

BASIC TRAINING SELF-CARE HANDBOOK



STRESS RELIEF/ COPING EXERCISES



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FOREWORD

First, thank you for your decision to serve our Nation by joining the Army family! Your initial entry training is purposefully designed to introduce you to and help you survive in the most harshest and stressful of environments. We have had many Soldiers in the past who arrive without knowing any emotional coping aids that could assist them through the challenges of Basic Training. If you feel this about yourself, you should not feel ashamed or alone. This handbook provides some exercises that may help.

It is important to remember that when trying any of these exercises, if you should feel worse or uncomfortable, please do not continue them. Seek additional help through your Drill Sergeant.

It might be that you have experienced some form of trauma in the past. Again, please do not feel alone. Many Soldiers arrive to training feeling they have learned to control the effects of their trauma only to have some unknown trigger bring memories of their experience back to their mind and add even more stress in an already intentionally stressful environment. While it might not seem so as you endure the challenges of Basic Training, the Army does care about helping you heal from your past trauma; we all want you to succeed and contribute to the Army Family.

Behavioral Health Specialists, Military Family Life Counselors and Chaplains are ready, willing, and able to assist you but unfortunately the time constraints and rigors of initial training do not allow for these professionals to thoroughly address the issues you may be facing. Included here are some self-care exercises that are aimed at helping you through Basic Training so that you can receive long term assistance, if needed, when you are able to do so. We highly encourage you to seek support from Behavioral Health Specialists because while these measures may help ease the symptoms for a time, they do not address the cause.

Do not feel discouraged if one or all of these recommended aids do not help. If you feel overwhelmed, seek assistance through your chain of command. Regardless of the outcome concerning your training, you have our deepest admiration for the courage to take on the challenge. If there is any way we can help, we are most definitely willing to do so!

Fort Sill Behavioral Health Team

Fort Sill Military Family Life Counselors

Fort Sill Risk Reduction Program

Fort Sill Sexual Harassment/Assault Response & Prevention Team

SLEEP AID

In Basic Training, sleep is very important and the inability to get to sleep will more than likely affect your performance. As a general rule, if you are unable to get to sleep within 20 minutes, get up and go somewhere else if possible, and do something relaxing (reading or journaling are a few suggestions) until you feel tired. We know Basic training is a very restricted environment and obeying rules and the orders of your drill sergeants is not only a priority but a requirement. So if it isn't possible to get up, there are some mindfulness exercises (as well as many of the other exercises throughout this guide) you may wish to try.

The Wave -A progressive relaxation exercise for falling asleep

In this exercise you will be tensing your entire body, from your toes to your forehead, and then relaxing. This exercise will help you rid your body of tension that may be interfering with your sleep.

1. Lay in bed and begin paying attention to your breathing. Breathe deeply and concentrate on the words, *in* and *out*. As you breathe in, say or mouth the word *in*; as you breathe out, say or mouth the word *out*. Doing this as you breathe can help keep your mind on deep breathing. If other thoughts come into your mind, don't get upset, simply go back to the words *in* and *out*. The thoughts will pass away.

2. The wave process should take about 10 seconds to get to the hold point. If you don't remember the entire sequence just remember to start at your toes and tense your body upward to your head. Here is the recommended process -Imagine a warm wave touching your toes.

- Curl your toes as hard as you can.
- Curl the arch of your foot, keeping your toes curled.
- Tense your ankle. *Do not relax your toes or arch, but keep adding tense body parts.*
- Tense your calves, holding your foot tense.
- Pull in your stomach, and hold it.
- Holding your feet, legs and chest tense, tense your back and shoulders.
- Tense your arms and make a fist.
- Tense your neck.
- Press your eyelids and tense your forehead, frowning as hard as you can.
- Tense your scalp.

SLEEP AID (Cont.)

3. Hold the tension from head to foot for 5 seconds. Then release, allowing your body to relax, and breathe deeply.
4. Repeat *the Wave* of tension and relaxation from toe to scalp at least 3 times. If you are particularly tense and have a very hard time falling asleep, you may want to do it 6 or 7 times.
5. Each time you relax the tension, turn your thoughts back to your breathing, riding your breath out, and just allowing the breath to flow back in. Repeat in your mind, *in and out, in and out*.
6. Also as you relax the tension be aware of how your body is feeling. Are there parts of your body that are still feeling tense, or have they become relaxed? Then repeat this progressive tension exercise, like a wave up the body.

