Guide to Coping with Deployment and Combat Stress

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>>>>>[Know the signs of combat and operational stress and how to manage the reactions.]

Combat & Operational Stress Reactions (COSR)

Combat is more stressful than any training. The enemy will try to stress and confuse you. Security and support operations can also involve heavy stress, even without combat. Mental and physical fitness will help you endure the stress of combat and military operations. Know the signs of combat and operational stress and how to manage the reactions.

Individual Preventive Actions to Combat Stress

- Try to stay calm and in control
- Focus on the mission
- Follow SOPs
- Focus on success
- Breathe deeply and relax
- Know COSRs are normal
- Keep open communication with your team
- Gather facts
- Avoid rumors
- Avoid alcohol
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Eat well balanced meals
- Maintain personal hygiene
- Practice quick relaxation techniques
- Sleep at least 7-8 hours in each 24 hours, if possible
- Debrief after unusually stressful events
- Share grief with a friend, a leader, or a chaplain

- Keep active
- Welcome new team members
- Stay physically fit
- Know and practice self aid/battle buddy aid
- Support each other
- See the example of an ethical, moral soldier

Leaders Preventive Actions to Combat Stress

- Be decisive and assertive; demonstrate competence and fair leadership.
- Preserve Soldier's welfare, safety, and health.
- Enforce sleep discipline.
- Be aware of environmental stressors such as light level, temperature, and precipitation.
- Learn the signs of stress in yourself and others.
- Recognize that fear is a normal part of combat stress.
- Rest minor stress casualties briefly, keeping them with their unit.
- Help Soldiers to address any Family concerns and/or separation, economic problems.
- Provide an upward, downward, and lateral information flow of communication.
- Allow open communication with Soldiers.
- Understand that stress in response to threatening or uncertain situations is normal.
- Create a spirit to win under stress.
- Conduct tough, realistic training.
- Ensure training includes understanding of combat and operational stress and how to deal with it.

- Look for stress signs and a decreased ability to tolerate stress.
- Practice and master stress-coping techniques.
- Ensure the best possible shelters are available.
- Keep Soldiers well supplied with food, water, and other essentials.
- Provide mail, news, and information avenues.
- Provide the best medical, logistical, and other support available.
- Maintain high morale, unit identity, and esprit de corps.
- Keep unit members together and build cohesion.
- Encourage experienced unit members to mentor and teach new members.

Common Combat & Operational Stress Reaction (COSR)			
Physical		Emotional	
Tension:	aches, pains	Anxiety:	keyed up, worrying, expecting the worst
Jumpiness:	easily startled, fidgety, trembling	Irritability:	complaining, easily bothered
Cold sweats:	dry mouth, pale skin, eyes hard to focus	Attention:	poor; unable to focus or remember details

Common Combat & Operational Stress Reaction (COSR)			
Heart:	pounding; may feel dizzy or light-headed	Thinking:	unclear; trouble communi-cating
Breathing:	rapid; out-of-breath; fingers and toes start to tingle, cramp and go numb	Sleep:	troubled; awakened by bad dreams
Stomach:	upset: may vomit	Grief:	crying for dead or wounded
Bowels:	diarrhea or constipation	Guilt:	self-blame for errors or what had to be done
Bladder:	frequent urination, urgency	Anger:	feeling let down by leaders or others in unit
Energy:	tired, drained; takes effort to move	Confidence:	low; loss of faith in self and unit
Eyes:	distant, haunted “1000-yard” stare		

Combat & Operational Stress Behaviors	
Adaptive Stress Reaction	Misconduct Stress Behaviors and Criminal Acts
• Unit cohesion • Loyalty to battle buddies and Leaders • Identification with unit tradition • Sense of uniqueness • Sense of mission and purpose • Alertness, vigilance • Strength, endurance • Tolerance to hardship • Ignoring pain or injury • Increased faith, confidence • Courage, heroic acts	• Mutilating enemy dead • Killing enemy prisoners • Killing noncombatants • Torture, brutality • Killing animals • Fighting with allies • Alcohol and drug abuse • Recklessness, indiscipline • Looting, pillage, rape • Fraternization • Excessive sick call • Negligent disease, injury • Shirking, malingering • Combat refusal • Self-inflicted wounds • Threatening/killing own leaders(“Fragging”) • Going absent without leave, desertion

Management of Combat & Operational Stress Behaviors

COSRs are inevitable but COSR casualties are not. Good leadership counts. COSR casualties can be restored to duty quickly if rested close to their units and treated positively.

