# Building Resilience, Navigating Stress

**By Chaplain William Stewart**

Each September, we set aside special time to focus on one of the most difficult issues facing our Navy, military and society as a whole … suicide. Therefore, we call September, Suicide Prevention and Awareness (SPA) Month. The CNO has listed four main themes in preventing suicide we need to focus on, in order to curb this unfortunate trend we are seeing. I would like to talk about the first two of these so we can deeply reflect on how they affect our lives as Sailors, family members and members of the Yokosuka community. The first topic is "Building Resilience."

A basic definition of resilience is the ability to recover quickly from setbacks or to spring back quickly into shape after being bent or stretched. Obviously, most all people go through difficult times during the course of their lives; it is just a part of life itself. Most people do fine and bounce back because of strong resilience, but occasionally for some, the challenge or multiple challenges become too much and it is then that the risk of depression or even suicide grows.

The concept of resilience brings to mind one of my favorite cheap toys I had as a child; the rubber band. It seemed that what I could do with rubber bands was only limited by my imagination, and sometimes that imagination even got me into deep trouble…I won't go there! But what I also remember about rubber bands is that even they had limitations and when stretched too far or for too long, they either broke or would not return to their regular shape. Another thing I remember however is that when I would combine and intertwine several rubber bands together, their increased resilience would become so strong it was nearly impossible to break or warp them. I believe we can apply this to human life as well.

Like the rubber bands, to have the best resiliency we need to rely upon not just one strand or source, but several. Experts in this field explain some of the things that best build and maintain resiliency, for example, nurturing one's faith or spirituality, finding purpose and meaning in life, having a positive outlook on life, staying physically fit, having flexible thinking and being able to accept things in life that are oftentimes not within our control. Understandably, since each person is beautifully unique, some strands of one's resilience may be quite strong while others are weaker or non-existent. But it goes without saying that the more sources of resilience we have in our lives, the stronger we will become to withstand the challenges that will inevitably come our way. Good resilience does not happen overnight, but like we know full well as Sailors who ride the mighty seas, we cannot wait for the storm before we start rigging the ship, we must prepare ahead of time if we are to withstand and remain healthy.

The second SPA topic we should look at is "Navigating Stress." I like the title because deep down, each of us know there is really no way to totally eradicate stress, indeed we have to navigate it. In fact, we should not want stress to totally disappear. If we did not have a certain degree of stress in our lives, we would probably accomplish very little as it is one factor in the development of motivation. Interestingly, over the years I have taught stress management classes, I ask those attending to give me their definition of stress. More often than not, they give me events in their lives that cause them stress. I then get the opportunity to explain that what they are describing isn't really stress, but stressors.

Stress then is not any specific event, but the physical and emotional reaction to the event. And while there are certain events that tend to generate stress for most anyone, most all stress comes from the perception or interpretation of the event, not the event itself. That is why stress is not only very unique for each person, but if dealt with properly, also very manageable. If we can learn to think about how we perceive certain events that cause us stress, we can then determine better ways of handling future situations, thus reducing stress. Or, when we have a choice, we may decide to navigate around the source or event. It's a lot like our ships here in Yokosuka. We have great meteorologists on staff who give our leaders information about our regional weather. If storms are not too bad, our ships and great Sailors can handle them with no problem. However, when severe storms or hurricanes approach, we take measures to ensure safety.

It doesn't necessarily mean our ships and Sailors wouldn't be able to handle them, but why take the risk. This reminds me of a popular saying I oftentimes hear today that goes, "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger." While I agree with the general premise, I would rather none of us be used in a test case to prove the theory.

That fact of the matter is, we will all have storms in life that cause stress; it's a given. Also, each of us have limits as to how much stress we can handle, but there are proven techniques we can use to reduce bad stress in our lives; to calm the storms of life a bit if you will. For example, eating healthy and maintaining a good regimen of exercise not only helps us feel better about ourselves, but it releases good substances in our bodies and generally gives us a more positive outlook on life. This is exactly what we need to interpret events of life in a more positive light and keep stress from taking a grip. Additionally, finding ways to get proper rest is important. Most everyone leads a very busy life these days, but ensuring we get good rest when we can is vital, and it doesn't have to just be our regular sleep. We can take quick naps in the daytime or meditate with relaxing music.

