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 (ITP).

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Upon completion of this discussion, 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

PROCEDURES AND OVERVIEW:
This module is usually taught on the first day of Transition GPS. The 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 how transition from active duty to civilian life may have an effect on family, friends, and loved ones; and encourages open communication to address concerns, clarify expectations, and mitigate stress. Course content addresses how events experienced during military Service may have a lasting impact on the Service member, and need to be addressed as part of the long term transition plan to avoid problems during separation/transition. Mentorship and how having a mentor can be beneficial in a successful separation/transition is also discussed. The session closes with a review of resources available to support participants as they address identified issues.

PRESENTATION MATERIALS:
Materials required to support this program include:
- Chart paper or dry-erase board
- Colored markers, dry erase or water color, depending on which medium is used
- Computer and projector, or video monitor to support slide presentation
- PowerPoint presentation, “Resilient Transitions”
AGENDA:
- Outside the Box: Managing the intangibles
- Common factor - You
- If I ignore it, will it go away?
- What is "stress"?
- What am I supposed to do about it?
- How do I keep my head in the game?
- Is there anything else I can do?
- What were YOU thinking?
- Do I really have to talk about it?
- What can the Family Support Center do to help?
- Anyone else?
- The value of mentorship in supporting a successful transition
- Wrap up

OUTSIDE THE BOX: MANAGING THE INTANGIBLES [Slide 1]

Instructor Introduction:
Be aware of audience demographics; use this to relate to the participants, explain how are qualified to facilitate this course, and the need for this course. Transition can be stressful; it is a major change in life. This is only necessary if the instructor has changed from Transition Overview.

Optional Activity – Stress Airplane
Time: Five minutes
Instruction: Provide all participants a full piece of paper, instruct them to write down one item involving transition they are stressed about; have them fold their paper in the paper airplanes; tell them on the count of three to let them fly; and have them pick up a plane, (not their own). Ask for a volunteer to be a scribe; and have everyone open their paper and take turns reading what is written. Have the scribe write the topics on a large piece of paper or the board, making a tic mark when one is repeated.

COMMON FACTOR – YOU! [Slide 2]

When we think of transition, we focus a lot on resumes, job searches, interviews, moving, VA benefits, and tons of paperwork. These are all very important events that must be completed correctly. However, there are other subtler aspects to transition which are often overlooked despite their potential to affect the transition process. For example, how keeping up with all the tangible items is affecting you and your family, and the stress this creates. What is the result of overlooking these issues? ANSWER: Subtle-self-sabotage.
There is one common denominator between your military and civilian life: You! How well you are functioning will influence how you think and act, and impact the success of your transition. With this in mind, it makes sense to do preventive maintenance to ensure you can meet the demands of the transition process. Today will be spent talking about some of these issues and how to manage them.

**IF I IGNORE IT, WILL IT GO AWAY?**

Transition is change, period. Anytime you introduce change into your lifestyle, there may be stress. The question is “Do you need to add stress management to the list?”

Ignoring stress is a common response in both the military and civilian culture. When faced with all the challenges of transition, you may be tempted to just try to “suck it up” one more time. You may ask, “If I ignore the stress, won’t it just go away?”

**Discussion Question:** How many of you have ever done or said something you later regretted when you were stressed?

Ignoring doesn’t mean it won’t affect you, ignoring stress doesn’t make it go away, and ignoring stressful situations can end much worse than dealing with them head on.

**WHAT IS STRESS?**

Stress Defined
It is difficult to manage something you don’t understand. Here are a few definitions to work with. What is stress? Stress is:

- The process by which we respond to challenges to the body, mind, or spirit *(Source: Navy Center for Combat Operational Stress Control)*
- The non-specific response of the body to demands placed on it *(Source: Hans Selye)*

Both definitions refer to a response to demands or challenges. Take a minute to consider what a stress response looks like.

Stress Symptoms – All of the following 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 - Symptoms of Stress Graffiti**

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Instructions:** In four locations around the room, place a large piece of paper; on each paper write one of the following: physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Direct participants to go to each poster and write a word or draw a picture of a symptom
that fits within that category. Provide an example of each before the participants begin. Allow a five minute time limit, to give participants time to write on every poster. After time is called, ask as for four volunteers, one for each paper, have them read what is written on each poster.