This exercise has been adapted from the Total Health Care Program's guide, parts of which were adapted from "Patient Education Aids," *Patient Care Magazine*, Aug. 15, 1980, pp 131-135.

4-7-8 Breathing Exercise - This is a great breathing exercise that many have found helpful in falling asleep

The 4 -7- 8 breathing technique works because when you are stressed out, your breathing becomes very shallow. Shallow breathing does not allow your body to get the oxygen needed to perform at its best.

- Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth, right behind your front teeth.
- Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Release your breath from your mouth with a whooshing sound for a count of 8.
- Without a break, breathe in again for a count of 4, repeating the entire technique 3-4 times in a row, then resume normal breathing.

Shared from <http://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/>

BREATHING EXERCISES

For many of us, deep breathing seems strange. One reason is that we often hold our stomach muscles in when we breathe. This interferes with deep breathing and gradually makes shallow "chest breathing" seem normal, which can increase tension and anxiety.

Deep abdominal breathing makes sure we are getting the oxygen our body needs — which can help to slow our heartbeat and lower or stabilize our blood pressure.

Try using the 4-7-8 breathing exercise described in Sleep Aid and the ones listed below to help with handling your stress.

Roll Breathing

The goal of roll breathing is to encourage the full use of your lungs and get in touch with the rhythm of your breathing. It can be practiced in any position, but it is best if you can do it by lying on your back, with your knees bent.

1. Place your left hand on your stomach and your right hand on your chest. Notice how your hands move as you breathe in and out.
2. Practice filling your lower lungs by breathing so that your left hand goes up when you breathe in and your right hand remains still. Always breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Keep your shoulders relaxed, and don't shrug them.
3. When you have filled and emptied your lower lungs 8 to 10 times, add the second step to your breathing: Breathe in first into your lower lungs as before, and then continue inhaling into your upper chest. As you do so, your right hand will rise and your left hand will fall a little as your stomach falls.
4. As you breathe out slowly through your mouth, make a quiet, whooshing sound as first your left hand and then your right hand falls. As you breathe out, feel the tension leaving your body as you become more and more relaxed.
5. Practice breathing in and out in this manner for 3 to 5 minutes. Notice that the movement of your stomach and chest is like a wave, rising and falling in a rhythm.

BREATHING EXERCISES (Cont.)

Morning Breathing

Try morning breathing when you first get up in the morning to relieve muscle stiffness and clear clogged breathing passages. Then use it throughout the day to relieve back tension.

1. From a standing position, bend forward from the waist with your knees slightly bent, letting your arms dangle close to the floor.
2. As you breathe in slowly and deeply, return to a standing position by rolling up slowly, lifting your head last.
3. Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this standing position.
4. Breathe out slowly as you return to the original position.

From WebMD. <http://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/tc/stress-management-breathing-exercises-topic-overview#1>

NARRATIVE EXERCISES

Journaling

Scientific studies support that journaling provides benefits that most people do not expect. The act of writing uses your left brain, which is your rational side. While your left brain is occupied, your right brain is free to create and feel. What writing helps to do is remove mental blocks and allows you to use all of your brain to better understand yourself, others, and the world around you.

One particular benefit is that it reduces stress. Writing about anger, sadness and other painful emotions will hopefully help to release the intensity of these feelings. By doing so you will feel calmer and better able to stay in the present.

Adapted from PsychCentral, <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-health-benefits-of-journaling/>

Letter Writing

Like journaling, letter writing may prove to offer many of the same stress relieving benefits. Keep in mind the letter does not necessarily have to be mailed. You can choose anyone: a family member, a friend or perhaps a celebrity you admire to write to. If you are going to mail your letter, consider writing to someone who is close to you as it provides a way to share your feelings with someone whom you already trust.

*** Note: You may feel uncomfortable with writing because it becomes a written record. If this is a concern, you can still take advantage of the benefits of writing, just destroy what you have written by any means available. You do not have to hang on to what you have written if you don't want to.**

NARRATIVE EXERCISES (Cont.)

