

## **Annex D – NATO SENIOR LEADERS GUIDE FOR RESILIENCE TRAINING IN BASIC TRAINING**

This guide is for senior leaders who are responsible for implementing the NATO Resilience Training for Basic Training. Resilience is defined as the ability to grow and thrive in the face of challenges and bounce back from adversity.

### **WHY A NATO RESILIENCE TRAINING PACKAGE?**

The goal of the NATO Human Factors and Medicine Research Task Group (RTG/HFM) 203, *Mental Health Training*, is to build on existing science and national approaches to mental resilience training, and to provide a NATO Resilience Training package that can be used by NATO Nations and partners to enhance the overall mental fitness of NATO forces. The *NATO Resilience Training for Basic Training* package is the main product of the NATO RTG/HFM-203 Task Group.

### **HOW DOES RESILIENCE TRAINING ENHANCE MENTAL FITNESS?**

Traditional military training provides service members the opportunity to develop many fundamental resilience skills. Current training practices can be supplemented with resilience training targeted to different operational and training contexts to further enhance resilience and/or well-being. Resilience training complements traditional training in several ways:

- 1) Increasing knowledge and awareness of physiological, emotional and cognitive processes;
- 2) Normalizing stress responses;
- 3) Training effective coping responses and flexibility;
- 4) Developing and supporting leaders in their efforts to sustain and enhance unit resilience; and
- 5) Stimulating service members to learn and grow from their military experiences.

### **HOW DOES ENHANCED MENTAL FITNESS BENEFIT MY UNIT?**

Mental resilience training has tremendous potential for military effectiveness. Initial research [4] has shown that mental resilience training can have a positive impact on service member functioning, and there is also evidence [1] that training can have an even greater impact on the organization. Additional benefits of resilience training may include increased retention, improved morale, sustained health and performance under high demand conditions at home, during training/exercises, and on operations, improved relationships with unit members, friends, and family, and enhanced personal growth. Finally, effective resilience training may lead to improved attitudes about mental health and lead to earlier help-seeking behaviour.

### **WHY DO WE NEED RESILIENCE TRAINING IN BASIC TRAINING?**

Basic training is the ideal time to introduce the relevance and importance of resilience and to build a foundation of resilience skills. For many recruits, basic training is the most challenging experience of their lives to date. They can immediately apply the knowledge and skills gained in resilience training to manage their responses to the stressors of basic training at the individual and buddy level. With this foundation in place, later in their

careers they will be able to teach and model resilience at the unit (section, platoon, etc.) level to manage the demands of a high stress environment like a combat deployment. Furthermore, basic training is where recruits adopt the military culture that remains part of their professional identity throughout their careers. If resilience skills are integrated into initial military training, then recruits learn that the military values mental fitness and they will bring that perspective wherever they go in the future.

## **WHO DEVELOPED THIS RESILIENCE TRAINING, AND HOW?**

Over a period of 4 years, 11 NATO Nations contributed to the products that form the foundation of this training package. Participating Nations contributed to the development of a NATO archive of resilience training [3] which included the objectives, target audience, core content, evaluation outcomes and evidence-base of current resilience training. NATO position papers were written to define and clarify many of the concepts that are referred to throughout the training. The demands of military life that service members encounter in addition to deployment were highlighted, the added value of mental resilience training for military organisations and operational leaders were described, and mental resilience and resilience in the military context were defined.

In order to develop relevant resilience training for NATO forces, surveys were conducted to identify gaps and needs in military resilience training among participating Nations [2]. The focus was primarily on basic training with the aim of identifying how resilience training for service members can be improved at the start of their military service.

*Resilience Training for Basic Training* is strength-based and skill focused. That is, the training is intended to make the recruits mentally tougher and to teach them skills that they can use to enhance their performance during basic training, throughout their military career and their lives.

