

# MRT Skills, Unit Two: Hunt the Good Stuff



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Cornaby discusses the importance of optimism during a Master Resiliency Training class at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, June 8, 2021. The Army designed the MRT program to enhance Soldiers' psychological and emotional well-being and promote resilience. Could emphasizing individuals' changing states of mind make the initiative even more successful? (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Elizabeth Hackbarth)

## A Resilient State of Mind

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**T**he Army designed the Master Resiliency Training (MRT) program to enhance Soldiers' psychological and emotional well-being and promote resilience. However, the program disproportionately emphasizes the Soldier's state of being.

Such an approach succeeds with Soldiers who possess a strong state of mind but falls short with those who don't. An analytical review shows individuals are only as resilient as their state of mind, so they need sound ones before a program focuses on their state of being (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

The prevailing MRT model, which underscores resiliency as a static state of being, should shift its focus toward promoting resiliency as an adaptable and dynamic state of mind – thereby better equipping Soldiers to navigate the challenges they will encounter.

To demonstrate this, let's first clarify what *state of mind* means and then better understand *state of being* by examining the MRT model.

### State of Mind

According to Oosterwijk et al. (2012), the state of mind refers to the intangible aspects of one's life experiences, such as mood, attitude, disposition, and overall thought process. The state of mind is the foundational structure for all tangible life experiences (such as what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch).

The conventional view of the state of mind sees the mind as a network connecting our nervous system, which sends messages throughout our entire body.

This view hypothesizes that the mind receives information from the five senses and interprets it to

generate mood, attitude, disposition, and an overall thought process (Oosterwijk et al., 2012). However, recent studies have challenged this perspective to say mood, attitude, disposition, and overall thought process affect the five senses, which in turn affects our perception of the world around us (Oosterwijk et al., 2012).

A study investigating the influence of mood on the perception of geographical slant provides an example of mood affecting outlook. Participants in a sad mood reported hills to be steeper compared to the description of those in a happy mood (Riener et al., 2011).

## The Prevailing MRT Model

The Army's Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2) program drives the prevailing MRT model. Five dimensions of strength form the bedrock of the model's framework: emotional, physical, social, spiritual, and familial (Department of the Army, 2014).

A literature review suggests three dimensions focus on the static state of being: the physical, social, and familial. A state of being is the tangible and measurable aspect of life, experienced through the five senses. What you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch you perceive as your quality of life at the moment and represent your state of being (Kaufman, 2020).

Only the spiritual and emotional dimensions truly focus on the state of mind. An analysis of the MRT model reveals its disproportionate focus on the state of being as reflected in the five dimensions of strength (Department of the Army, 2014) and an emphasis on physical, tangible aspects (such as the Soldier's physical fitness).

### Physical Fitness

Army Regulation (AR) 350-53 explains the physical dimension as engagement in and proficiency with strength- and endurance-increasing physical activities. It also says the dimension encompasses maintaining a healthy body composition through training, diet, and physical activity.

The MRT program emphasizes physical fitness as a crucial component, so the Army uses it to help Soldiers maintain their physical health. It is an essential MRT tool for handling challenging physical situations (Department of the Army, 2014).

However, studies have shown how the state of mind affects physical faculties. State of mind relates so closely to physical fitness that achieving one without the other would be difficult. According to Box et al. (2019), personal physical fitness is more significant than just the physical. It is a state-of-mind application.

Individuals rely on their current state-of-mind modes, not the physical, for motivation to execute personal physical fitness objectives (Box et al., 2019). Therefore, building on Soldiers' state of mind will increase their motivation by addressing how they feel, think, and act. Their state of mind also affects how they will engage in activities (LCMC Health, 2023).

### Social Connections

Social connections are another dimension with a disproportionate focus on the state of mind. The current MRT model asserts these connections support Soldiers facing mental challenges and represent a stress management tool within the program (Department of the Army, 2014).

The current MRT model emphasizes building and maintaining social connections as a foundational part of the program. The model asserts that building on Soldiers' ability to maintain social connections will increase their resiliency in dealing with difficult situations (Department of the Army, 2014). However, Soldiers who deal with emotional issues like anxiety are often socially awkward and face challenges in

maintaining social connections.

The inability to build and maintain social connections leads to loneliness and isolation, negatively impacting a Soldier's state of mind. Although social connections strengthen stress management and social support, if Soldiers don't possess a sound state of mind, they won't realize the benefits of social connections – including connections with family members (International Journal of Public Health, 2022).

### The Family Dimension

The MRT program, through CSF2, provides Soldiers and families with training tools to address issues at home – problems capable of escalating into unnecessarily stressful and adverse situations (Department of the Army, 2014). However, further research shows the



The Army uses the Master Resiliency Training program to help Soldiers maintain their health. Motivation, state of mind, and physical fitness all play a factor in how individuals confront challenges. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Kevin Reece)



The Master Resiliency Training model accentuates social connections' importance. The model asserts that building on Soldiers' ability to maintain relationships will increase their resiliency in dealing with difficulties. (U.S. Army Photo by Cadet Amanda Lin)

family training tools MRT provides are essentially tangible reactionary products to address things like conflict resolution and identify icebergs and triggers (Department of the Army, 2014).

Reactionary responses offer families short-term solutions for long-term problems. The MRT program must actively seek out and address families' underlying emotional issues to provide applicable resources (GGI Insights, 2024).

Having behavioral health professionals in the program who offer individual counseling sessions for Soldiers and family members to identify and work through things like emotional scars and childhood trauma would be a proactive approach to reinforcing the family dimension. Building the Soldiers' and family members' state of mind lays the foundation for the five dimensions.

## Conclusion

A solid scientific and psychological research foundation supports the current MRT model, which has tremendously impacted the force (Millacci, 2017). The validity of the model and its intent are beyond reproach. This article merely aims to highlight new information perhaps not considered during the program's creation and inception.

Although the Army's current MRT program is comprehensive and backed by scientific and psychological research, its design doesn't encompass emerging information. The current MRT model, which predominantly underscores resiliency as a static state of being, must fundamentally shift toward promoting resiliency as an adaptable and dynamic state of mind to better equip Soldiers to navigate challenges. ■

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