

An AI-generated graphic showing a soldier's head in profile, facing right. The head is semi-transparent, revealing a landscape inside. The landscape features a bright, orange and yellow sky with a large, glowing sun or moon, and dark, silhouetted mountains or hills. The soldier's face is pale, and their hair is light-colored. The overall image has a dramatic, high-contrast aesthetic.

WHY THE ARMY SHOULD KEEP THE MASTER RESILIENCE TRAINING PROGRAM

By Staff Sergeant Jacob P. Hogencamp

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The demands placed on modern Soldiers continue to increase not only in the physical domain but also in the mental and emotional domains. Higher operational tempos, exposure to trauma, and prolonged separations from family have made psychological resilience essential for mission preparedness. To meet those challenges, the Army previously implemented the Master Resilience Training (MRT) program, a strategic initiative designed to strengthen mental fitness and enhance unit cohesion. MRT was later removed in an effort to streamline training requirements and consolidate time with other mandatory models, including suicide prevention, equal opportunity (EO), and anti-terrorism training.^{1,2} Although this change may have reduced some scheduling challenges, it created a gap in the Army's ability to prepare Soldiers for the mental and emotional demands of service. A modernized MRT program would improve psychological resilience, strengthen unit cohesion, and support long-term mental health. The Army must reinstate and update the MRT program to enhance Soldier lethality, as these skills are essential to building a force capable of thriving in high-stress, high-stakes environments.

Overview of the MRT Program

MRT is a proactive educational initiative that prepares Soldiers to manage adversity before it arises by providing practical, skills-based instruction. It is not a therapeutic intervention or psychotherapeutic practice; rather, MRT focuses on identifying cognitive distortions, building mental toughness, and regulating emotions in high-stress situations. Through the program, Soldiers develop competencies in advanced communication strategies, growth mindset principles, and goal-setting techniques informed by research from the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. By equipping Soldiers with these tools before crises occur, MRT helps them establish a strong mental foundation that reduces the likelihood of stress escalation.³

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Reasons for Removing the MRT Program

Formally discontinued in 2025, the MRT program was phased out as part of a broader effort to reduce mandatory training requirements and increase unit-level flexibility. Although the Army proposed incorporating psychological resilience into routine training rather than maintaining a stand-alone course, this decision raised significant concern across the force. Many Soldiers and noncommissioned officers feared that eliminating MRT would also eliminate a shared language, a structured instructional framework, and a science-based method for developing strength and resilience in high-stress situations.

Reasons to Reinstate the MRT Program

The following points illustrate why reinstating the MRT program is essential to the Army’s long-term readiness and resilience:

- **Enhances Readiness in Combat Settings**
In combat operations, resilience is essential for helping Soldiers maintain emotional stability under intense stress. The MRT program equips them with critical skills to think clearly in chaotic environments, manage emotional responses, and cope with stress effectively. Beyond physical strength, Soldiers require emotional and cognitive adaptability to process battlefield information, respond to rapid changes, and make calm, tactical decisions. By improving mental agility and emotional control, MRT enhances operational focus and readiness, serving as a force multiplier on the battlefield.
- **Strengthens Resilience in Garrison Settings**
Although MRT was initially designed to support combat readiness, its benefits extend into garrison environments where Soldiers face demanding schedules, administrative pressures, and leadership challenges. The program provides essential tools for emotional regulation and effective coping,

enabling Soldiers to manage both combat-related stressors and the daily pressures of military life. By strengthening mental resilience, MRT promotes healthier work-life balance and reduces the risk of burnout. As Soldiers learn to prioritize their mental well-being, they contribute to a more cohesive and supportive unit culture. This proactive approach prepares individuals to navigate unexpected difficulties and enhances overall unit effectiveness.