Keep with battle buddies

Symptoms: any amount or type of combat operational stress reaction symptoms that does not endanger the Soldier or others or interfere with the current mission

Actions: reassure of being normal, rest, clean up, feed, sleep, and keep on duty with battle buddies

Rest in parent or support unit

Symptoms: warning signs that indicate the Soldier is not too much of a risk or burden to stay with his or her own battle buddies

1. Section can provide safe, stable environment for recovery
2. Soldier is not disruptive or dangerous
3. No urgent medical evaluation is needed

Actions: assign less critical duty in safer areas for 6-36 hours of rest and work

Take to aid station or medical company

Symptoms: warning signs

1. Soldier is disruptive or potentially dangerous to self, others or the mission
2. Soldier could need urgent medical treatment for illness or injury
3. Warning signs do not improve

Actions:

1. Take to aid station or medical treatment facility
2. Maintain contact or visit Solider if not returned in hours
3. Welcome Soldier back into Unit upon return (65-85% return to original Unit in 1-3 days; 15-20% to limited duty in 1-2 weeks)

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>>>>>[The day-to-day stress that comes with stability and support operations (SASOs) can, at worst, be as bad as that of major combat.]

Coping with Stress in Stability and Support Operations

The day-to-day stress that comes with stability and support operations (SASOs) can, at worst, be as bad as that of major combat. The danger may be as high, the mission less clear, some civilians hostile, and stricter rules of engagement. Threats are hard to recognize. Steady progress is difficult to see. There is boredom, no privacy, restricted movement, and separation from home with poor communication. Under these conditions, anyone can begin to show signs of distress, and knowing how you can help yourself and your battle buddy is important.

Learn effective relaxation techniques:

- play cards or sports
- write a letter or keep a diary
- take slow, deep breaths
- talk with friends
- read a book
- imagine a favorite place

Relaxation techniques can help you refocus in action, recharge you after grueling or boring work, and can help you get to sleep. Request training on relaxation techniques from mental health or combat stress control teams and unit ministry teams in your area.

What to do for yourself:

- Remind yourself that the way you are feeling is normal given the situation;
- Make certain that you get enough sleep, food, water, and exercise – if you are physically stressed, your ability to deal with the day-to-day SASO stressors is reduced;

- Focus on the mission at hand – break down objectives into smaller tasks and reward yourself with rest breaks after each task is accomplished;
- Stay tied in with battle buddies in your unit;
- Maintain contact with friends and Family at home whenever you can – if something at home is bothering you, talk about it with your battle buddies, your leaders, or anyone else you trust;
- If things start to feel out of control, contact with your unit sergeant, chaplain, medic, or commander immediately.

What to do for your battle buddies:

- Know the members of your team and welcome newcomers when they arrive—help them learn skills they need;
- Be on the lookout for sudden changes in how your battle buddies act – if you see such a change, ask them about it;
- Include your battle buddies and newcomers in opportunities to relax;
- Offer encouragement and recognition when your battle buddies do something well;
- If you’re concerned for your battle buddies, talk to them about how they’re doing;
- If you think that your battle buddy may be having a really hard time and won’t talk to you, contact your supervisor and let them know about your concern.