**Possible answers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Increased breathing rate</td>
<td>• Poor problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased heart rate</td>
<td>• Poor attention/decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased blood pressure.</td>
<td>• Poor concentration/memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Muscle tension</td>
<td>• Increased/decreased awareness of surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decreasing skin temperature in extremities</td>
<td>• Negative self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Release of “stress” hormones (adrenaline)</td>
<td>– “Why me?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Headaches</td>
<td>– “Oh no...this is...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insomnia</td>
<td>– “I can’t take this”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indigestion, heartburn, other digestive issues</td>
<td>– “Really?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Anxious</td>
<td>• Lack of enthusiasm for children, family, work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overwhelmed</td>
<td>• Withdrawal from people/activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Afraid</td>
<td>• Poor diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uncertain</td>
<td>• Skip workouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Angry</td>
<td>• Change in sleeping patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Isolated</td>
<td>• All night video games/TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incompetent</td>
<td>• Arguing, yelling, interpersonal conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase use of tobacco, alcohol, and/or drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aggressive movements/pacing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Throwing/breaking things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitator Note: If it is a very large class, use eight pieces of paper, using each topic twice; still have a volunteer read each paper. This allows people to express the way they stress, but not be singled out and to feel as they are not alone in the way they show stress.

**Discussion Question:** *What does this list tell us?* ANSWER: That stress manifests itself in many different ways and everyone stresses in their own way.
Discussion Question: *Based on the discussion so far, why do you think stress management is important? Why do you need to manage your stress during transition?* (Solicit ideas)

**ANSWER: The interview!** You need to be sharp, on your toes, and 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 or which position you accept!

Let’s revisit what you look like when you are stressed out. *(Facilitator Note: refer back to the created lists or solicit responses to what stress looks like)* Would you hire a person who came in like that? Probably not.

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. For example, imagine what you would feel like if you came home at the end of the day, announced “Honey, I’m home!” and your partner responded, “So?”. That isn’t the response you’d be looking for.

Facilitator Note: *Polling questions can be used to take a quick poll of the class; ask them to raise their hands or stand in order to answer the question; or ask for a volunteer to answer follow on questions*

**Polling Question: How many of you think your knowledge and expertise is considered a valuable asset by your peers and supervisors?**

Of course you do. However, 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, stress can be a part of being happy and fulfilled!

**Polling Question: How many of you have ever had three weeks to do something, but waited three hours before the due date to start?**

Why? Because some of you may work better under pressure! Stress can be an excellent motivator!

Bottom line: Stress isn’t bad, it’s something to be acknowledged and managed so it doesn’t prevent you from being the person, parent, partner, and professional you need to be!
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO ABOUT STRESS? [Slide 5]

- **Eat Well, Drink Water** - 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 excessive alcohol, or overuse energy drinks. Rather, eat proper food and drink plenty of water.
- **Get rest** - Sleep is when your body repairs damage done by the stress response. If you aren’t sleeping, there is no repair. Unfortunately, the result is cumulative damage to your body and mind.
- **Exercise** - It releases endorphins, clears your head, and releases muscle tension.
- **Maintain a schedule** - Treat your job search like a job, put in the hours and effort. Don’t, however, let it become your entire life. Obsessing over it can decrease your productivity. Build time for work, play, family time, and spiritual needs. Get up, get dressed, “go to work”, then go home and take care of the rest of your life!
- **Break things down into small pieces** - You can’t do it all at once. Break it down into manageable pieces. Delegate if possible, and acknowledge accomplishments.
- **Let your friends be friends** - Don’t try to do this alone. How many of you can talk to someone for 10 minutes and afterwards feel better about yourself and about life in general? CALL a friend, reach out and let them help.
- **Acknowledge and accept your feelings** - You may 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 transitioning to a civilian, you can expect to miss some aspects of the Service, including the variety of assignments, camaraderie, sense of purpose, travel, steady income, benefits, and pride.
- **Surround yourself with positivity** - Monitor who you spend time with. When you are under stress, it is important to surround yourself with people who are positive and motivating. Beware of the “Chicken-Littles” in your life who perceive “The sky is falling!” at every opportunity.
- **Take breaks** - Stress management is often misunderstood. One of the most effective stress management techniques is merely to take a break.

**ASK:** What methods have you found helpful to help you relax? (Solicit Answers)

- 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 those items a priority and build them into our daily routine! Stress management plans should be tailored to your needs.
HOW DO I KEEP MY HEAD IN THE GAME?  

The ABC Model (Albert Ellis)  
https://www.verywell.com/rational-emotive-behavior-therapy-2796000

How you react to a situation may increase your stress or reduce it. What you may overlook is you have choices. We have control over our reactions. This idea is the basis of the famous psychologist and behavior expert, Albert Ellis and his ABC Model.