Empty Chair

This is a great narrative exercise, especially if you do not enjoy writing. The concept is simple. Instead of composing a letter, imagine carrying on a conversation with the person chosen in the letter-writing exercise. Tell them how you feel and then imagine what their response would be. It is very important to make sure to imagine someone who will be supportive and to also “step into their shoes” to determine their response. Try to see the situation as they would. You don’t want to use this as an opportunity to beat yourself down more.

The conversation should definitely **not** be: You—“I don’t think I can make it through this!” Their response— “You’re right, you should just give up.” Rather, their response **should be** something like— “You have more courage and determination than anyone I know and if anyone can make it through this, I know it is you.”

Battle Buddy

While the relationships you are currently developing with your fellow Soldiers are built on trust, we understand it might take some time to develop the kind of trust necessary to discuss the emotions you are experiencing. If you do have a battle buddy in which you do have such trust, talking with them may be a good way to relieve anxiety and stress.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

Sometimes we feel like we're caught up in a tornado of thoughts and emotions. The exercise below is a quick and easy method for feeling more centered on a tough day. It's also great to practice at times when you're not as stressed so you know exactly how to use it when you need it the most.

As you do this exercise, you may notice thoughts coming into your mind, which is COMPLETELY normal. Our brains are designed to think but we can learn to refocus our attention. Don't get upset that such thoughts keep coming to mind. Just recognize that you are having them, then, redirect your attention back to the present moment. While the following steps relate a process, remember you can adapt it to whatever situation you might be in so that it does not interfere with what is going on around you.

1. Sit in a comfortable upright position with your feet planted flat on the ground. Rest your hands on your legs.

2. Notice your breathing. No need to breathe in any particular way. Just bring attention to each part of the breath—breathing in, breathing out, and the space in between.

3. Start thinking about your 5 senses. One at a time, for about one minute each. The point here is to focus on the present moment and how each sense is being activated in that moment. The order in which you pay attention to each sense does not matter.

Hear: Begin to notice all of the sounds around you. Don't analyze the sounds- just notice them. They are not good or bad, they just are. Sounds might be internal, like breathing or digestion. Sounds might be close by or more distant like the sound of traffic. Are you now hearing more than you were before you started? You may begin to notice subtle sounds you did not hear before. Can you hear them now?

Smell: Now shift your attention to notice the smells around you. Maybe you smell food. You might become aware of the smell of trees or plants if you are outside. Sometimes closing your eyes can help sharpen your other senses.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE (Cont.)

See: Look around you and notice the colors, shapes and objects. As you concentrate on your sight, you may notice things that you hadn't noticed before.

Taste: You can do this one even if you do not have food in your mouth. You may notice an aftertaste of a previous drink or meal. You can just notice your tongue in your mouth, your saliva, and your breath as you exhale. We have tastes in our mouth that often go unnoticed. You can run your tongue over your teeth and cheeks to help you become more aware.

Touch: Last one. Bring your attention to the feeling of your contact with your chair, clothing, and feet on the floor. You can notice the pressure between your feet and the floor or your body and the chair. You can focus on the temperature, like the warmth or coolness of your hands or feet. You might take time to feel some of the objects that you noticed by sight a moment ago. Are they smooth, rough, warm, cold?

Remember this exercise is to help you from continuing to focus on negative thoughts, it allows you to be in the present. Once you are focused you can return to whatever task is at hand. A quick "grounding" version of this exercise is to pick two or three of your senses and identify objects that affect them in your current environment. This quick adaptation might help you get back to the present moment.

Adapted from Clayton State University, Counseling and Psychological Services.
<http://www.clayton.edu/Portals/541/docs/Five%20Senses%20Mindfulness%20Exercise.pdf>

IMAGERY EXERCISE

As with the mindfulness exercise, this imagining exercise works best when you use all your senses in building the picture in your mind - it's more than just "seeing"! The idea is to create an image in your mind of a positive place you would like to be.

If you notice any negative elements entering your positive image, then stop using that image and think of something else. We suggest not using your home as a 'safe place'. You can create a new 'safe place' in your imagination.

Start by getting comfortable in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, and take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing, close your eyes, become aware of any tension in your body, and let that tension go each time you breathe out.

- Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamed about going, somewhere you've seen a picture of, or just a peaceful place you can create in your mind.
- Look around you in that place, notice the colors and shapes. What else do you notice?
- Now imagine the sounds that are around you, or perhaps the silence. Sounds far away and those nearer to you. Those that are more noticeable, and those that are more subtle.
- Think about any smells you may notice there.
- Then focus on what things may feel like - the earth beneath you or whatever is supporting you in that place, the temperature, a breeze, anything else you can touch.
- Now while you're in your peaceful and safe place, give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
- You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now, and bringing yourself back to alertness in the 'here and now'.

Carol Vivyan 2009, permission to use for therapy purposes.
<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/SafePlace.pdf>

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (ANS) REGULATION EXERCISES

Our autonomic nervous system is what regulates our body without us having to think about it. It controls such things as our heart rate and hormone production such as adrenaline. There are two separate parts to the system. The parasympathetic part is what regulates our body when we are in a state of rest. The sympathetic part is what regulates our body when there is a sense of danger.

Hand Warming

When we are stressed or experiencing anxiety, sometimes our bodies enter into a fight or flight mode (the sympathetic nervous system) and blood does not flow as well to our hands because it is being sent to other areas. Our bodies are reacting to that stress and anxiety, even though there may not be real danger currently where we are, our body can go into the fight or flight mode.

The more stressed a person is, the lower the temperature in the hands; the lower the stress level, the higher the temperature should be in the hands. This is the basic principle that mood rings are based on.

A biofeedback technique, aptly named hand warming, is designed to counteract the stress response by increasing your body's "at-rest" nervous system or parasympathetic response. By both focusing your attention on your hands and imagining experiences of warmth (e.g., holding a cup of hot chocolate, sitting by a fireplace or sitting in a sauna or hot tub) you can actually increase the temperature of your hands, which can produce a general sense of calm in your body and mind.

Taken from *101 Trauma-Informed Interventions*, Linda A. Curran, Pesi Publishing, 2013.

Mammalian Diving Reflex

It is believed every mammal has an automated response system for diving in cold water. One of the "at-rest" or parasympathetic nervous system responses to this "diving-reflex" is that the heart rate slows. When one is in a state of extreme stress, being able to think logically suffers dramatically. In order to recover this function, the nervous system needs to be reset. Marsha Linehan, Ph.D. and others have suggested that the activation of the mammalian diving reflex is an effective method of doing that. One way you might be able to achieve this in your current environment is to splash your face with cold water just below the eyes and above the cheek bones.

Adapted from *101 Trauma-Informed Interventions*, Linda A. Curran, Pesi Publishing, 2013.

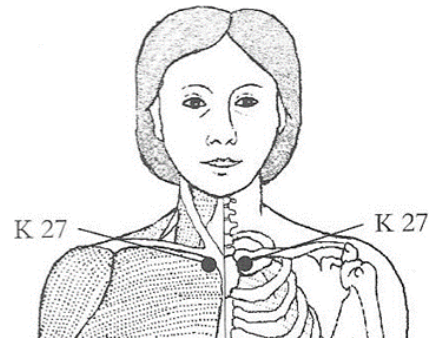
ANS REGULATION EXERCISES (Cont.)

Acupressure Points

During periods of increased stress, levels of both adrenalin and cortisol hormones rise, which decreases the ability of your nervous system to “communicate” as effectively as your body’s nervous system takes on a defensive stance. In this survival state, the body directs “communication” away from the “thinking part of the brain” and towards the sympathetic or “react to danger” branch of the autonomic system. In an actual emergency, this response is life-saving; however, often in traumatized people, no danger is actually *present*, just a reminder of past trauma. That reminder or “trigger” keeps inappropriately alerting the brain and body to continue dumping the stress hormones into your system when they really aren’t needed. The following exercises are designed to counter the misguided activation of the “fight or flight” sympathetic nervous system by engaging the “at-rest” parasympathetic function of the autonomic nervous system.

K-27 Points

The K-27 points are located just below the collarbone. To find them, place your fingertips on the U-shaped notch at the top of the sternum. Move your fingers down one inch, then out toward each shoulder.



Holding K-27 Points

1. First locate the K-27 points and massage both sides.
2. Spread the fingers on your right hand and place it with the palm side down over your breastbone and heart, covering both K-27 points.
3. Spread the fingers on your left hand and place it with the palm side down over your navel.
4. With a bit of pressure, begin to hold these points.
5. Continue holding the pressure, as you inhale to the count of four. Pause. Exhale to the count of four.
6. Repeat step five, increasing the count of exhalation each time by one until you reach a count of eight.