What to do for your subordinates:

- Keep your team informed of new developments as they come up but be careful not to pass on rumors – say you don't know and will tell them when you do.
- Be on the lookout for changes in behavior or performance and act to address issues before they become problems.
- Organize team events to help your Soldiers relax and have some fun; give them some private time when you can.
- Check in with team members on how they're handling the deployment and how things are going back home;
- Assure they get a fair share of MWR communication.
- Talk with any Soldier you are concerned about and listen to them;
- Conduct sensing sessions as frequently as possible, and make sure Soldiers' feelings are expressed and heard;
- Refer Soldiers to unit chaplains, mental health or combat stress control (CSC) team assets for help if they need it.

>>>>>[If you see a battle buddy upset, fuming or brooding alone, you can help your battle buddy]

OIF/OEF TIPS

Providing Support to Soldiers in Distress: Battle Buddy Aid

In Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, any Soldier can run into rough times. Examples of difficult situations include: seeing destroyed homes; dead bodies; hostile reactions from civilians; being ambushed; small arms fire; IEDs; knowing someone is seriously injured or killed; long deployments; lack of privacy and personal space; separation from Family; difficult communication back home.

The fact is that all of us can sometimes feel down, hurt, or angry. **If you see a battle buddy upset, fuming or brooding alone, you can help your battle buddy** through what may be a painful and sometimes risky time. Emotionally distracted Soldiers can endanger the mission, the unit, and themselves. **Often**, just talking, listening, and focusing on their strengths is all that a battle buddy needs to find their own answers. Try the following suggestions:

1. **Be a good friend, talk with your battle buddy and find out what's wrong. Listen and be understanding. Be compassionate.** For example, say, "Something seems to be bothering you. How can I help? I can listen without being upset."
2. **Listen and encourage** your battle buddy to talk about what is bothering him or her. **Listen** not merely to the words, but the **feeling** content. **Stay calm and objective.** Maintain vigilance.

3. **Don't criticize or argue with the Soldier's ideas and feelings.** Encourage your battle buddy to continue to tell you what's wrong. **Allow time for your battle buddy to find words.**
4. **Acknowledge your battle buddy's grievances** against others, but don't make it worse by agreeing too strongly.
5. **Ask questions to understand** the problem and the feelings. If the talking stalls, **summarize what has been said** and ask if you have it right.
6. **Don't give a lot of advice.** It is okay to plant the seeds of new ideas but don't drive them in with a hammer. Remember you don't need to have all the answers for the Soldier's problems.
7. **Praise your battle buddy** for the work he/she has been doing under such difficult circumstances and for talking with you.

If your battle buddy gives any hints or clues of thinking about suicide, or seriously harming or killing someone else, remember your Suicide Prevention Training!

Signs of Suicide: Soldiers will show a wide range of behaviors/emotions, it is up to you to recognize the behaviors that are different. Be aware of Soldiers who suddenly become quiet and show significant change of behavior. Other signs to watch for:

- **Recent break-up in a relationship**
- Excessive use of **alcohol or drugs**
- **Significant financial problems**

- **Poor work performance**
- **Recent administrative or legal action**
- **Appears depressed: sad, tearful, poor sleep, poor appetite, hopeless**
- **Threatens suicide**
- **Talks about wanting to die**
- **Deliberately injures self**
- **Gives away possessions.**

What to do if you're concerned about suicide

Follow the acronym ACE.

"**A**sk" your battle buddy: Ask your battle buddy questions that will give you a better idea of what he/she is thinking. Ask your battle buddy directly about his or her suicidal thoughts. Such as: "**Are you thinking about killing yourself or someone else?**" I see how distressed you are. Do you wish you were dead?" Have you thought of how you would kill yourself?"

- Know the **warning signs** you might see in yourself or battle buddy if he or she is suicidal.
- Look for any outward sign that shows a deviation from your battle buddy's usual self.
- **Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen and allow your battle buddy to express his or her feelings.**

"**C**are" for your battle buddy: Care for your battle buddy by understanding that your battle buddy may be in pain.

