

SURVIVAL STRESSORS (ENEMIES OF SURVIVAL)

At some time in our life we have all experienced pain, hunger, thirst, loneliness, cold, heat, fatigue or fear. But not many of us has tried to experience them all at one time, and face the possibility that they might be life threatening. Any one, or a combination of them, can destroy your self-confidence or reduce your will to survive. These feelings are normal, but if you accept them and let them overwhelm you in a survival situation you might end up dead really quickly. But if you learn to identify them, you will be able to accept them and let them work for you instead of against you.

Remember, what is stressful to one person, might not be stressful to another. Your experience, training, physical and mental condition and your self-confidence decide what is stressful or not, in a survival environment.

If you want to stay alive in a survival situation, you have to react. You have to identify the indicators or stressors of the situation, and keep your positive mental attitude. Never give yourself the extra burden of feeling self-pity or fall into hopelessness. Stay positive and focus on the important aspects of your life and the situation you are forced into.

If you are in a survival situation, chances are that you are lost. But try to think of it as an opportunity to explore a new area. With a positive attitude your experience could be interesting, and you might as well enjoy the wilderness while you are there. Why not pick up the challenge and grow stronger as an individual as a result of your survival experiences.

Any event can lead to stress, and as you probably has experienced, an event don't always come one at a time. These events are not stress in them selves, but they produce it, and I call them "stressors". The stressor is the cause, and stress is your body's response when it begins to act to protect itself.

The response, in an emergency or survival situation will often be "fight or flee". Your body will send out an internal alert, and several reactions will start. It will release stored energy (sugar and eventually fat) to give your body a quick boost; your breathing rate will increase to provide more oxygen to your brain and blood; your muscles tension increases to prepare for action; blood clotting mechanisms are activated to reduce bleeding from cuts; your hearing becomes more sensitive, eyes becomes big, smell sharpens so that you become more aware of your surroundings. Your heart rate and blood pressure will rise to provide more blood to the muscles. All these reactions lets you cope with the potential dangers, but you must be aware that you cannot maintain such a level of alertness indefinitely.

Stressors do not behave gentlemanlike because another one arrives. They add up, and the cumulative effect of minor stressors can become a major distress if they happen close together. As your resistance to the stressors are weakened and they continue or increase, a state of mental and physical exhaustion will arrive. As a result of this your ability to resist stress and use it in a positive way, will be overwhelmed you will start to show signs of distress and despair.

By anticipating the stressors and developing your own strategy to fight them will help your mental state of mind and your self-confidence in surviving

Let's look at some of the stressors you might encounter in an emergency or survival situation

Loneliness and Boredom

It is almost impossible in modern society to let you adapt to silence, loss of support or separation from others. Loneliness and boredom are two survival enemies that can hit you without warning. We have always been social human beings, who enjoy the company of others. But the feeling when you realize you are the only person around to depend on in your situation can be quite overwhelming.

Don't let it affect your positive attitude, but fight it off by whistling, gathering food, improve your shelter or anything else that will take your mind of the fact, that you are alone. Very few people want to be alone all the time, but chances of isolation in a survival situation are great. To be alone is not bad, it can bring out qualities you thought only others had. Your creativity and imagination will be challenged, and you will probably discover some hidden abilities and talents. Most of all, you may tap into a reservoir of inner strength and fortitude you never knew you had. Loneliness and boredom can be a source to depression. As a person surviving alone, or with others, you must find ways to keep your mind productively occupied. Additionally, you must develop a degree of self-sufficiency.

You must have faith in your capability to do it alone.

There are some advantages by facing the stressors with others. Like soldiers who learn individual skills, but still train to primarily function as a team. Being together with others also gives you a greater sense of security and a feeling that someone is available to help you with the problems.

Frustration and Anger

If something were stopping you in reaching your goal, you would normally get angry and after some time feel frustrated. The goal of survival is to stay alive until you are rescued. You have to complete this goal you have to accomplish some tasks with a minimal use of your resources. There's no doubt something will go wrong in trying to do these tasks. Something will happen beyond your control and because your life might be in danger, the mistake will be magnified compared to everyday life. No matter what, you will have to deal with the anger when one or more of your tasks run into trouble.

