

# Improving The Behavioral Health of Military Communities

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## Two University-AF Partnerships (NORTH STAR & ARMOR) for Translating Evidence-Based Interventions into Community Action

Forum on Military Families in Transition: Stress, Resilience, and Well-Being  
Walter Reed Army Institute of Research  
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**NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**

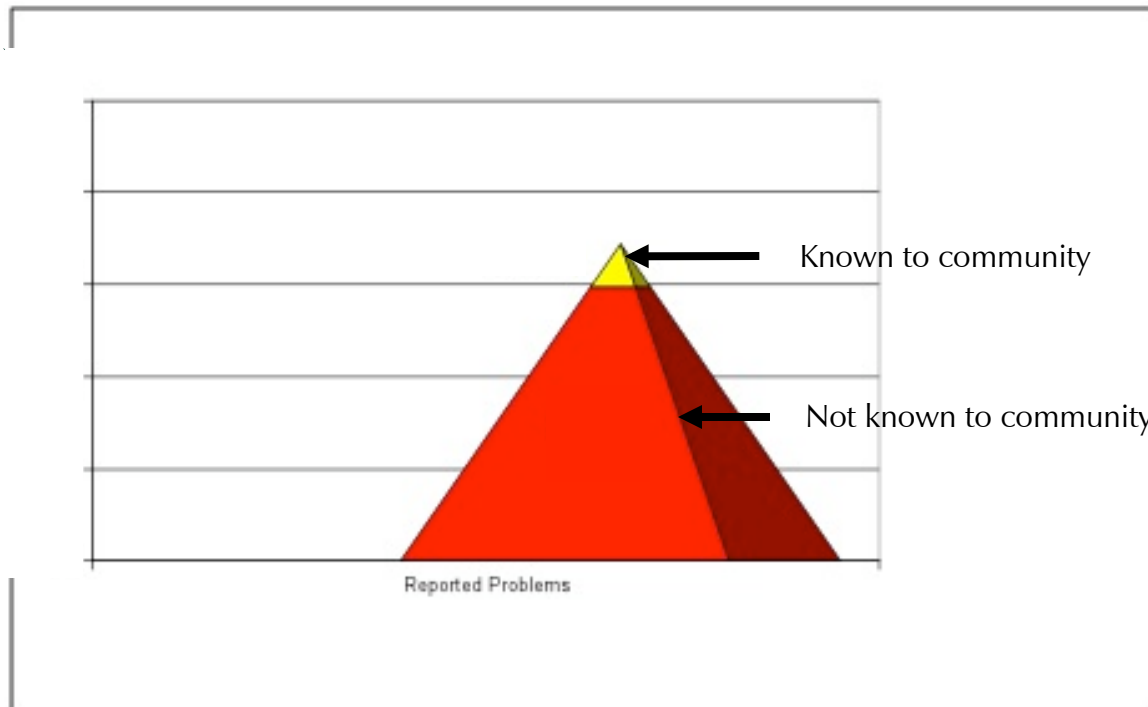
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# Acknowledgments

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- NORTH STAR
  - Partnership with U.S. Air Force and 28 AF communities
  - Funding
    - Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP)
      - DAMD 17-03-1-0166 (2003-2006)
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- ARMOR
  - Partnerships with
    - U.S. Air Force Security Forces
      - CDMRP D61\_I\_10 J5\_100
    - U.S. Air Force Airman and Family Readiness Centers
      - USDA 2010-48696-21892

# Challenge For Prevention



For problems people would prefer to keep **secret**...

- True prevalence rarely known
- Those in need rarely avail themselves of preventive services

# Prevention Science Approach

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- Targets risk/protective factors, NOT problems themselves (e.g., *Communities that Care*, Hawkins & Catalano, 1990; Uncontrolled Trial: Feinberg, Greenberg, Osgood, Sartorius & Bontempo, 2007; RCT: Hawkins, 2010)
  - Uses data to select strongest risk/protective factors
  - Allows communities to identify most influential targets (risk/protective factors associated with multiple secretive problems)
- Uses empirically-supported activities to reduce risk and increase resilience

# NORTH STAR Goals

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- Reduce prevalence of secretive problems (family maltreatment, suicidality, alcohol abuse/drug use)
- Improve each community's risk/protective factor profile
  - Implement and evaluate empirically-supported activities
  - Community outcomes owned by all stakeholders, not just Med Group or particular agencies
- Test sustainable approach