- Active listening may produce relief. Calmly control the situation: do not use force.
- Take action by removing any lethal means, such as weapons or pills. **If your battle buddy is armed**, say, “Let me unload your weapon and keep it safe for you while we talk.”

“**E**scort” your battle buddy: Escort your battle buddy immediately to your chain of command, Chaplain, or behavioral health professional.

- **After your battle buddy has talked as much as he or she wants, say**, “I need to get you help for this. People here can help you.”
- Don’t keep your battle buddy’s suicidal behavior a secret.
- Adopting an attitude that you are going to help your battle buddy will save his or her life.
- Stay with your battle buddy until he or she receives appropriate help. Don’t leave your battle buddy alone.

In OIF/OEF, the Army has fielded additional helpers for Soldiers with such problems. Beyond the **immediate sergeant and officer leaders**, you can encourage the Soldier to talk about problems with the following:

- **Unit Medic**
- **A Chaplain** or chaplain assistant
- **BN Aid Station or medical companies’ medical care providers. These resources** and the Chaplain should know where the Mental Health helpers are and how to contact them.

- **Mental Health officers, NCOs, and Specialists at the medical companies or in Combat Stress Control teams** in your area.

Get help immediately! A suicidal person needs immediate attention.

For more information access:
https:// www.militaryonesource.com

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273 TALK (8255)

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>>>>>[Emotionally distracted Soldiers can endanger the mission, the unit and themselves.]

OIF/OEF TIPS: Helping a Soldier in Distress

Leader's Hip Pocket Training Guide

In Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, any Soldier can run into rough times. It could be any combination of:

- Seeing destroyed homes, dead bodies, human remains;
- Hostile reactions from civilians;
- Being ambushed, receiving small arms fire, improvised explosive devices;
- Knowing or seeing someone killed or seriously injured; having close calls;
- Long deployments; lack of privacy and personal space;
- Separation from Family, difficulty communicating with Family members at home.

All of us can feel badly at times. **If you see a fellow Soldier who is upset, fuming or brooding alone, you can help him or her** through a painful and sometimes risky time. **Emotionally distracted Soldiers can endanger the mission, the unit and themselves. Often, just talking to a friend** (or leader) who listens, tries to understand, and praises their strengths, **is all people need to find their own answers.** The following can be useful ways for a Soldier to help a battle buddy:

1. **Be a good friend**. For example, say, "Something seems to be bothering you. How can I help? I can listen without being upset."

2. **Listen attentively** and encourage him or her to continue telling you what's wrong. **Stay calm and objective**. **Don't criticize or argue** with the Soldier's thoughts and feelings, but listen and allow silent time for him/her to find words.
3. **Acknowledge the Soldier's grievances** against others, **but don't amplify them** by agreeing with them too strongly.
4. **Ask questions to help you understand** the problem and the feelings. **If the talking stalls, try to summarize what has been said** and ask if you have it right.
5. **Delay offering different perspectives or practical advice until** you believe your Soldier knows that **you really know the situation** and understand why he/she is upset**.**
6. **Plant the seeds of new ideas**.
7. **Praise the soldier** for the work he/she has been doing under such difficult circumstances and for talking with you.

Sometimes the problems are too big to resolve after one talk or without additional outside help. Remember the Army deploys additional help for Soldiers with such problems. Help for Soldiers, beyond **yourself and other military leaders** includes:

- **Unit Ministry Teams** in the maneuver battalion, brigade HQs, hospitals, and area support in Corps areas and Kuwait.

- The **primary medical providers** in battalion aid stations and medical companies should know where these helpers are and how to contact them, as well as being helpers, too.
- **Mental Health Officers, NCOs, and Specialists** at the brigade, division and area support medical companies.
- Mental Health officers and enlisted in **Combat Stress Control teams** that cover those areas and can come forward to battalions and companies.

If the Soldier seems preoccupied with death, hints at having thoughts of suicide, or makes threats toward others, remember your Suicide Prevention Training!