A + B = C defined

- **A = Activating Event**, the stressor or the situation, in this case, transition. It is neutral, neither good nor bad.

- **B = Beliefs** or "self-talk" about that stressor.

- **C = Consequences** 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!

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. You may experience B so automatically you aren't aware of it, but it occurs and has a significant impact on your response. If you want to change a response or consequence, change the beliefs or self-talk and you can generate a different outcome.

Here's some good news.

**Discussion Question: Who controls what you think?**  
**ANSWER: You do!**

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

**Optional Activity – Plus one exercise**  
**Time:** 15 minutes

**Instructions:** On white board or large paper, draw two columns – or use two pieces of paper. Place a minus sign (-) at the top of one column or paper. Ask for a volunteer scribe.

**Activity Question: What aspects of transition are keeping you up at night? What are you worrying about?**

*Refer back to the first activity (stress airplane) or solicit answers; have the scribe write answers on paper or board.*
Read back the list to the class in a negative, defeated tone, "So, you’re going to be broke, homeless, unemployed, lonely."

**Activity Question:** 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.

*Place a plus sign (+) over the other column; ask for a different scribe.

**Activity Question:** List all the positive things about this transition.

Solicit answers for the plus (+) column. Answers may include: no duty, more freedom, no wearing a uniform, can be an individual, no deployments, can make more money, live where I want, more family time.

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

**Activity Question:** 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 model at work. When you focus on the negative aspects of a situation, you tend to get a more negative, stressful response. By shifting focus to more positive elements, you may 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.

Facilitator Note: This is a simple but effective way to show participants how the ABC model works.

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**IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO?**

By boosting your confidence and using the Principles of Resilience: Predictability, Control, Relationships, Trust, and Meaning. When these five basic concepts are present, stress is lower and confidence is higher. Let me explain:

**Predictability:** Stress is lower when you can predict the outcome, higher when you don’t know what to expect. How can you develop predictability about new situations? Education, mentorship, experience, consistency, communication. Get the necessary information so you can make the unknown known.

**Controllability:** When we feel like we have no control, stress is high, when you identify areas you control, even if it is only in how you respond, confidence increases. 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.

**Relationships:** When faced with stressful events, knowing someone has your back can make all the difference. Any opportunity to improve relationships throughout the transition process needs taken. A positive relationship with mentors, career counselors, and other professionals can also keep your stress down and confidence high.

**Trust:** Knowing you can trust the people or organizations you are working with to have your 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 which employer will match your values, beliefs, and goals.

**Meaning:** When you believe you are doing something meaningful and has purpose, it makes it easier to work through the challenges! Stay focused on 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.

As you go through the rest of the program, ask yourself, "What can I do to help set realistic expectations for myself? Identify areas of control? Develop appropriate responses and improve relationships along the way? How can you involve your family and let them feel some sense of control and be a meaningful part of the process? What opportunities are present to help you improve your personal and professional relationships? Are there training workshops, counseling opportunities, research sites, mentors, or job fairs you can use?"

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**WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?**

Facilitator Note: *This section asks participants intended to provoke thought about how the transition will affect others in their lives.*

You need to consider how transition effects more than yourself. How many of you have a 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? Is your family being included in the transition planning and education process? Do they feel left out/forgotten in all this?

Do you think your family may have expectations about what your transition is going to mean? Are there differences between their expectations and yours? 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, "Now they’ll be able to come to all family events, or can move back home and help with elderly relatives."
Consider some questions about change 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 transitioning? Are they thinking about benefits; the loss of their military spouse identity and privileges; leave and vacations; 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?

Remember, families are made of people! Have you noticed symptoms of stress? Are the kids acting out? Do they have problems in school? Illnesses? Fear? They will have responses just as adults do, but because the responses are non-specific, they may be easier to overlook or contribute to something else.

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

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

- Share concerns, expectations, fears, and opportunities
- Engage them in the planning process
- 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
- Acknowledge the challenges your transition presents to them, too
- Look for signs and symptoms of stress
- Reassure them that these are normal experiences associated with transition
- If they are not comfortable discussing issues with you, encourage them to talk to friends, family, or professionals who can answer their questions and relieve their concerns
- Seek assistance from the Family Support Center, Military OneSource, VA, National Resource Directory, other local support agencies
- Practice reframing using the “Plus 1” exercise practiced earlier to keep things in perspective

Keep conversations constructive and inclusive. Avoid “Dumping” on each other. Venting should be reserved for friends, a counselor, or mentor who is not as emotionally invested. If you have trouble communicating with family members, 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.