# NORTH STAR Approach

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- Local control, local decision making, & sustainability
- Use data
  - help set priorities
  - choose risk/protective factors to target
- Empirically-supported activities to target leverage points
- Monitor impact
- Evaluate effectiveness
  - Improvements in targeted risk/protective factors
  - Reductions in prevalence of secretive problems

# NORTH STAR RCT Results

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- NORTH STAR bases vs. controls
  - Significantly reduced alcohol abuse
  - Likely reduced child emotional abuse
- Under adverse prevention conditions (moderated effects), NORTH STAR bases significantly reduced vs. controls
  - Partner physical abuse
  - Suicidality
  - Prescription drug misuse

# NORTH STAR: The New Trial

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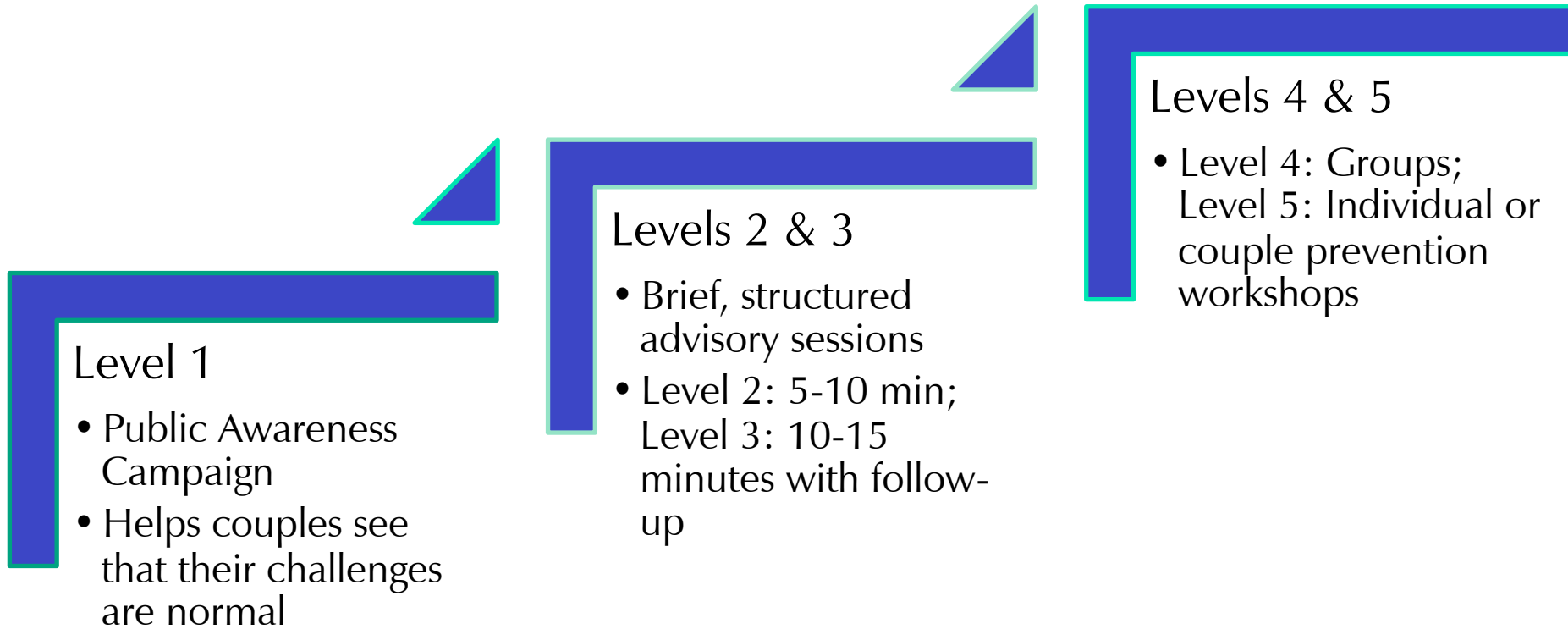
- Community prevention teams' capacity variable
- Work units most powerful element of AF
  - Most directly affected by members' secretive problems (reduced readiness; diversion of leader time and energy)
  - Greatest incentive to act
- NORTH STAR implementation can be streamlined
- More statistical power needed



# ARMOR

- Integrate universal outreach, informal prevention, and formal prevention/intervention for couple problems into a **unified strategy**
  - Stovepiped; thicket of agencies
  - A better way – bring EBI to community nodes
- AD members and partners can receive **what they need, when they need it, and from whom they prefer to get it**
  - Model: Triple P
- Currently being tested with 2 AF Security Forces squadrons and 16 Airman and Family Readiness Ctrs

# Stepped Approach



# Action Sheets (Sample – Front)

**Action Strategy**

**1. TARGET**  
What do I want to achieve?  
.....

**2. ASSESS**  
What am I doing now?  
.....  
What are the pros of what I'm doing now?  
.....  
What are the cons of what I'm doing now?  
.....