- **Say something like,** "I can see that you feel distressed." "Have you thought of hurting yourself or someone else?" or, "Do you wish you were dead?"
- Then "Have you thought of how you could kill yourself?" (or whomever);
- **Don't act shocked** or alarmed! Encourage the Soldier to talk using the techniques on this card.
- **If the Soldier is armed**, say, "Let me unload your weapon and keep it safe for you while we talk."
- **After the Soldier has talked** as much as he or she wants, say, **"I need to get you help for this. There are people nearby who can help you."**
- Don't leave this person alone. Secure any weapons. Immediately take the Soldier to your chain of command, chaplain, or to medical care.

>>>>>[Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom can be an emotionally difficult time for all Family members]

OIF/OEF Tips - Coping with Deployment Separation Tips

Separation from a loved one who is deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom can be an emotionally difficult time for all Family members. Symptoms resulting from separation can include low energy levels, feelings of sadness, anger, excitement, restlessness, tension, frustration, resentment, and depression. Additionally, there are many challenges for military Families to overcome during deployments. It is important to recognize, understand, and face these challenges in order to effectively cope with the separation during deployment:

Avoid the pitfalls that are often associated with deployments:

- Realize that arguments prior to deployment are common. Generally, this is the result of stress due to upcoming separation. Try not to take them too seriously.
- Discuss family concerns such as child rearing, financial management, or intimacy issues prior to deployment. Attempting to resolve disagreements around family concerns from long distance will not be effective.
- Avoid trying to resolve marital issues that precede deployments. This is very difficult over long distance and is best left until the Soldier returns home.

- Understand that dates of departure and return often “slip” forwards and backwards.
- Avoid listening to or spreading rumors. It is best not to repeat the rumor. Because of rapid communication, rumors can spread unchecked causing great psychological harm to Soldiers and Family members. An example of a rumor is one Family Readiness Group (FRG) member spreading allegations of infidelity about another group member. Such rumors cause harm to Soldiers, Family members, FRGs, and unit cohesion.
- It is important to accept change and growth by all Family members. It is unrealistic to be reunited and expect everything to be the same as before the deployment.

Some general tips to help the spouse/Family cope while the Soldier is deployed:

- If disagreements arise, leave the issue until you are face-to-face with your spouse.
- Establishing and maintaining a support network helps the Family cope.
- Include breaks in the daily routine. This may include weekly get-togethers with other Family members and monthly outings for the children to a favorite park, restaurant, picnic, etc.
- The parent at home will need time away from the children. A regular “Mommy’s or Daddy’s day out” is important to maintain sanity.

- Encourage all Family members to share feelings, reassure your partner of your love and commitment, and try to see the deployment as a challenging opportunity for growth.
- Communication is important between the Soldier and Family member. Use all available avenues of communication (e.g., telephone calls, e-mails, letters, etc.). It is important to keep in touch; however, try to end phone conversations and letters on a positive note.

Some general tips for caregivers to help children cope while the Soldier (parent) is deployed:

- Be honest with children about Daddy's or Mommy's deployment. Share information about the Soldier's work and what the parent is doing for our country. Answer questions openly and honestly using words your children can understand.
- Give children a method of measuring the passage of time. Provide a calendar to help your child count the days the parent has been deployed.
- Make sure your spouse's parents are kept informed. The Soldier's parents share your concerns about the health and welfare of their deployed son or daughter. Grandparents and spouse can support each other during the deployment.

- Continue to provide a structured, stable and safe environment for your children. Children require reassurance that they are loved, cared for, and safe while the other parent is away.
- Make sure the deployed parent is part of everyday conversations.
- Help your children sort out what they hear and see in news reports. Find out what your children know and understand and talk with them about their feelings. Follow your child's lead. Give a small piece of information at a time and see how your child responds before deciding what to do next.
- Provide your children with a method to communicate to the deployed parent i.e., letter writing or e-mail access.
- Try to maintain Family routines and traditions during the other parent's absence.
- Keep children involved with outside activities and maintain constant communication with schools.

