



Equipping for a COMBAT MINDSET



SELF-TALK



WHAT is Self-talk?

Self-talk is what you say to yourself; silently or out loud.

Our thoughts can either help or hinder our performance. Negative thoughts can *really* interfere with our performance leading to even more negative thoughts and a downward performance spiral. Managing our thoughts helps to break this spiral and reset performance.



WHY does Self-talk work?

The right kind of Self-talk can help us perform better

Self-talk can be separated into two types, **motivational** or **instructional** self-talk. As a general rule, when a task requires a lot of physical effort and motivation to complete, **motivational** self-talk is best.

When it requires more technical skills that can be broken down into steps, **instructional** self-talk is best as it reduces the 'mental chatter' that can reduce performance.



WHEN would I use it?

Cues that changing self-talk would be useful:

- You find yourself getting frustrated or dismayed at your performance.
- After a couple of set-backs your performance gets worse.
- You need to perform under pressure (e.g. an assessment)
- You need to maintain performance over a period of time.



Motivational Self-talk

The first step is identifying the negative thought and then having a skill in place to stop it.

One way to do this is to use thought stopping cues. They can be verbal, visual, or physical or a combination of these. It's a matter of preference.

Examples:

Verbal: "Park it" "Dump it" "Not important"

Visual: screwing up thought into a paper ball, parking thought in car park, throwing thought away like a rugby ball

Physical: Click fingers, stamp feet, slap leg, flick rubber-band

The second step is to replace that negative thought you stopped with a positive one.

Positive self-talk should be **specific** to the task. The more specific it is, the more effective it will be. **"I've run further"**

The focus should be **on what you can do**, not on what you don't want to do. For example, "Don't fail this" or "Don't give up" may be detrimental because rather than focussing on what you can and should do, you will focus on the thing you don't want to do which will lead to negative feelings making poor performance a more likely outcome. **"I've got this"** or **"I can keep going"** will be much more productive.

It should be **short and sweet**. No big long winded sayings as this is difficult to remember and express when we are fatigued or stressed. **'drive hard, dig deeper'**

If it works for you, use **third person** self-talk. Research suggests that talking to ourselves in third person is even more effective than when we use first person self-talk.



Instructional Self-talk

Instructional self-talk is task oriented

It breaks the skill down into small chunks and associates words with each part of the activity.

By doing so, these words cue the individual as to what they need to be doing and how they need to do it.

For example, a professional weight lifter might use the cues "Up" "Settle" "Control" "Explode" when competing in the bench press to correspond with un-racking the weight, getting in position, controlling the weight on the way down, and then exploding on the way back up.

In this way each stage of the movement is cued, and each cue refers to a specific action that needs to be taken to ensure successful performance.

This style of self-talk is better for:

Skill acquisition

- Fine or isolated motor tasks such as the bench press or shot-put
- Technical activities such as weapons drills
- Maintaining attention toward the requirements of the task
- Improving task consistency through following a set process to provide the same output rather than just hoping for the best.

As a basic rule, when we are doing something that requires a lot of physical effort and motivation to complete, motivational self-talk is best. When we are doing something more technical, or novel, or which can be broken down into steps, we need to use instructional self-talk



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VISUALISATION



WHAT is Visualisation?

Visualisation is mentally rehearsing skills or scenarios.

Visualisation allows us to mentally prepare for an upcoming task by rehearsing good performance.



WHY does visualisation work?

The brain treats physical and mental rehearsal in the same way.

When visualising or mentally rehearsing, the same brain pathways are activated as when physically doing the task.

Visualisation is 30% as effective as physical practice but is readily accessible and repeatable – world class athletes rely on visualisation to aid their preparation.



WHEN

would I use it?

Cues that visualisation would be useful:

When you are mastering a new practical skill and want to increase the amount of practice you get.

When you want to run through a range of scenarios or possibilities that you want to prepare for.

When you want to feel more competent at a task.



WHERE

would I do it?

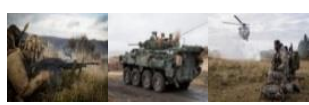
Visualisation is a preparation technique. There are a range of situations that you may wish to prepare for; here are just some examples...

Prior to an assessment

While learning a new task.

Rehearsing scenarios during PDT or on operations.

When you want to practice the 'actions on' for a possible situation.