**3. PLAN**  
What exactly do I need to do to hit target?  
.....  
When/where/how will I do this?  
.....

**4. ACT** — Carry out plan this week

**5. REVIEW**

0	1	2	3	4
Didn't do it	Gave it some thought	Tried, no success	Tried, some success	Tried, complete success

What exactly did I do?  
.....

Positive outcomes of Action Strategy:  
.....

Negative outcomes of Action Strategy:  
.....

Changes needed to hit target better:  
.....

**6. RATE ARMOR:**  
SF members visit:  
[http://tiny.cc/USAFARMOR\\_gr\\_SF](http://tiny.cc/USAFARMOR_gr_SF)  
A&FRC customers visit:  
[http://tiny.cc/USAFARMOR\\_gr\\_AFRC](http://tiny.cc/USAFARMOR_gr_AFRC)



**What is ARMOR?**

**ARMOR** can help you protect and maintain your relationship.

**ARMOR** is different because it lets you decide what you want to target and how to take action. It brings you tested help:

- From whom you want
- As much as you want
- When you want

Which one is right for you?

- Self-paced tip sheets
- Coaching
- Short workshops
- In depth assistance

**ARMOR** is brought to you by research teams at New York University, Texas A&M, U. of Tennessee Med. Center, & the U.S. Air Force Medical Service. Funded by the Defense Medical Research & Development Program (Grant D6L110 J5\_100) and by AF Airman & Family Readiness Headquarters.  
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Communication: Stress

**Couples Coping with Stress**



We take care of our own

# Action Sheets (Sample – Inside)

## Stress is a given. How you and your partner respond is not.

### What is Stress?

- Stress can arise from a situation that strains or goes beyond our abilities to adapt or cope.
- We expect our relationships to help us cope with stressors outside the home and inside the home...
  - ...but sometimes relationships can add rather than remove stress.
- It's hard to ask our partners for support when you think they might be the problem!

### How Stress Affects Relationships

Research has documented four key effects that stress has on relationships:

- Shared time reduced
- Worsened communication
- Increased physical & psychological problems
- Clearer personality differences



### Solution – Couple Coping

You can either cope as a unit (which will make your relationship battle tested and stronger) or allow the world to divide and conquer you! Talking to each other:

- Lowers your burden (in and out of the home)
- Strengthens the bond with your partner
- Increases trust
- Helps both you and your partner feel valued and supported

## What You Can Do

1. **Set aside some time** (e.g., over dinner) to talk about what's stressing and use good communication skills.

	Speaker	Listener
Be Clear	1. Be specific 2. Share	1. Pay attention 2. Ask questions 3. Summarize in your own words
Be Considerate	3. Include positives 4. Show consideration even when expressing negatives	4. Let your partner know you're listening, even if you disagree 5. Reserve judgment

## What You Can Do

2. **Support each other by showing you care.** Do small acts that make your partner feel supported on a daily basis. Ex: rubbing partner's shoulders, taking out garbage without being asked, taking care of the kids.
3. **Support each other by listening.**
  - Listen to your partner without trying to help him/her solve the stressor
  - Pay attention to what s/he seems to be feeling
4. **Support each other by making important decisions together.**
  - Clarify the problem
  - Brainstorm solutions (TIP: Each partner comes up with *at least 2 options*)
  - Agree on a plan or Action Strategy
    - Summarize and ask questions
    - Consider pros and cons of each option
  - Put it into action
5. Create a **list of stress-reducing rituals to do together.** These might include:
  - Exercising
  - Taking a walk
  - Going out to dinner
  - Listening to music or going to a concert
6. Get enough **sleep** and/or make time for relaxation daily.
7. **Take deep breaths.**
8. **Use a "stress temperature".** When you or your partner are at a 5 or above, start engaging in a stress-reducing ritual, take deep breaths, and/or talk about it.

# Discussion Points

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- Secretive problems need different approach
- Most critical issues
  - Palatability (focus on risk/protective factors *not* problems themselves)
  - Reach
  - Access (breaking free of formal agency model)
- For guard/reserve and veterans, these issues even more pronounced