Setting realistic and attainable goals is also important. One of my favorite anonymous sayings is, "God didn't do it all in one day. What makes me think I can?" If we expect too much of ourselves, or others, we are only setting ourselves up for rough seas of stress.

Finally, we need to understand, the only person we can ever change is ourselves. Certainly we can influence others and hopefully we do, in good ways. But we need to be able to understand and accept that which is not within our control. To me, this is why the Serenity Prayer is so crucial to know and follow. Many of you probably already know it, but it goes: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." Whether you apply this concept within a particular religious context or not, these words are very wise and stress relieving.

Again, I hope each of us looks deeply into our own lives and the precious lives of those around us this month as we focus on Suicide Prevention and Awareness. We can be such a positive influence on our Navy, community and society as a whole if we will simply work together and take care of one another. May God bless each of you as we contemplate good ways of building resilience and navigating stress.

***EXHIBIT** cont. from page 1*

132 aircraft and more than 15,000 personnel to support the Japan Self-Defense Forces humanitarian assistance disaster and relief operations in north eastern Japan," said Owen.

"The Navy delivered more than 260 tones of supplies, searched more than 3,200 square kilometers of ocean during more than 160 recon flights over land and water, distributed emergency food and water to communities isolated by the tsunami and worked very closely with the Japan Maritime and Ground Self Defense Forces (JMSDF)."

For their part, the JMSDF sent approximately 16,000 personnel and 59 ships to support the disaster area.

"I think that one thing we learned right off the bat is how quickly the US and Japanese forces can work together in the time of a crisis," said Owen. "It's one of the reasons we're here. We look at Japan not just as allies, we look at them as a friend and a neighbor and we're a part of this community."

Owen also emphasized that due to the disaster, the base has learned from the Japanese how to better practice energy conservation due to the energy crunch which according to him has resulted in a 15 percent reduction of energy use as compared to levels of 2010.

In closing, Owen felt that it was important for Japanese citizens to view the exhibit so they could see first hand what the forward-deployed forces mission was for being in the region.

"I would like them (Japanese people) to come and see it. I would like them to see what we did and never forget what happened over a year ago," said Owen. "You don't learn without always educating yourself on what occurred in the past. I want them (Japanese) to recognize what we did and I want them to recognize that we're here to help again if anything should happen and most importantly I want everyone to realize that we haven't forgotten and we're not going to forget anytime soon. And out to those people who are still recovering, the message I want to send is hang in there. We are behind you. You are strong people and you will all recover."

The photo exhibit is scheduled to be on display until Sept. 27. The Japan – U.S. Culture Center is open Monday through Thursday from 1 p.m.-6 p.m.

UNITED STATES AND JAPAN HAND IN HAND TODAY AND ALWAYS

*237th Navy Birthday*
*Yokosuka Ball*
*Purdy Gym, Oct. 13, 2012*

For ticket info contact
HM1 Lewis at 243-7381

## Kinnick Sports

*Week of Sept. 14 - 20*

**Volleyball**
Fri, Sept. 14 at 5:30 p.m. Kinnick vs. Yokota in Yokota
Sat, Sept. 15 at 10 a.m. Zama vs. Yokota in Yokosuka
Tue, Sept. 18 at 5:30 p.m. Kinnick vs. YIS in Yokohama

**Tennis**
Fri, Sept. 14 at 4 p.m. CAJ vs. Kinnick in Yokosuka

**Football**
Fri, Sept. 14 at 4:30 p.m.(JV) 7:30 p.m.(V) ASIJ vs. Kinnick in Yokosuka

**Cross-Country**
Sat, Sept. 15 at 9 a.m. Kanto Schools in Tama