Adapted from *101 Trauma-Informed Interventions*, Linda A. Curran, Pesi Publishing, 2013.

ANS REGULATION EXERCISES (Cont.)

Thumping K-27 Points

1. Locate the K-27 points.
2. Cup your fingers together.
3. Breathing deeply in and out through your nose, begin thumping the K-27 points.
4. After three deep breaths, allow your arms to return to your sides and relax.

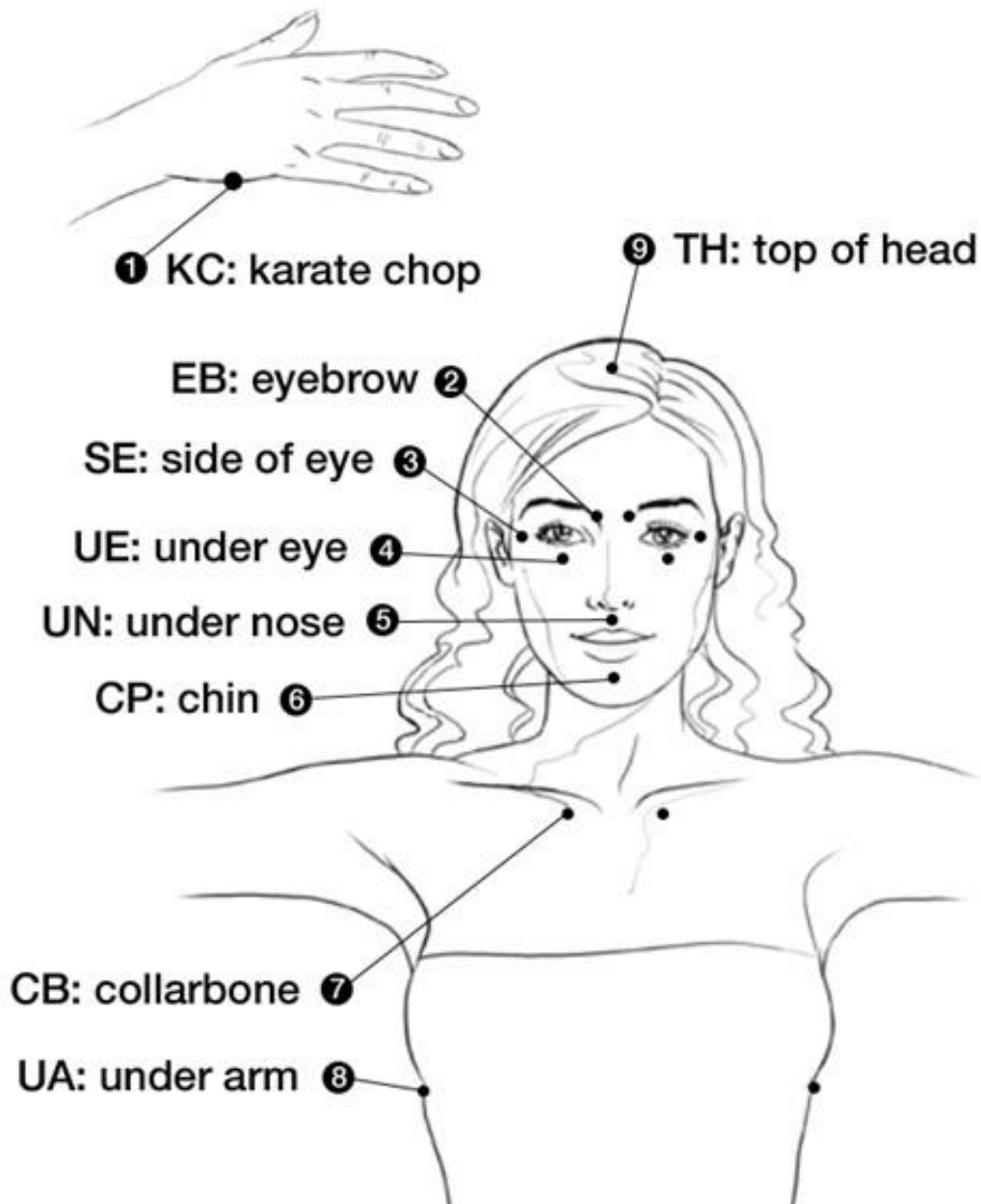


Adapted from *101 Trauma-Informed Interventions*, Linda A. Curran, Pesi Publishing, 2013.