>>>>>[For more information access: https:// www.militaryonesource.com]

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
1-800-273 TALK (8255)

>>>>>[To sustain performance over the long haul, you and your Soldiers need 7-8 hours of sleep out of every 24.]

Sleep Management and Soldier Readiness

A Guide for Leaders and Soldiers

Like food, water, and air—sleep is a necessity. When we don't get enough sleep, our performance suffers, and we put both ourselves and our fellow Soldiers at risk. We react slower, it's harder to stay focused, it's harder to think, and we get stressed more easily. We make more mistakes and make poor decisions and judgments. To make matters worse, the effects of sleep deprivation sneak up on us. In other words, when we don't have enough sleep, we are not good judges of the impact that sleep deprivation is having on our abilities and performance.

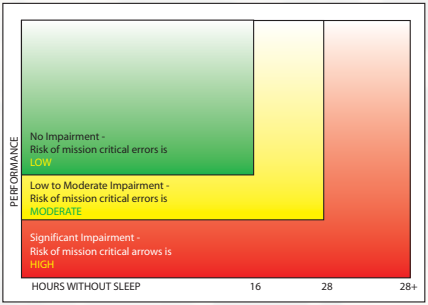
A sleep-deprived Soldier might fall asleep at the wheel and cause a vehicle roll-over. A sleep-deprived Soldier-medic might administer the wrong dose of medicines. A sleep-deprived Soldier on guard duty might not notice a threat or might react too slowly to it. A sleep-deprived Soldier might transpose digits while entering coordinates into a fire-control system. More generally, a sleep-deprived Soldier might make wrong tactical decisions. The bottom line is that sleep deprivation can get Soldiers killed!

Sleep Deprivation and Performance

This chart shows the relationship between sleep deprivation and performance. You can use this chart to gauge your sleep status or the sleep status of your Soldiers. Essentially, the longer we go without

sleep, the poorer our performance on any number of tasks. In general, we can sustain normal performance without noticeable impairment (the Green zone) for about 16 hours after waking up. After 16 hours without sleep, we begin to see a noticeable decrease in our performance (the Amber zone). By the time we have been awake for 24 hours, our reaction time is worse than if we were legally intoxicated. After 28 hours without sleep, our performance becomes significantly impaired with the likelihood of critical errors rising to an unacceptable level (the Red zone).

Figure 1.



Sleep Management

To sustain performance over the long haul, you and your Soldiers need 7-8 hours of sleep out of every 24. When Soldiers get less sleep than this, their performance will degrade over time. Getting 4-6 hours of sleep every 24 hours will keep Soldiers in the Amber zone (where the risk for mission critical

errors is moderately increased) for periods of up to several weeks. Getting less than 4 hours of sleep will keep Soldiers in the Red Zone (where the risk for mission critical errors is unacceptably high). Sleep doesn't have to be continuous to be effective. While it is preferable to give Soldiers uninterrupted sleep time, several shorter sleep periods that add up to between 7 and 8 hours can also sustain alertness and performance.

Tips for Sleep Management

- **Tips for Soldiers**
  - Don't sleep in areas where there is regular activity
  - When sleeping, minimize exposure to noise and light - wear ear plugs and use blackout shades or a sleep mask
  - Avoid over-the-counter "sleep aids," – they cause grogginess but do not improve actual sleep
  - Sleep whenever you can – even a little sleep is better than none, and the benefits of several "catnaps" can add-up quickly
- **Tips for Leaders**
  - Develop a unit sleep management program that gives Soldiers enough time off so they obtain 7-8 hours to sleep out of every 24
  - Soldiers trying to sleep during the day require longer (or more frequent) opportunities to sleep to compensate for the body's normal reaction to sleep cycle disruption

- Never put your Soldiers in a position where they must choose between adequate sleep and other important off duty activities (personal hygiene, calling home, etc.) They will always sacrifice sleep in these situations.
- Arrange sleep schedules that give Soldiers opportunities to sleep at a consistent time