**DO I REALLY HAVE TO TALK ABOUT IT?**

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 and younger service members often do not view themselves as Veterans, and as a result, don’t take advantage of their benefits. Everyone here in class today is a VETERANS. You Served, you earned your benefits.

An additional consideration for female Veterans is the culture change of leaving a very "male-oriented" work environment that can be very different from the civilian workplace, considering the military has more males than females. Some female Veterans express difficulty fitting in and relating to their civilian co-workers because they were perceived as being overly aggressive and direct. While this can be said for both male and female Veterans, it seems to bother female Veterans more. It may be necessary to observe your new co-workers in your civilian job 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 and ability to adjust to a new environment.

While in the military, events may have occurred, which may have had an impact on your ability to adjust to and/or perform effectively. You may have needed extra support, mentorship, counseling, or training to make the necessary adjustments.

**Discussion Question:** *What are some experiences that may affect or “stay with you” once you transition out of the military?* (Solicit responses.)

- Managing the needs of a special needs child can be intimidating in the absence of the military support system
- You might miss the excitement and variety of assignments; feel bored, as if your life lacks meaning
- 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.

These experiences are real, and they impact those who were affected. With appropriate help and support, you can move past them effectively, and there is plenty of help. In no way would I ask you, in a classroom forum, to discuss these issues. However, I want to emphasize the importance of acknowledging and
ensuring any issues are documented appropriately in your medical records, if appropriate, and address them as part of your Individual Transition Plan (ITP).

It’s beneficial to know where your local Family Support Center is located. If relevant to you or your family members, call and set up a counseling session to discuss your 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 to recognize your issues are a part of who you are and need to be addressed as part of your ITP.

**WHAT CAN THE FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER DO TO HELP?** [Slide 10]

- **Life Skills** training programs including stress management, anger management, communication workshops, conflict management, and relationship building programs
- **Counseling** services are available for individuals, couples, families, and children, with Counselors who facilitate support groups addressing a variety of issues
- **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
- **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
- **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
- **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
- **Information and referral specialists** can assist with identifying alternative resources for just about any situation identified by the client, and if FSC doesn’t have it, they can help find someone who does

**ANYONE ELSE?** [Slide 11]

- Military OneSource
- Chaplains
- Base Legal
- VA
- Medical Treatment Facilities
But there are others who can help you succeed as you transition from military Service. Does anyone know what a mentor is and how they can assist?

The VALUE OF A MENTOR

Mentorship is nothing new to today’s Service member. If you ask a Service member for the name of someone who has been influential in their military career, in many instances it will be a mentor who provided guidance and advice on what it takes to advance or to be a successful military member. Unfortunately, this does not always translate to the need for a mentor as a Service member transitions into civilian life.

Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship where a more experienced or knowledgeable person helps guide a less experienced or knowledgeable person. However, mentoring is more than just answering occasional questions or providing assistance. It is an ongoing relationship of learning, dialog, and challenge.

- The dictionary definition is, “a wise and trusted counselor or teacher or an influential senior sponsor or supporter”
- A mentor is someone to help you and nurture your career; are willing to share ideas, skills, knowledge, and expertise
- A mentor demonstrates a positive attitude, acts as a role model, and takes a personal interest in the mentoring relationship
- A mentor can help you establish goals and planning priorities

Discussion Questions: When might you need a mentor?

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

- 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
- 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
- You are not limited to just one mentor – you might need different mentors during different phases of your transition
Characteristics to look for in a good mentor:  
- Willing to share their knowledge  
- Flexibility  
- Competency in the subject matter and task  
- Encourage and support personal growth  
- Direct in dealing with situations and people  
- Honesty when providing positive and constructive feedback.  
- Understands the parameters and requirements of the relationship  

Successful mentor relationships develop from honest communication and trust. Building healthy relationships requires trust that is created by establishing a rapport, getting to know a person, identifying with their past experiences, and helping them understand the importance of each of your roles and transition goals.

**LET'S WRAP THIS UP!**

- Stress can be a normal part of the transition process, manage it or it will manage you  
- Your family is transitioning and needs to be kept in the loop  
- Traumatic events, emotional injuries, and physical injuries can be a part of the military experience. Don’t ignore them if you require assistance  
- Mentors are a valuable addition to your team to help you accomplish a successful transition.  
- Remember, you aren’t alone through this process, there are abundant resources available to support both you and your family