## **HOW WERE THE RESILIENCE SKILLS THAT ARE INCLUDED IN THE TRAINING CHOSEN?**

The resilience skills selected were based on their relevance to basic training. In order to include the skill, the criteria must be:

- 1) Simple to use;
- 2) Portable, possible to use in different situation; and
- 3) Proven to be effective.

Careful consideration was also given to the amount of time available that could be allotted for meaningful resilience training to be conducted during basic training.

## **HOW SHOULD THE PROGRAM BE IMPLEMENTED?**

Training effectiveness is highest when the content is delivered as a whole, including reinforcement of skills in real-life situations. However, due to restraints this might not be possible in every Nation. The training has therefore been divided into core skills and additional skills, which can be delivered either together or separately, depending on the time available. Ideally, the core skills should be taught in one solid block, with time for skill application exercises, to ensure a standardized approach and consistency across Nations. This training is most effective when it is delivered within the first 2 weeks of basic training.

To adjust the package for national use the training package needs to be translated and adapted to national context without changing the core content of the training. It is strongly encouraged that the translated package be tested to ensure suitability for your military.

To implement the training effectively some requirements should be adhered to in order to ensure optimal delivery of the training (see also [5]).

### **Requirements to effectively implement the training:**

- Trainers need to be carefully selected.
- Ensure that a train-the-trainer qualification course (3 days of training) is developed and implemented.
- Ensure that training is conducted in small groups of trainees (max. 40, ideal size 15 – 25).
- Duration of the training should be at least 3 hours:
  - 4 Core content modules– 3-4 hours total time.
  - Additional module – 2 hours.
- Timing in basic training: during the first 2 weeks of training.

Once implemented, the program should be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure the training meets the learning objectives. Program evaluation may consist of trainee evaluation, lessons learned from the trainers, and when possible, a validation study can be undertaken.

## **WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE TRAINING?**

See Figure D-1 for an overview.

**Leaders:** Leaders are critical to the successful implementation of resilience training. Leaders are responsible for communicating the importance of the training within their organization, clearly outlining the objectives and rationale for the training, to ensure that enthusiasm for the training is promoted at all levels and that training is conducted properly. One idea to consider is producing a video clip of respected leaders/service members introducing the relevance of the training to help market the program.

**Facilitators:** Subject-matter experts such as mental health professional should teach the trainer qualification course. Consider using a mobile trainer qualification course team that can go to different units to help implement the training. Mental health professionals are also involved with ongoing evaluation, validation, annual program reviews, and updating of the program when necessary.

**Trainers:** The training may be delivered by a non-mental health professional that has knowledge of the recruits, a uniformed mental health subject-matter expert, experienced and credible Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) or officers, or combat veterans, ideally all of whom have been through both a military instructional technique course and the required trainer qualification course.

**Audience:** The training is intended for all services' recruits during basic training, whether they are conscripts, enlisted personnel or junior officers. The training needs to be delivered during the first 2 weeks, when there is still sufficient time to learn and apply the skills to a number of challenging situations and thereby experience the positive effects of the training.

**HOW SHOULD THE TRAINING PROGRAM BE MANAGED?**

The responsibility for program implementation resides with the command line; the command line is responsible for facilitating the execution of the training by qualified trainers, and coordinating adaptation of the content by the subject-matter experts to ensure that it is culturally relevant while maintaining the integrity of the core skills. The ownership of the content should lay with national subject-matter experts (mental health professionals).

Program evaluation (validation) is important to ensure training quality and should be performed by a mental health subject-matter expert or equivalent. Training is to be assessed to ensure that the training is executed as intended, training aids are properly used, the training environment is acceptable, and the trainers are qualified. An additional goal of quality control is to prevent unauthorized changes of material or insertions of unsanctioned training material. Leaders should ensure that they receive and review the quality control report and act on the recommendations.



**Figure D-1: Key Roles, Actors and Documents in Managing Resilience Training During Basic Training.**

## **REFERENCES**

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