• **Remember…**

- Your performance begins to suffer as soon as you start losing sleep
- If you are struggling to stay awake, your ability to function is already impaired

• **If Sleep Loss Can't be Avoided…**

- Use caffeine – drink the equivalent of two cups of coffee (~200 mg of caffeine) every 2 to 4 hours;
- Caffeine use as described above will help maintain performance even in the face of moderate sleep loss

>>>>>[For more information access: https:// www.militaryonesource.com]

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>>>>>[These techniques and coping skills cannot make a horrible and tragic event acceptable or easy, but they can help you and your teammates better cope with the stress in order to complete the mission.]

The Injured and Dead

In combat or disaster situations, you may see, hear, smell, and perhaps have to handle injured and dead people. They may be men and women of all ages.

You may be struck with combinations of feelings that include pity, horror, repulsion, and anger at the senselessness or malice of the event. You may feel guilty for failing to prevent it, for surviving it, or for not helping enough. These reactions are a normal part of being human. You may blame yourself or the U.S.A. It hurts most when a victim reminds you of someone you love or yourself.

Keep in mind that these feelings are honorable and confirm your humanity. At times, however, you may feel emotionally numb and may use “graveyard humor” to make the suffering and deaths seem less terrible. Whatever you feel, remember that the mission must continue.

The following are lessons learned by people who faced such horrible experiences. These tips can help you do the mission and live with the memories without being haunted by them.

1. Remember the larger purpose of what you must do. You are showing care, giving hope, and preventing disease for the living. You are recovering the bodies for registrations and respectful burials.
2. Limit exposure to the stimuli: don’t sightsee; use screens, poncho curtains, partitions, covers, body bags, and barriers to keep away anyone who does not need to see.

3. Wear gloves and disposable uniforms if available.
4. Mask odors with disinfectants, deodorants, air-fresheners. Save perfumes or aftershaves for afterwards. Do not be surprised when odors trigger memories.
5. Be compassionate, but AVOID FOCUSING on any individual victims, especially those you most identify with. Do not focus on personal effects.
6. Have people who did NOT search the body examine the personal materials collected for identification of the body or intelligence.
7. Remind yourself the body is not “the person,” just the remains.
8. Keep humor alive, even “graveyard humor” with battle buddies who understand it, but don’t get too gross or too personal (e.g., no picking on each other).
9. Don’t desecrate or steal from the victims—those are UCMJ crimes.
10. Say silent prayers; ask unit or local ministers to conduct memorial services.
11. Schedule frequent breaks; maintain hygiene, drink plenty of fluids, and eat good food. Command should arrange facilities for washing hands and face, and later for showers and fresh clothes.
12. Have your team get together for mutual support and encouragement. Acknowledge horrible aspects, but don’t dwell on these memories of details.

13. Help battle buddies or subordinates in distress by being a good listener. Do not jump in with “off the shelf” answers. Do not mistake his/her feelings as weakness. Tell them they are normal and honorable. Remind them that the mission must go on, and the team needs everyone.
14. If forewarned of the mission, prepare yourself for what you will see and do; take the supplies and equipment mentioned above.
15. Afterwards, do not feel guilty about having distanced yourself mentally from the suffering or tragic deaths of individuals.
16. Do not be disheartened by horrible dreams, feeling tense, or intrusive memories. Those are normal, and it is better to have them now than to suppress them. Do not keep them hidden. Share them with your battle buddies, and keep that positive humor alive.
17. One to three days after exposure, participate in a critical event debriefing with trained people from your supporting unit ministry and/or behavioral health/combat stress control team.

These techniques and coping skills cannot make a horrible and tragic event acceptable or easy, but they can help you and your teammates better cope with the stress in order to complete the mission. Be proud of what you have done, and use these lessons learned to take care of yourself, your battle buddies, and your family when you get home.

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http://phc.amedd.army.mil

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