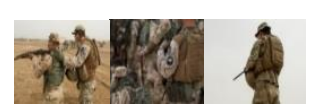


HOW

do I do it?

- 1. Describe the setting
- 2. What are you seeing?
- 3. What are you hearing?
- 4. What are you smelling?
- 5. What are you feeling?
- 6. What are the physical movements involved?
- 7. What do you need to do to be successful?

Try and include as much sensory information as you can into your visualisation – this makes it real for your brain!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Preparing for Deployment Book
NZDF Resilience Coach (ResCo) App





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DEFUSION

WHAT is Defusion?

We all tell ourselves a story, and can become hooked by this negative thinking. Sometimes negative thoughts can be helpful as they help to identify a genuine threat; other times they can impact on our behaviour and prevent us from living the life we want to or prevent us from reaching our goals. Defusion techniques can help to unhook from these thoughts so they have a lesser impact on your behaviour.

Defusion techniques include focusing on the present moment, or acknowledging that our thoughts are just thoughts i.e. our thoughts don't always match up with a realistic view of our behaviours and performance.



WHY does defusion work?

Defusion works by lessening the impact our thoughts have on our behaviours. Over time defusion techniques can help to reduce the intensity and frequency of these unhelpful thoughts.



WHEN would I use it?

Cues that defusion techniques could be helpful:

- You find yourself hooked on the same negative thoughts or a spiral of negative thoughts – e.g. I am not good at sport; that means I'm never going to be good at anything.
- You notice that your thoughts are impacting on your performance or leading to unhelpful behaviours.



Contacting the present moment

Try the following grounding routine:

- Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your upper chest (when starting out or practicing),
- Start breathing in and out deeply (filling your belly with air),
- Once you have control of your breathing, begin to list:
 - 5 things you can see;
 - 4 things you can feel (touch);
 - 3 things you can hear;
 - 2 things you can smell; and
 - 1 thing you can taste.



Thought Defusion

The aim is to acknowledge the thoughts are just thoughts. This helps to take away the impact of the thought so it doesn't impact performance to the same degree.

1. Notice the thought pattern
2. Name it – this is my *not good enough story*
3. Neutralise it
 - *I am noticing that I am having the thought that*
 - *Thanks mind, thanks for sharing*
 - Sing it/Rap it
 - Say it in a funny voice/cartoon character
 - Picture it as words on a screen bouncing up and down



Labelling your thoughts

The simple act of labelling your thoughts and feels can change how your brain interprets the thought. When you begin to become hooked by negative thoughts, or get stuck in a negative thought pattern labelling the thoughts and feels can reduce the perceived threat which in turn can reduce the stress response.



Observing your thoughts

A further way in which we can defuse from our thoughts is to observe our thoughts coming and going. This can help us to acknowledge all our thoughts, rather than just getting hooked by a select few negative thoughts – which likely to don't give us the full story. Examples include:

- Thinking of your thoughts as leaves floating down a stream
- Thinking of your thoughts as adverts on the sides of buses as they come and go from bus stops.



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OPTIMISM



WHAT is Optimism?

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty” (Winston Churchill)

Optimism describes a perspective how people view the world on a spectrum from believing that things always go wrong for you (pessimism), to expecting the best possible outcome for any given situation (optimism). Optimism is associated with being resilient and doing better in life, when balanced with small dose of realism or even pessimism.



WHY does Optimism work?

Optimism can help us to increase positive emotions and bounce back quickly from setbacks.

Often, events that are negative are the things that stick in our mind and that we devote lots of time and energy to thinking about. This can create a negativity bias. We often ignore things that are positive or don't pay enough attention to them. This can give us an unbalanced view of reality, and lead to giving up under pressure.

Optimists tend to attribute the causes of failure as temporary rather than permanent, specific rather than all-encompassing, and external rather than internal. This perspective leads to an increased sense of agency.



WHEN

would I use it?

Optimism can be practiced regularly in order to retrain the brain to pay attention to just as many positive as negative events.

You can use the 'three good things' exercise to practice optimism when you feel that you need to. However, for regular practice, it is recommended that practicing the 3 good things exercise once per week is more effective than daily. This is because it can become boring and predictable. It is best as part of a wider range of tools.



WHERE

would I do it?