- **Addresses Rising Mental Health Disorder Diagnoses**
Recent data indicates that the Army reports the highest number of mental health disorder diagnoses among the military branches, including adjustment disorder, anxiety disorders, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).⁴ This trend underscores the need for proactive programs like MRT that build psychological preparedness before Soldiers reach a point of crisis. By equipping Soldiers with skills to manage stress and adversity, the MRT program can help reduce the incidence of mental health disorders, making it a vital component of the Army’s training framework.

- **Builds Stronger Teams Through Communication and Cohesion**
MRT serves as a cornerstone of team development by strengthening interpersonal communication and enhancing unit cohesion. It equips Soldiers with a shared vocabulary and the ability to identify entrenched thought patterns and worst-case thinking, enabling them to better understand their own reactions as well as those of their subordinates. These skills promote mutual respect, reduce tension, and contribute to the formation of more resilient teams.

Through MRT techniques, Soldiers develop a common emotional language that supports conflict resolution, performance reviews, and personal check-ins. This capability is especially critical for junior leaders who must resolve conflicts quickly, de-escalate tense situations, and train others under high-pressure conditions. By reinforcing these

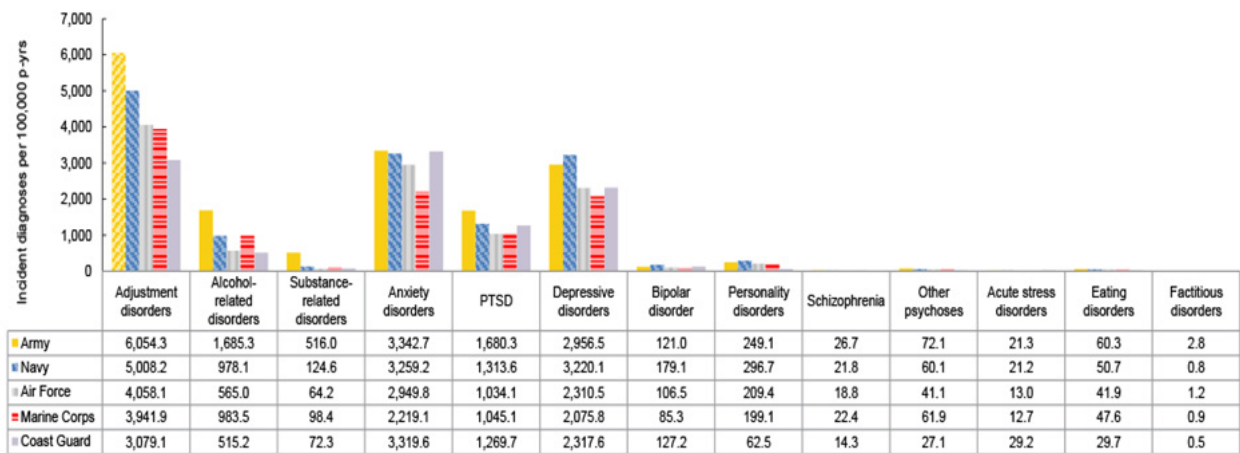


Figure 1. Incidence rates of mental health disorder diagnoses by service, active component, U.S. Armed Forces, 2019–2023.
Note. Adapted from *Diagnoses of Mental Health Disorder Among Active Component Service Members, 2019–2023* (Defense Health Agency, 2024), *Health.mil*. <https://www.health.mil/News/Articles/2024/12/01/MSMR-Mental-Health-Update-2024>



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competencies, MRT enhances both unit and mission effectiveness and instills confidence in a team's ability to perform under stress.

- **Reduces Stigma and Supports Suicide Prevention**

MRT plays a crucial role in helping Soldiers address mental health issues by normalizing emotional regulation as a fundamental component of military readiness. Historically, many Service members hesitated to report stress, anxiety, or depression out of fear that doing so would be perceived as weakness or jeopardize their ability to serve. By integrating emotional awareness into mission preparedness, MRT helps reduce this stigma and reframes mental health care as a strength rather than a liability.