As a result of your anger you will eventually become frustrated and might start thinking that everything from now on will go wrong and there's no reason to continue with surviving. This is where it's starting to get dangerous. In a survival situation there are many events that can anger or frustrate a person. Getting lost, forgotten equipment, weather, physical limitations are just a few sources of frustration or anger.

Frustration will encourage you to make impulsive reactions, irrational behaviour, wrong decisions and some times an "I quit" attitude. If you are able to recognize and channel the emotional energy associated with anger and frustration, into lessons learned, you will be able to learn from your mistakes and use the new knowledge as you continue to survive. Instead of wasting energy hitting your fist into a tree in frustration, and thereby not expanding your chances of survival, you could just as well use it to break of branches and use them for your fire later on.

Depression

You could end up in a destructive cycle between anger and frustration until you are exhausted emotionally, physically and mentally. Reaching this dangerous stage you will start to give up and your priorities will shift from "What can I do" to "There's nothing I can do". We label this hopeless and helpless feeling as depression.

It would be extraordinary if you do not get sad, at least for a short time, when trying to overcome the enemies of survival. There is nothing wrong with being sad, it can in fact give you the motivation to try even harder to survive. You might think about your family or what life was like in "the real world". The danger is if you let yourself fall into a depressed state, it will sap all your energy and even your will to survive. It is

Guilt

It's not uncommon for survivors feeling guilty about living when others have died. You often see these reactions after larger accidents like airplane crashes or passenger ships sinking. Both after but also before you are rescued, you have to use this feeling in a positive way. Whatever reason you give yourself, don't let the guilt prevent you from living, and in this way, accomplish nothing.

Cold and heat

If you are not prepared, exposure to cold and heat can be very dangerous. Depending on the situation, making a shelter would be one of your first priorities. This applies both for cold and hot weather. In the cold weather, wind is a big factor, so building a shelter to shield you from it and building a fire could save your life. In a hot climate it's important to get out of the sun, so a shelter will give you much needed shade.

Uncertainty and Lack of Control

Some people have trouble operating in settings where everything is not clear-cut. The only guarantee in a survival situation is that nothing is guaranteed. It can be extremely stressful operating on limited information in a setting where you have limited control of your surroundings. This uncertainty and lack of control also add to the stress of being ill or injured.

In a survival situation there's no guarantee that; you will not be injured, you will not be lost during the night, you will be able to find food and water, you will be in a resourceful area, you will not be ill already or you will have your survival kit and a weapon.

Environment

The nature can be a formidable opponent, even under the most ideal circumstances. In a survival situation you have to face the stressors or challenges of the weather, animals living in the area and the terrain. You then have the challenges of surviving in relation to shelter, food and water. Depending on how you handle the challenges of the environment, the surroundings can be either a source of food and protection, or it can lead to discomfort, injury, illness or your death.

Injury, Illness or Death

Injury, illness, and death are real possibilities you can face as a survivor. Survival is maybe one of the most stressful situations you can be in. You are in unfamiliar surroundings where you could die from an accident, eating something poisonous or even die from dehydration. Illness and injury can also add to your stress by limiting your ability to perform simple duties like making fire or building a shelter. Even if illness and injury don't lead to your death they play a big role in the level of stress you feel. Only by controlling the stress you can have the will and courage to take the risks associated with survival.

Example of injury**SERE Instructor Course - Winter Part**

During the course I had an accident with my knife, and made a deep cut in my left thumb. The cut was so deep the Course Director would take me off the course if it got infected or if I was unable to perform life saving tasks.

During the next week I had big troubles just making simple tasks, due to the bandages on my thumb. We had temperatures close to -17F (-25C), so being able to make fire was essential. I had to make sure my thumb had blood flowing at all times and my finger was checked by some of the instructors at least 1-2 times daily.