You might want to practice optimism at the end of the day either on your own or with your team. It might involve looking at an event which didn't go very well, and pulling out the more useful information from the experience. I.e. rather than think about a setback as a permanent, all-encompassing issue with the team or individual, it may be more useful to think about it as temporary, specific to that situation, and include consideration of factors which were outside of your control. As part of this you can use the 3 good things exercise to pull out what did go well, and put this information to good use moving forward.



HOW

do I do it?

Think of three things from the past day or week. They could be big or small but they must be good. For example, passing the exam, being first in the line for lunch, getting paid to do PT, having a laugh with your mates, making a small improvement at something.

Then ask yourself 3 questions:

1. Why did the event go well?
2. What meaning does this positive event have?
3. How can you make this happen more often?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Preparing for Deployment Book





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HIERARCHICAL GOAL SETTING



WHAT is Hierarchical Goal Setting?

Goals can be thought about as being formed in a hierarchy that lends to the development of smaller goals. The higher order goals are the overarching general goals or values that you want to achieve or uphold. They are things like “I want to be a better soldier” or “I want to be healthier”.

Smaller goals sit below these overarching goals. All of these are more specific but work to achieve your higher order goal.

These goals can be broken into specific actions which help to achieve this.



WHY does goal setting work?

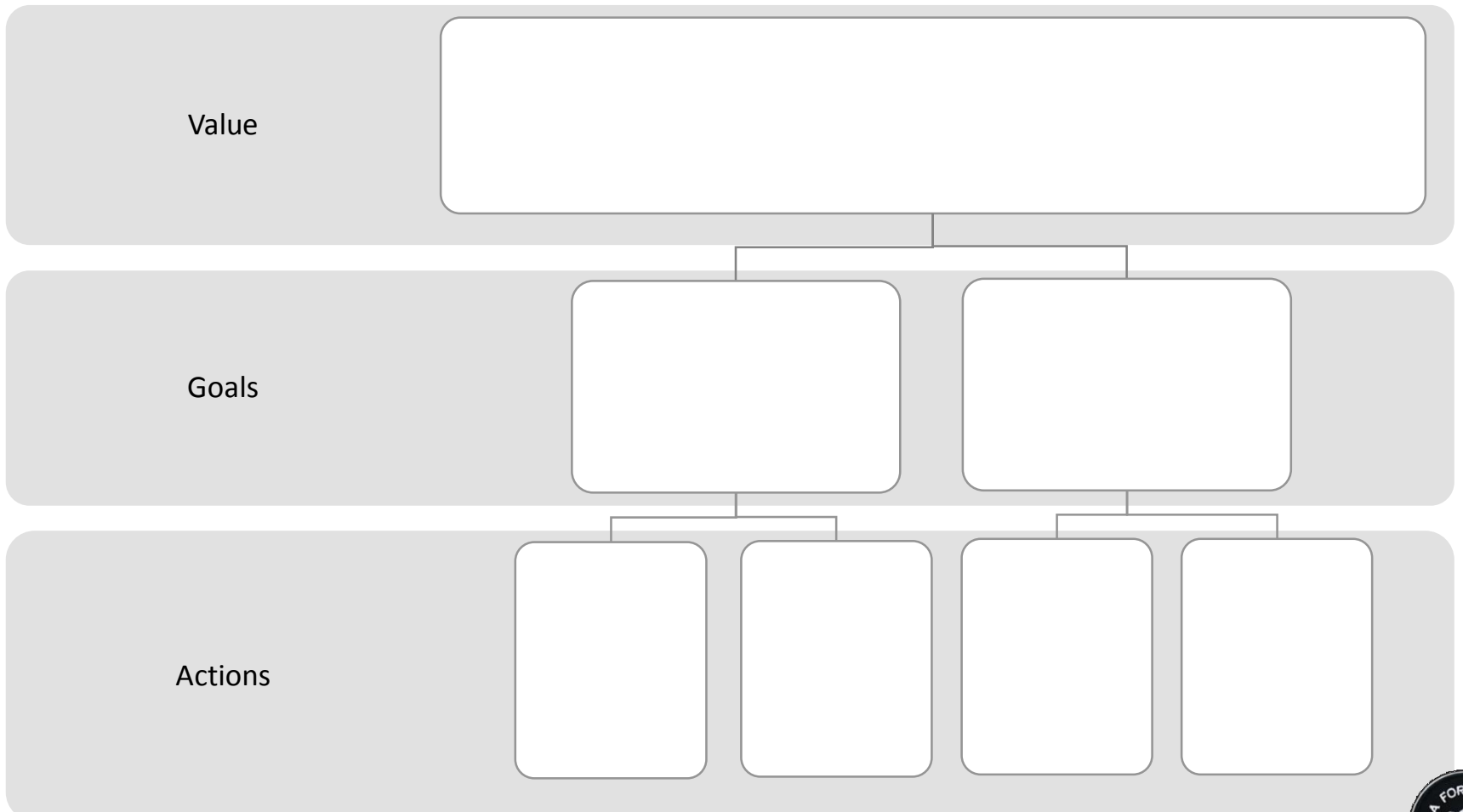
Goal setting give us something to focus on, and way to get there.

