing, federal employment, job search strategies, interview techniques, and all aspects of finding employment for military personnel and their spouses.
6. Parenting Classes cover a wide range of topics to assist parents in understanding the challenges associated with parenting in a military environment, the effects of military life on children, and strategies to help parents manage them effectively.
7. Information and referral specialists can assist with identifying alternative resources for just about any situation identified by the client. If FSC doesn't have it, they can help find someone who does.

**K. Anyone Else?**

**[Slide 11]**

1. Military One Source
2. Chaplain
3. Base Legal
4. Veterans Administration
5. Medical Treatment Facilities
6. Military Family Network
7. National Resource Directory

*Note: Facilitator can mention any resources relevant to the participants in the local area.*

But there are others who can help you succeed as you transition from military service...Anyone know what a mentor is and how they can assist?

**L. Value of a Mentor**

**[Slide 12]**

1. Mentorship is nothing new to today's Service member. They have connected with mentors...someone they can trust for guidance and feedback... to gain advice on preparing for promotions, preparing for deployments, and learning the ropes of a new position or career field. Ask a Service member for the name of someone who has been influential in their military career, and in many instances it will be a person who provided guidance and advice on what it takes to advance or to be a successful military member. Unfortunately, members may not see the value of a mentor as they separate from the military.
2. Mentorship refers to a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or knowledgeable person helps guide a less experienced or knowledgeable person. However, true mentoring is more than just answering occasional questions or providing ad hoc help. It is about an ongoing relationship of learning, dialog, and challenge.

- a. The dictionary definition is a wise and trusted counselor or teacher or an influential senior sponsor or supporter.
- b. A mentor is that one person to help you and nurture your career. Mentors are willing to share ideas, skills, knowledge, and expertise. **[Slide 13]**
- c. A mentor demonstrates a positive attitude, acts as a role model, and takes a personal interest in the mentoring relationship.
- d. A mentor can help you establish goals and planning priorities.

3. The facilitator should ask the group: When might you need a mentor? **[Slide 14]**

Answer: When transitioning from the military, searching for employment, identifying colleges or universities to support educational goals, starting a business, starting a new job, etc.

- a. A mentor can be valuable not only in your job search and professional growth, but also in helping you transition to civilian life and workplace cultures.
- b. Just as a sponsor helps you to become acquainted to a new post or base, a mentor can help you adapt to your new life and career.
- c. You are not limited to just one mentor – you might need different mentors during different phases of your transition.

4. Characteristics to look for in a good mentor: **[Slide 15]**
  - Willing to share their knowledge
  - Flexible
  - Demonstrate competency in the subject matter and the task
  - Encourage and support personal growth
  - Direct in dealing with situations and people
  - Honest when providing positive and constructive feedback.
  - Understand the parameters and requirements of the relationship

5. Successful mentor relationships develop from honest communication. Building such relationships requires trust which can be created by establishing rapport, getting to know him/her, identifying his/her past experiences, and helping him/her to understand the importance of each of your roles and transition goals.

**M. Okay, let's wrap this up!** **[Slide 16]**

1. Stress is a normal part of the transition process, manage it or it will manage you.
2. Your “family” is transitioning and needs to be kept in the loop!

3. Traumatic events, emotional injuries, and physical injuries are part of the military experience. Don't ignore them.
4. There are abundant resources available to support both you and your loved ones through the entire process. Use those resources early and often. Remember, ***YOU ARE NOT ALONE!***