I'm in no doubt that I would have been in a life-threatening situation if I had been alone, or if I had an infection in the thumb. I was lucky that it was my left thumb and not the right one, as I'm right handed.

Working with a weakened hand really opened my eyes for those small factors, which can mean so much.

Hunger and Thirst

The lack of food is not an acute problem in a survival situation, but water could be. It's a matter of days surviving without water, but if you have access to it, you can live for weeks without food. It will not be easy, as the lack of food will cause psychological changes to occur. The symptoms will include apathy, irritability, depression and lack of concentration. Finding food (and water) will be more and more important as the length of you being in a survival situation increases.

For a person being used to be able to buy his food and liquids, foraging can be a big source of stress. When hungry and thirsty your positive mental attitude will be challenged. Try to conserve your body's energy reserves. If you can get food easily then go for it, but be aware of the possibility that you might use more energy in getting the food, than it will provide you.

A factor is when you have a full belly; you will be able to withstand more survival stressors, than with an empty belly. Lack of nutrition can also make you more prone to depression.

Fatigue

As you become more and more tired, surviving will be more difficult. You can become so tired that the act of staying awake will be stressful in itself. Most survivors tell that fatigue can overwhelm them, but they are not able to sleep or relax.

Fatigue will deteriorate your physiological and physical performance, resulting in your inability to act and react to the situation. Fatigue is the result of overusing your mind and muscles and will cause carelessness and loss of judgement.

Sleep, resting and staying calm is essential. When your body is signalling pain due to overuse, it's a signal that something is wrong, but in moments of excitement or stress you may not feel the pain. Stay rested and hydrated so your desire to continue will stay strong.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia produces both physical and psychological effects. Especially the psychological consequences can occur in the early steps of the condition and result in faulty decision-making and irrational behaviour due to loss of concentration, memory and attention. On the physical side you can experience degraded use of hands and feet, and in the end, impairment of the muscles.

Fear

Fear is the emotional response to the dangerous circumstances you are in when placed in unfamiliar surroundings under adverse conditions. This feeling is a totally natural reaction, but you have to train yourself not to be overwhelmed by them.

Fear is not limited to physical reactions; the threat to your emotional and mental state of mind is a large factor also. It can immobilize you, and frighten you to a degree where you cannot perform the activities essential for your survival. At wartime many aircrews have been overwhelmed by fear of capture, so in their haste they have left their survival kit or inflated dinghies, with food and water, in the haste to get away from the crash site.

Fear is a lot of things. You can have fear of death, getting lost, animals, suffering, ridicule, and of your own weaknesses. The thing most feared by people going into the wilderness is getting lost, and there is no way to tell how you will react to it. Expect fear and learn to recognize it. Live with fear and understand how it can alter your effectiveness in survival situations. The level of fear will usually depend on you and not the situation you're in.

You have to do your best to control your fears and by learning basic outdoor and first aid skills, it will help you prevent or ease your fears by increasing your confidence. Maintain your positive mental attitude.

In a survival situation you have to be realistic and don't make mountains out of anthills. There's no idea of trying to deny the existence of a potential dangerous situation, and sticking your head in a hole in the ground. You will need to accept the fear as a natural reaction to the situation and try to turn it to your advantage.

When used in a controlled manner, fear can have a positive function. It can encourage you to be more cautious in a situation where recklessness could result in injury. You can lessen fear through training and working with your known fears. In a survival situation you can fight the fear by keeping your body and mind free from thirst, hunger, pain, discomfort and other enemies of survival.

Anxiety

When fear is present, so is anxiety. It can be an uneasy feeling you get physically, mentally and emotionally when faced with a dangerous situation. You can reduce your anxiety by starting to do those tasks related to your survival. As you reduce your anxiety, you are also taking control over the source of that anxiety – your fear.

As with fear, anxiety can overwhelm you to the point where you become confused and have difficulty thinking. It will become more and more difficult to make good judgements and decisions. To survive you have to learn techniques to calm your anxieties and keep them in control, so they can help and not hurt you.

When used in a controlled way, anxiety urges you to act and face the dangers that threaten you. Anxiety can motivate you to take action and react fast, and in this form it can be used in a positive way.

My own experiences with stressors.

During my time in the military I have experienced some situations, where I have been under a certain amount of stress or mental and physical pressure. I'm in no doubt that my positive mental attitude and will to accept things as they are have helped me through most of the situations.

When serving in Iraq, I had the "honour" of being on the receiving end, of more than 250 rockets (107, 122 and 240 mm) in a period of almost 6 months. A lot of the stressors and reactions mentioned above were in play during that time; uncertainty and lack of control, fear, anxiety, anger and frustration.

Uncertainty and lack of control: We didn't know when the attacks would occur and where the rockets would hit. I personally tried to take control by always being alert to where the closest cover were, and trying to accept the fact that the attack could come at any time and hit anyplace.

Fear/anxiety: The fear of being wounded or killed was always present. By accepting the situation I was in, and trying to control the environment by always being alert and knowing where I could take cover helped a lot. Also the fact that we openly talked with our friends and colleagues about the danger and our reactions to them was a big help.

The most interesting observation I made on myself was that in the first 4-5 months I really didn't pay that much attention to the dangerous situation, because it became an instinct reaction to dive for cover during the attacks. Only when I had some close calls or when people got wounded or killed, the fear and anxiety came back. But during the last 2-3 weeks the feeling was ever more present. I started to think where to take cover, during the attacks. If it would be better to be outside or inside where I was working.

I thought if the rockets hit close to me the chances of being found quickly would be bigger, if I was outside and so on. The reason for this, I think, was the fact that I could see the end of my tour, and therefore the fear of getting wounded or killed became greater. This could have lead to me making wrong decisions, but I decided to stick with the drills and procedures I've used in the months before, as I saw no reason to change them in the last couple of weeks.

Anger and frustration: The anger and frustration of not being able to "pay back", was maybe one of the biggest stressors apart from the anxiety. But to accept the fact that others did it, with counter-battery fire and by other means, was of great comfort.

All in all, to survive either being in a survival situation or other stressful situations for a longer time, you need to have a positive mental attitude. To be able to "unload" your thoughts to another person also really helps.

Panic

One of the most dangerous enemies of survival is panic. Panic is an uncontrolled urge to run or to hide from the situation. It's triggered by your mind and imagination when you are under stress, and it's a result from the fear of the unknown, lack of confidence, vivid imagination and not knowing what to do next.

Panic is actually a rare reaction, and contrary to popular belief, people do not normally panic. However, should panic occur, it is extremely contagious and a small number of panic-stricken individuals can send a whole crowd into blind terror. Panic often occurs in situations where people are trapped or there is a time limit to their escape. This could be a fire in a building or a ship going down.

Fear can build up to a panic and cause you to make a bad situation worse. Your rational thinking will disappear and could produce a situation that can result in exhaustion, injury or your death. To fight fear and ultimately panic, you must stay calm, in control and look at the brighter side of things to stay in control.

A panic-stricken person can ultimately end up in the "Survival Paradox".

The Survival Paradox

If you are in a survival situation chances are that you might be injured and almost certainly at risk of hypothermia. You will probably be in fear of your life and the unfamiliar situation you are in. Your body will start taking actions to keep you alive. Your peripheral blood responds to cold exposure by vasoconstriction (withdrawing from the extremities), which helps to conserve heat. Shivering occurs to generate heat.

But if you are in a panic your reasoning, decision-making and memory abilities will be retarded and hindered, just when you need them the most, leaving you wide open to misinterpretation of the environmental stimuli. In this state you might end up killing yourself, because your ability to monitor your own condition becomes unreliable due to the physiological reaction of your body.

We now have a general knowledge of stress and the stressors common to survival; the next step is to see how we can prepare ourselves for the stressors we may face.

HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF

In a survival situation your primary goal is to stay alive, and as you can see you will go through an assortment of thoughts and emotions. You can either have them work for you, or they can be the reason for your downfall.

You might experience fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, guilt, depression and loneliness during a survival situation. If you can control these enemies of survival, it will increase your chances of survival. These stressors should prompt you to train harder, fight back when scared and to take actions that ensure your safety and security, when faced with large odds against your survival.

If you cannot control these reactions they can make you stop, and listen to your internal demons. You will experience psychological defeat much faster than physical exhaustion. Survival is natural to everyone, but being thrown into a survival situation is not.

Don't be afraid of your natural reactions to an unnatural situation, like a survival situation. You should learn to anticipate what reactions you might have, so they can serve your ultimate interest – to survive. This will involve your mental preparedness, so your reactions in a survival situation will be productive, and not destructive. Below are a few tips helping you to prepare mentally for survival.

Know Yourself

Do you know who you really are on the inside? Strengthen your strong sides and develop the areas you where you know you are weak. Ask your friends and family how they see your strong and weak sides. Accept that you might have some areas you cannot develop; it could be that you are afraid of spiders or thunderstorms. By accepting it, you can anticipate your reactions to them. This way you can learn to accept your reactions and either try to fight or accept them.

Anticipate Your Fears

Don't pretend you are fearless, but try to think of what would frighten you the most, if you are forced to survive alone. Try to expand your understanding of your fears and work on them, so you will be able to function despite your fears. The goal is not to eliminate your fears, but to build your confidence with them.

Be Realistic About Your Situation

Don't be afraid of being realistic about your situation. See the circumstances as they are, not as you want them to be. Try to keep your hopes and expectations within a realistic setting, so you don't end up with bitter disappointment.

By hoping for the best and preparing for the worst, you will experience that it's much easier to adjust to the situation. By accepting your situation you force your mind to react to it, instead of denying it. It will feel like a monumental step forward.

Adopt a Positive Mental Attitude

Try to see the potential good in everything, it will not only boost your morale but also trigger your imagination and creativity. You will learn to appreciate the small things in life, and even small achievements will seem large as time goes by, when placed in a survival situation.

By keeping your positive mental attitude, you won't end up in negativity and a mental black hole where you will have difficulty escaping from.

Remind Yourself What Is at Stake

In a survival situation your life is at stake. Failure to prepare your self psychologically could lead to reactions such as depression, carelessness, inattention, and loss of confidence, poor decision-making and giving up before the body gives in.

Training

Training removes the lack of knowledge, which in turn removes fear. If you have received training in wilderness skills and survival you will show a much higher degree of effectiveness in a survival situation. You will possess knowledge of what to expect, and therefore anticipate what to prepare for.

Training will allow you to function effectively at an automatic level, and in this way free up some of your mental capacity. By demonstrating your skills in training, you will have the confidence to use them when the need arise. The more realistic the training, the less overwhelming an actual survival situation will feel. Try to train in an environment similar to the areas you are supposed to work or hike in.

Example of lack of training.

RAF aircrews in Operation GRANBY. (British military operations during the Gulf War in 1991).

Most staff and aircrews were of the general opinion of "it won't happen to me". Consequently no aircrews had any desert survival training and all were captured quickly. Some even made really wrong decisions due to this opinion.

Accepting the Situation

If you are unable to accept your situation you will most likely experience frustration, anger and irrational behaviour. Your ability to accept the situation is not the same as giving into it. On the contrary it will give your mind then kick it might need to get into survival mode. If you have this ability and know when to be active or passive, you will have the upper hand in a survival situation.

Psychology First Aid

If you are thinking of applying psychology first aid, you should look at the following factors; Monitor your own condition. Are you really up to the task? Do not take on too much. Try to determine who are genuinely disturbed from those who are showing "normal" reactions.

The mere touch of your hand on someone's shoulder or a hug can make the difference between a person unable to function and one who can perform "normally" and help improve your situation.

You should use psychological first aid on those who are failing to recover, and are making no progress towards a return to effective behaviour. Using simple words of comfort and interest will make the majority who are unresponsive, more responsive and they can be set to do small but useful tasks. They are unlikely to show initiative or take responsibility for a long period.

Learn Stress Management Techniques

If you are under stress for a long time, you have the potential to react unpredictable. By being well trained both on the mental and practical side, of survival and wilderness skills, you will be able to control your responses to the situation.

You will normally not be able to control the survival circumstances you are in, but by learning stress management techniques you can significantly enhance your capability to remain calm and focused, as you work to keep yourself and others alive. Focus on relaxation skills, time management skills, assertiveness skills, and cognitive restructuring skills (the ability to control how you view a situation).

Motivation

Often known as "The Will to Survive", motivation includes a refusal to accept death, and to hang on to a belief that you are not meant to die under these conditions. It involves overcoming the emotional and physical discomforts of extreme conditions. Linked to motivation is the ability to establish goals, work out the steps to those goals and follow those steps through.

To accept your situation will also catalyst your motivation to survive.

Example of motivation.**AWOL 1 Bravo. F-4C Phantom, North Vietnam. November 9, 1967**

After ejecting from his F4 at low level over Laos, Lance Sijan was very badly injured. Compound fracture of left leg, fractured skull with associated concussion, right hand mangled with the 3 smaller fingers dislocated.

After regaining consciousness fully on day 2, Sijan attempted to crawl the 20 feet towards the jungle penetrator of a hovering Jolly Green rescue helicopter. Due to his injuries he was forced to crawl on his back, pushing with his good leg.

After it had hovered over the jungle for 33 minutes Sijan still hadn't reached the penetrator. In the growing darkness and with increasing ground fire the helicopter had to depart. After slipping into a sinkhole where he was knocked out for several more days, Sijan resolved to crawl east, taking him off the other side of the limestone plateau that he was on, in order to reduce the risk to any further rescue attempt.

He crawled on his back pushing with his good leg until he had been evading for 46 days. All this time he was motivated by the prospect of rescue. Then he was captured. He resisted the torture of the NVA whilst in his poor health state; he continued his planning to escape. This he succeeded in doing by overpowering his guard even though he was crippled and crawled into the jungle. After a couple of hours he was recaptured.

Never once complaining, his injuries and malnourishment caused his physical condition to deteriorate that led to his death one month after capture. He never gave in.

Lance Sijan was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honour for his heroism and courage.

There is also a strong motivation force towards reunion with principal figures of attachments such as wife's, mothers, children and girlfriends. This urge for reunion is also a strong motivation force for survival.

Remember; "The will to survive" can also be considered to be "the refusal to give up."

Stress acronym

You can use the following acronym when under stress: S – T – O – P

S - Stop. Don't do anything without thinking

T - Think. What is your situation? How can you improve it? What way to move?

O – Orient yourself. Where are you? Where should you go?

P – Planning. Do your planning thoroughly.

As you can see, the mental aspect of surviving is really important. If you don't have a positive mental attitude your chances of survival will be very small. Let's look at the reactions to stressors and how to overcome them with your positive mental attitude.

POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE

Survival Attitude

Man has been able to adapt physically and mentally to the world changing around him. He has been able to overcome many shifts in his environment throughout the centuries, even while other species around him got instinct.

The same mechanisms that kept our forefathers alive can help you as well, but they can also work against you if you don't understand and overcome the survival stressors.

In a second you can be thrown out in a life-threatening situation where you have to survive, or try to overcome unexpected potential deadly challenges. It can happen to anyone, anywhere and anytime.

As with most unexpected situations you'll have to adjust to the new scenario quite fast so you can reduce the danger or threat, so you can survive the situation.

A survey showed that of those who die of physical injuries, like stabbings or bullet wounds, 95% die within the first 3 hours. 95% of people, who die of psychological injuries, die within the first 3 days.

Is it possible they never acquired "the will to survive" (survival training), but only possessed "the will to die", i.e. thinking: "this will never happen to me".

Defining survival attitude



In short survival is to stay alive no matter what situation you face. You have to accept your situation, adapt to it, improve it and in the end get out of the situation so you can return to normal life.

But maybe most important, survival is a state of mind you have to put yourself into.

By far your brain is the most valuable and best survival tool. You are still in trouble despite having a lot of muscles, but not being able to adjust to the situation, danger, terrain or nature of the emergency will surely stop you in negotiating the danger or situation in a rational and effective manner.

Your survival depends on your reaction to the stressors, and not only brute force. To adapt to the situation, is to survive it. If you are unable to use your positive mental attitude in a survival situation, you will not be able to use all your available resources, including your physical skills to your advantage.

By keeping a positive mental outlook you will have a much bigger chance of survival. You will not only be forced to rely on yourself and your abilities, you will have to fight many challenges that you are not accustomed to.

You will be facing loneliness, the dark, cold and heat, hunger, thirst, uncertainty and much more. By accepting your situation and adapting to it, you will tolerate and accept your situation. You will be able to get into a proper frame of mind to control your fears, relax and start thinking.

Never give in, but prepare for the worst and hope for the best. When in the proper frame of mind, you will make the right decisions and a good plan for survival.

Proper Frame of mind

To survive a survival situation it's essential to switch to "survival mode", or get in the proper frame of mind. To conquer a potential life threatening situation, a strong will or determination to live is needed.

Your mind can force your body to perform extraordinary tasks, and records have shown that a strong will to survive, often has been the major factor for surviving a survival situation or other emergency. Survival is possible in most situations, but can demand a lot from you. Without your will to survive, survival can be impossible, even in the most favourable situation. Your mind is a powerful force, and what affects you mentally also affects you physically. If your mind isn't tuned into surviving, you won't try to survive, and you will be prone to give up even when rescue is near.

Your positive mental attitude will greatly increase your chances for survival.

The Positive Mental Attitude

You will be confronted with many problems when in a survival situation. To survive you will need to overcome them all, but even if your brain is your best asset, it could be your worst enemy. It will try to overflow you with negative thoughts, fears and imaginations. You will need to fight those negative thoughts, and use your creativity and positive state of mind to adapt to the situation.

You must work with the situation and nature, and not against it. This all sounds really easy but it's not. You have to make a mental picture of your goal and then visualize yourself reaching it. You must actively take control and motivate yourself to solve the problems to stay alive.

Your positive attitude will have a strong influence on your motivation to live, and your attitude towards overcoming the enemies of survival. Your positive willpower will make the difference between feeling lost in the wilderness and no will to live, or seeing the situation as a challenge to rely upon your own resources.

My own experiences with Positive Mental Attitude

As one of the oldest participants on the Swedish SERE Instructor course, I sometimes felt the "burden" of age. Especially during a specific survival phase where we did a lot of walking through hard terrain. A not so welcome add-on was a lot of rain during the period. It gave us a lot of drinking water, but also the discomfort of being wet and cold most of the time.

One very important lesson learned during this phase, was from my 3 (much) younger teammates. They had the stamina and muscle power to continue on for a much longer time than me, but by "leeching" off their positive state of mind, and accepting their help, my state of mind was always (more or less) positive and thereby it made my transition through the phase much easier, than if I had been alone. Thanks' mates 😊.

During the course I had the opportunity to talk to Lars Fält and Mors Kochanski. Lars said at one point. "The longer you are in a survival situation, the larger the "victory's" feel, when accomplishing even small things".

I thought of my own reactions when we started our first fire, using a fire steel in the cold rain, after preparing all the remedies for more than an hour. Or when we drank the hot pine-needle tea and tasted the very small fish we prepared on the head of a shovel. These small things really felt like a big victory in that situation, so I must totally agree with Lars Fält. To see all small achievements as big victories is maybe one of the most important ways of upholding the "Positive Mental Attitude" in a survival situation.

There is no doubt that you will have some psychological reactions in a dangerous situation. But if you can identify and let them work for you, instead of against you, you will have a great advantage in surviving. We have looked at some of the stressors, or enemies of survival, you might experience in a survival situation, and even more important, how you can overcome them.