On deployment goals can help us to maintain our motivation towards are role, help to identify the things that are most important to us, and to help give us a sense of purpose. One way to do this is by using Hierarchical goals – these start with a value or higher goal which is then broken down into smaller goals and actions.

When we know what we are trying to achieve and how to do it, we are more focused and motivated to achieve a task or to improve our performance.



Goal Hierarchy





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PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



WHAT is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a strategy to reduce stress or regulate emotions.

PMR is the systematic tensing and relaxing of different muscle groups. It can help to relax our body which can in turn relax out mind/reduce our stress response.



WHY does visualisation work?

PMR works by relaxing our muscles and our body which can result in an overall feeling of overall relaxation including the mind.

Think about the differences in your body, and muscle tensions from when you are relaxed and when you are stressed. PMR works by consciously changing our physical body to mirror our relaxed state.



WHEN

would I use it?

PMR is another strategy to use to reduce the stress response or to regulate emotions. It can be useful in stressful situations such as:

- An unexpected situation crops up
- Before going to sleep
- Overthinking
- After a stressful or emotional situation
- Non-physical situations

Since PMR requires us to tense and relax out muscles, it is best used when we are not doing physical tasks



HOW

do I do it?

Try the following PMR routine. Afterwards consider how you feel afterwards, and when you could make this routine work for you:

- a. Sit in a relaxed, quiet position;
- b. Start by focusing and controlling your breathing. Maintain this throughout the exercise;
- c. Instruct group to scan through different muscle groups tensing and holding different muscle groups for 4-10 seconds, and then to relax their muscles for 20 to 30 seconds before moving onto the next group;
- d. Move through each muscle group starting with the facial muscles squeezing and relaxing them, then moving onto other muscle groups such as the shoulders, neck, fists, stomach, legs and toes;
- e. Continue to scan through each muscle group as necessary, try to maintain this for 5 to 10 minutes. With practice you will be able to increase the length they can stay focused doing this task.





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GROUNDING



WHAT is Grounding?

Grounding is an in the moment strategy which can be used to reduce stress or regulate emotions.

Similar to mindfulness meditation it allows us to be present in the moment by using the five senses to focus in on our surroundings and what's happening in this moment.



WHY does Grounding work?

Grounding is a form of mindfulness and works by regulating emotions, and reducing the stress response.

Grounding works by connecting you to the present moment using the five senses. This can help to distract us from thinking about the past or the future instead focusing on the now. As a result this can reduce the stress response enabling us to perform when required.



WHEN

would I use it?

Anytime you are having a stress or emotional response and need to perform in the moment such as:

- An unexpected situation crops up
- Combat stressors
- Before going to sleep
- Overthinking
- After a stressful or emotional situation

Practice the technique listed on the right. Think about how you feel afterwards, and any changes to your body. Practice in different settings to how you can apply it in the moment.



HOW

do I do it?

Try the following grounding routine:

- Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your upper chest (when starting out or practicing),
- Start breathing in and out deeply (filling your belly with air),
- Breathe in for 4 secs, hold for 2 secs, breathe out for 4 seconds,
- Once you have control of your breathing, begin to list:
 - 5 things you can see;
 - 4 things you can feel (touch);
 - 3 things you can hear;
 - 2 things you can smell; and
 - 1 thing you can taste.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Smiling Mind App (free) | 10 % Happier App (Paid Subscription) | Headspace App (Paid Subscription)
Altered Traits—Davidson & Goleman (Book) | www.mindful.org





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MINDFULNESS MEDITATION



WHAT is Mindfulness Meditation?