ANS REGULATION EXERCISES (Cont.)

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) tapping

EFT has been described as needle-less acupuncture for the emotions. Repetitive physical patting seems to have a calming and soothing effect. This calming is most likely a result of your “at-rest” or parasympathetic nervous system overcoming your “fight/flight” or sympathetic nervous system reaction. In EFT, you tap gently on certain points on the face and the body as you tune into the problem you want to resolve. The tapping process, combined with your focused attention on the issue you want to resolve, can reduce physical and emotional pain while creating positive effects.



ANS REGULATION EXERCISES (Cont.)

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) tapping (Cont.)

1. The Setup—

- Start your EFT process by tapping firmly on your karate chop point.
- Think about the negative feelings you are wanting to get rid of.
- Rate your level of discomfort on a scale of 1-10.
- State the following or similar phrase three times (out loud or to yourself):
“Even though I have this, _____, I accept myself.”

2. The Sequence -

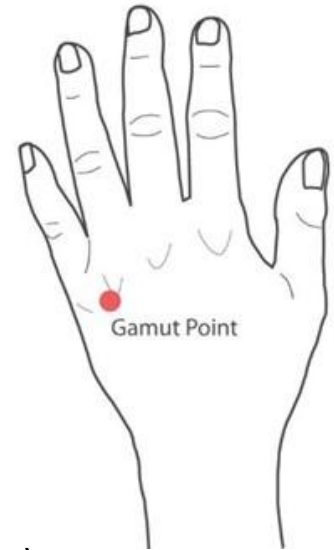
- Place index finger and middle finger together.
- Using the tips of these fingers, tap about seven times on each of the body points listed.
- Tap firmly—but not so hard that you hurt yourself.
- As you tap, keep your mind on the feelings you are wanting to resolve, use a reminder statement such as This _____ (feeling).

ANS REGULATION EXERCISES (Cont.)

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) tapping (Cont.)

3. GAMUT Procedure– This procedure fine-tunes the brain by using eye movements, humming and counting to enhance the effects of tapping. Locate, and continue to tap your GAMUT point while carrying out the following:

- Close your eyes.
- Open your eyes.
- Eyes hard down right while holding the head steady.
- Eyes hard down left while holding the head steady.
- Roll your eyes in a circle clockwise.
- Roll your eyes in a circle counterclockwise.
- Hum any song for a few bars (engages the right brain).
- Count to 5 (engages the left brain).
- Hum any song again for a few bars (engages the right brain).



4. Repeat step 2.

5. Reassess-

- After each round of EFT, take a deep breath in and gently breathe out.
- Take a moment to check in with yourself.
- Notice how you are feeling now, physically and emotionally.
- Without judging yourself right or wrong, just observe.
- Reassess the intensity level of the problem.
- If needed, repeat the process until you achieve an acceptable intensity level.

Adapted from *101 Trauma-Informed Interventions*, Linda A. Curran, Pesi Publishing, 2013.

CLOSING REMARKS

Again, we are truly thankful for your willingness to serve in the U.S. Army. We hope that these coping strategies and stress relief measures will help you, at least temporarily or until you receive additional support. Remember, we encourage you to consider trying any of these coping mechanisms but discontinue them if they make you feel worse. We also suggest you consider professional help, after basic training, if memories of prior trauma interrupt your daily life.

We gratefully appreciate any thoughts you have on this pamphlet, both good and bad, as we continue to improve its content so that it meets the needs of Soldiers. We welcome any suggestions you have as a way of looking out for those who will follow in your footsteps. If you have strategies that work for you that are not listed here, please let us know. Perhaps you were able to adapt one of these exercises in a particular way or during a particular circumstance that proved beneficial, or perhaps you discovered that there was no way to successfully utilize an exercise because of the demands of basic training. We would love to hear about your experiences. To share your thoughts, please email us at: usarmy.sill.imcom-central.mbx.usag-sharp@mail.mil.

We wish you the best in your future and what lies ahead and remember, we are here to help if and when you need us.

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