



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## **New psycho-educational group educates Soldiers about healthy thinking**

By: Stacy Neumann, Medical Department Activity Public Affairs

The instructor elaborated on cognitive models and the Yerkes-Dodson law. The students recited the three types of responses to a situation: physical, emotional and behavioral. It's the kind of lecture you might expect to find in any college psychology class across the country. But this class is in a Fort Carson conference room.

The MEDDAC Department of Behavioral Health debuted its "Behavioral Health 101" class in November of last year. Each of the Embedded Behavioral Health teams around the post conducts the course for Soldiers within their brigades who have sought behavioral health help. At EBHT #3, the four week course starts on the first Wednesday of every month and introduces troops to the scope of behavioral health services offered on post. Most of the course, though, focuses on basic behavioral health concepts.

"It's really important for people to understand what's available but also to get a firsthand view of methodology. Our soldiers should know how to use the cognitive-behavioral concepts presented in this group," said Dr. Bob Stewart. "I want them to go out and take this with them into every facet of their lives. They're essentially adding to their psychological armor."

Stewart is a psychologist with EBHT #3. He likes to call his class "Healthy Thinking." On one Wednesday morning, he scrawled "Session II: When our thoughts work against us" onto the white board. Thirteen Soldiers pulled out blue folders with worksheets, started laughing and trading stories about an "activating event" that had occurred in the last week. The group broke down and dissected anecdotes about getting pulled over by police, trouble at the post office, divorce delays and more.

"I'm big on techniques. Resources are helpful. I need concepts and strategies," said one female Soldier. "This is teaching me how to approach my anger."

Animated and energetic, Stewart went on to talk about how beliefs and perceptions can shape a person's reactions to stressful events. Through personal stories, some theoretical models and self-monitoring, Stewart wants to help Soldiers respond to adverse situations more effectively.



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Stewart said, "They're responsible for their behavioral health and they are responsible for their behavior or responses to various situations. After this class, some have said to me, 'I have control over my anxiety. I always thought I was just an anxious person.'"

A male Soldier said just one week of the course has already helped him. "It changed my week. I look at everything differently. I can examine situations before I get irate. Instead of worrying about something, I smiled and laughed. Everything got easier." He smiled and added, "I already told one Soldier that his anger was counterproductive."

Stewart said the first two iterations of the class have been popular. He's hoping to start offering two courses a month. Soldiers who feel they need help are screened and diagnosed by behavioral health specialists. They can then be referred to the class.

Near the end of the session, Stewart turned to the Soldiers and threw up his hands. "How much control do we have over situations that occur in our lives?"

"Zero," answered a chorus of voices.

"That's right," the recently retired Colonel affirmed. "What we have control over is how we respond to the events that occur. Stuff happens."

When Soldiers walk out of Healthy Thinking, they'll know how to react.