This cultural shift supports the Army's broader suicide-prevention efforts by reinforcing the idea that seeking help is a proactive step toward resilience. MRT equips both commanders and Soldiers with early-intervention tools, including recognizing warning signs, developing self-awareness, and fostering supportive environments where individuals feel safe asking for assistance.

- **Fosters a Culture of Support**

MRT produces organizational benefits that extend far beyond individual self-development by cultivating a unit culture grounded in trust, shared language, and psychological safety. Leaders and Soldiers who regularly participate in MRT are more likely to check on one another's well-being, respond quickly to signs of distress, and practice open communication. The program helps reduce feelings of isolation—often associated with stress or trauma—and reinforces that seeking assistance carries no stigma. In doing so, MRT becomes a cultural pillar that supports long-term resilience and mission success.

MRT also strengthens the leadership environment by demonstrating that mental wellness is an essential part

of personnel care. When Soldiers see their leaders openly applying MRT techniques—such as identifying stress triggers or using effective self-talk—it reinforces that resilience is a shared responsibility. Over time, this top-down reinforcement creates a ripple effect of healthy coping strategies across the formation. This approach aligns with the Army's commitment to building trust and fostering a positive command climate.

- **Improvements to the MRT Program**

To improve the effectiveness of the MRT program, it should incorporate modern, flexible, engaging, and personalized instructional practices. One significant enhancement would be the addition of a digital, mobile-responsive training module, allowing Soldiers to access the course material at their convenience in both combat and garrison environments. Interactive elements—such as branching scenarios, decision-making simulations, and real-world examples—would help translate MRT principles into daily military operations. The curriculum should also be tailored to specific military occupational specialties and operational settings, making the training more practical and immediately applicable.

Research from the Office of Educational Technology at the U.S. Department of Education (2017) indicates that learners retain information more effectively when it is delivered through technology-enhanced, personalized experiences aligned with real-life scenarios and cognitive preferences.⁵ Embracing these strategies would enable the Army to modernize MRT into a high-quality program that better meets Soldiers' needs. These updates could be integrated into existing digital training platforms, such as the Army Learning Management System (ALMS).

Conclusion

Soldiers face complex psychological demands that are not confined within the physical domain, requiring mental stamina, emotional regulation, and adaptability. The

discontinuation of MRT has exposed a significant gap in how the U.S. Army prepares its personnel for the psychological challenges inherent in military service and combat. MRT was not an auxiliary program; it was a core resource that enhanced readiness and solidified unit cohesion. It enabled Soldiers to remain composed and efficient in high-stress situations. By improving combat effectiveness, supporting suicide-prevention efforts, and strengthening team dynamics, MRT delivered measurable benefits across the force.

Reinstating and modernizing the program is not merely beneficial—it is strategically necessary. If the Army intends to maintain a combat-ready force capable of fighting and winning in complex operational environments, it must invest as fully in the psychological resilience of its Soldiers as it does in equipment and tactical doctrine. Such an investment will shape the Army's future preparedness and ensure the long-term effectiveness of the force. ✂

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Endnotes:

- ¹ Army streamlines training requirements to enhance warfighting readiness," U.S. Army, https://www.army.mil/article/284317/army_streamlines_training_requirements_to_enhance_warfighting_readiness
- ² Army cuts down on mandatory training requirements for troops, makes some courses optional," Corey Dickstein, Stars and Stripes, <https://www.stripes.com/branches/army/2025-04-03/army-soldiers-training-courses-17355972.html>
- ³ Reivich, K., Seligman, M. E. P., and McBride, S., "Master resilience training in the U.S. Army" *American Psychologist*, 66(1) (2011) 25–34. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021897>
- ⁴ Update: Diagnoses Of Mental Health Disorder Among Active Component U.S. Armed Forces, 2019–2023," Health.mil, <https://www.health.mil/News/Articles/2024/12/01/MSMR-Mental-Health-Update-2024>
- ⁵ Reimagining the role of technology in education: 2017 National Education Technology Plan update," U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology.