

Facilitator Instructions:

To be qualified to facilitate this exercise, the facilitator must have successfully completed Johns Hopkins [Psychological First Aid course](#). It is provided through their online Coursera platform.

Prior reading necessary:

Facilitators must also have fully read the [Psychological First Aid Field Operations Guide](#) developed by the Terrorism and Disaster Branch of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD.

TRIGGER WARNING: The scenario used in this simulation is based on real events and may trigger PTSD or other stressor-related mental health issues for anyone who shared a similar experience(s) with the scenario. Participants **should not participate** in this exercise if they feel the events discussed in this scenario may act as a trigger for their symptoms. If someone does feel that such an exercise may be a trigger, it is **important** that they seek professional support. Furthermore, all participants **must retain** the right to walk away from the simulation at any time if it begins to trigger a response.

For the purposes of this group role-playing exercise, five participants will each be given the role of five individuals who were either directly or indirectly exposed to a traumatic event while serving as frontline civilians. A facilitator will guide them through the exercise where a context similar to that of the traumatic event occurs to all five roles three months following the end of their tour. While each of the roles face no actual threat during this scenario, the perceived threat they each face differs according to their mental health statuses, resources, and resilience levels.

Instructions:

As a participant within this role-playing game, your objective is to embody the mindset of the role you are given. Explore how you may feel if you shared the role's mental health state and encountered a similar scenario. If at any time you feel as if the events discussed in this scenario may be too close to ones you or ones you know have experienced or that the simulation is acting as a trigger for your symptoms, please ask to suspend the exercise and talk with your facilitator.

Scenario:

The bright sun falling on everyone's backs created a comfortable feeling amid the brisk wind. Five of us were gathering together at a diner for the first time since we all returned from Afghanistan three months ago. We hadn't known each other prior to our service, but quickly bonded working together as Personal Services Contractors (PSCs) for USAID.

One incident, in particular, solidified our group's bond. Seven months ago four of us were, with others, delivering supplies to a village. But as one of the men from the villages, who had appeared to be calm, opened the trunk of his car, he pulled out an automatic weapon and began firing at the PSCs, their translator, and their military escorts.

The situation was quickly contained, but not before one of us, Sam, was hit. He survived to sit with us at the diner today, but the experience thoroughly shook all of us. But all of that seems as if it's in the distant past now that the five of us are all sitting together in this diner.

While leaving the diner, we saw two people arguing over the price of something in an opaque tote bag. They failed to reach an agreement, and one began to reach into his car trunk to grab something...

Roles:

Role A: First to reach Sam – PTSD

Everyday, something you encounter reminds you of what happened. It's as if you can't escape reliving it. You've started to avoid hobbies that you used to enjoy. Familiar places now all seem strange or different. It's even difficult to talk with your friends and family. What used to be your normal life feels so different now. You see and experience the world around you differently and aren't certain things will ever return to normal.

Role B: Acute Stress?

You had some trouble sleeping after it happened, but you continue to improve. You're beginning to be able to discuss some of your time in Afghanistan without reliving all that you felt there. Occasionally, the world still appears to be closing in around you, but you haven't allowed it to affect your ability to engage with it. The more time passes the more you feel in the present engaging with people and activities. At first, you felt like you couldn't concentrate at home or at work but as time continues on you have felt calmer, more relaxed and as if your experiences in Afghanistan are in the past.

Role C: In denial

You have issues sleeping through the night but tell yourself it's your new job hours. Family members have told you that you are overreacting to noise that the kids or dog make in the house. You think you are reacting normally and don't understand why everyone keeps acting so differently since you've returned. You're tired of partner and family members saying you should talk to someone, you weren't the one that was shot, everything will return to normal soon enough.

Role D: Wasn't present

You heard about what happened to the others but were back at base working on logistics. When they told you about how the man had grabbed a gun you couldn't believe how that could happen to Sam. You just kept imagining the horror of it all in your mind. But when you heard what had happened and saw Sam's injuries you couldn't help but empathize with his pain.

Role E: Sam - Leader

You're happy to see your friends again, but you can tell that some of them are having trouble coping with all you experienced together in Afghanistan. Your injury left you wounded for some time, but you persevered and learned how to engage with the stress the incident created. After going through trauma therapy, you began to regain control of how you interacted with the world around you again. Hopefully, you can help your friends by informing them about what you had to learn in order to bounce back so that they can too.

Facilitator Debriefing Questions:

- How did it make you feel when you were reading through the scenario? Have you encountered incidents such as this one before?
- Do you feel as if you were able to begin to empathize with your role? Why or why not? Was anything in particular holding you back from empathizing with your role? Did you resonate with one of the other roles more?
- Do you have friends or colleagues who have gone through similar incidents or who have had similar reactions to incidents?
- Were you reminded by any of the roles how you react in some situations? Maybe abroad or in your normal life?
- Did any specific emotions begin to surface within you during the exercise? Why do you think it/they did or did not?
- Did you find it difficult to embody the character of your role? Why or why not?
- How much resilience do you believe each of the roles had? How could each role have increased their resilience level?
- What are some of the ways you have considered or have already implemented into your lives in order to increase your own resilience level?
- Are there any resilience strategies you can think of that may have helped contain the situation in the moment (i.e., deep-breathing, recalling street names of a familiar and safe environment, etc.)
- Could any of the roles have done anything better or more specific to calm their friend during the situation? Before? After?
- Do you think that if the five remain in better and more regular contact, in essence, forming a support network that it will help increase all of their resilience levels? How could they go about implementing this?
- It is important to realize and remember that incidents such as this one are common among those returning from hardship areas. Each person returning from any station – whether hardship or not – must go through a period of readjustment. What are some of the ways you may have attempted to remind your friend that their behavior in this situation was normal?