Mindfulness is focusing the mind IOT be ready, alert, watchful and in control.

It enhances our situational awareness and allows us to choose the most skilful responses to situations. It is the non-judgemental awareness of present moment experiences.



WHY does Mindfulness Meditation work?

New neural connections are formed in the brain.

These parts of the brain are responsible for attention regulation, body awareness and emotion control.

Mindfulness practices strengthen the brain's ability to pay attention, regulate mood and emotion, and maintain situational awareness in complex, ambiguous, and dynamic environments.



WHEN

would I use it?

Every day. Mindfulness is a skill that is developed through regular, **daily practice**.

Once developed, mindfulness skills can then be used anytime you need to be 'in the moment' such as:

- Being on the range.
- Receiving a brief.
- Coaching a subordinate.
- Before a performance.
- Giving a presentation.



WHERE

would I use it?

Mindfulness practices can be done anytime, anywhere. For a daily practice, all you need is 10 – 15 minutes. Some good times to practice include:

- When you first wake up.
- Before or after lunch.
- In the early evening.

Mindfulness skills can then be practiced for 1—3 minutes anytime you want to 'check-in', be present, or enhance your focus.



HOW

do I do it?

To start, try a simple breath awareness practice:

1. Sit upright in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes or lower your gaze.
3. Focus your attention on your breathing.
4. Anytime you are distracted, notice that, and simply begin again by refocusing on your breath.

If you have difficulty staying focused, count each breath up to 10. Restart every time your mind wanders or when you reach 10.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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RECOVER through GUIDED SELF-REFLECTION

WHAT is GUIDED SELF-REFLECTION?

Guided self-reflection is analysing your reactions under pressure to strengthen resilience and future performance.

Guided self-reflection involves examining your reactions and coping strategies under stress. This enables you to develop self-awareness and adapt to improve resilience and performance over time.



WHY does GUIDED SELF-REFLECTION work?

Self-reflection involves creating your own solutions to improving performance under stress.

Research suggests resilience is built through learning from our experiences facing adversity.

Engaging in a quality self-reflection after a performance enables you to adapt and improve coping strategies for reacting to future stressors in your own personalised way.



WHEN would I use it?

Self-reflection is an effective method for use in the 'RECOVER' phase i.e. after a performance or event.

Cues that doing guided self-reflection after a performance would be useful:

- You find yourself repeating mistakes under pressure or repeating unhelpful reactions to stressors.
- You want to improve your resilience or long term performance.



HOW do I do it?

Write down your answers to the following:

What was the stressful event(s) that you are going to reflect on?

It is important to identify a specific recent experience. E.g. I was leading my section to a rendezvous and realised we were lost.

Describe the event in terms of your emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological responses to the stressors?

This is how you will become aware of your response to the situation. I.e. **what emotions were you experiencing** (e.g. frustrated, angry, hopeless), **what were you saying and doing** (e.g. I froze and went off to the side of the group), **what thoughts or brain processes were going through your mind** (e.g. negative self-talk "we're never going to make the timing now because I stuffed it"), and **what physical reactions did you have** in that moment (thumping heart beat, sweaty palms, tunnel vision)?

What were your coping strategies for the event(s)? How effective they were on a scale of 1 to 10 (best)?

Make yourself aware of what coping strategies you used, and critically evaluate these. E.g. I used tactical breathing to calm down, then I could think more clearly again (effectiveness 9 out of 10).

Why were the above strategies effective/ineffective?

E.g. Once calm and able to think again, I was quickly able to and figure out our location and how to get to the RV on time.

How could you improve or change your strategy(s) in the future to better cope with a similar situation? Is there another strategy you would try?

Figure out how you can adapt for the future. E.g. next time I would use a thought stopper (thinking to myself "not helpful") to stop my negative self-talk sooner. This way I could have started tactical breathing sooner and reduced the delay getting back on track



Ongoing Development

After recording multiple self-reflections it is useful to evaluate these for themes, wins, or ways you have improved over time. It can also help you to identify where you need to improve further. Continue as an ongoing practice, and involve a coach or mentor if you get stuck.

