COMMON SENSE STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING OURSELVES FROM SECONDARY TRAUMA

29TH ANNUAL NAPSA CONFERENCE

Presented By:

Gail Wettstein, J.D.
&
Cathy Wood, M.S.
Oklahoma Department of Human Services
Adult Protective Services

Acknowledgements

NCTSN (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
"Child Welfare Trauma Training Toolkit"
In Partnership with
Chadwick Center for Children & Families
Beth Hudnall Stamm, PhD
Idaho State University
www.isu.edu/irh
www.proqol.org
Mary Mueller, LMSW
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services
Katie Morris Henson, LPC, LADC
Mental Health Consultant
Dr. Brian Miller, PhD
Director of Children’s Behavioral Health
Primary Children’s Medical Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

Children's Bureau
Center for Social Innovation
Objectives

- Define Secondary Traumatic Stress.
- Identify three personal, interpersonal, and organizational warning signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress.
- Develop an action plan for personal and professional safety.

Activity:

![Core Values Image]
Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

The emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).


What client trauma has had an impact on you?
Trauma is not produced by strong feelings. It's when we feel overwhelmed and helpless.
Where Does Trauma Live?

- Personal
- Interpersonal
- Organizational
**Slide 16**

**Personal: Warning Signs**
- Inability to listen
- Anger & cynicism
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Missed deadlines
- Avoid clients
- Hopelessness
- Sleeplessness
- Fear
- Minimizing
- Guilt
- Hypervigilance

**Slide 17**

**Interpersonal: Warning Signs**
- Increased conflict
- Negative feelings when others reach out to you
- Withdrawing & not seeking connection with others
- Inability to manage relationships & work
- Losing interest in family rituals, routines, & social activities
- Avoiding calls or invitations from friends
- Feeling disconnected, detached, or trapped
Slide 19

**Organizational: Warning Signs**

- Poor communication between individuals and/or departments
- Increased interpersonal conflict
- Negative atmosphere - low morale
- Missed deadlines
- Incomplete and/or poor quality work
- Increased customer complaints
- Less motivation and/or energy
- High rates of turnover, absences, or tardiness
- Lack of psychological safety

Slide 20

**5 Protective Skills**

1. Engaging with Emotion
2. Silencing the Voice in Your Head
3. Sharing Our Experience
4. Framing the Difficult Case
5. Regaining Composure

Slide 21

**Skill 1: Engaging with Emotion**

- Be curious not controlled
- Name it
- Accept it
- Let it go
What Happens When We Don't Engage Emotion?

What Does Avoidance Look Like?
- Say not prepared
- Want to refer case to someone more experienced
- Avoid certain situations (i.e. sexual abuse investigations)
- Feel like cannot relate to certain people or relate too much
- Second guess self

Questions to Ask Ourselves
- What feelings arise when I am getting ready to start this task?
- What am I feeling during the task?
- What aspects of this case worry me (might I be avoiding)?
- What is the suckiest part of my job?
Skill 2: Silencing the Voice in Your Head

Silencing the Voice Skills
- Intention
- Avoid mind wandering
- Acknowledge that you're brooding
- Have a conversation with someone
- Conscious engagement in an activity

Questions to Ask Ourselves
- Are thoughts of my clients interrupting my time off?
- How am I sleeping?
Skill 3: Sharing Our Experience

Sharing Our Professional Story
- Defining our professional role
- Acknowledging our abilities, skills, & limitations
- Reflecting on lessons learned

Defining Our Professional Role
- I accept my role in the community as a steward of the community's trauma.
- The commitment is intense.
- There is very little cynicism about the work.
Acknowledging Our Abilities, Skills, & Limitations
- I am confident of my skills to manage very difficult situations.
- I am willing to feel my discomfort and be curious.
- I have radical acceptance of the limits of what I can do.

Reflecting on Lessons Learned
- Period of reflection
- Continuous narrative in any and all meetings

Questions to Ask Ourselves
- What effect is this work having on me?
- How do I feel in the morning getting ready for work?
- Does this case present any issues/challenges for me?
- What was that like for me?
- What did I like about how I handled that situation?
- What would I like to have done differently?
Skill 4: Reframing the Difficult Case

Sources of Difficulty
- Seeing clients in judgmental terms
- Feeling ineffective
- Focusing on emotions instead of solutions
- Trying to fix everything

Skills for Reframing the Difficult Case
Questions to Ask Ourselves

- In what way do I think this client is trapped?
- What makes this client especially hard for me?
- What do I think this client is afraid of?
- How is my energy level when I come in contact with this client?
- What skills do I feel I have mastered?
- What type of client is most difficult for me?

Skill 5: Regaining Composure

- Conscious awareness of your levels of stress
- Having some go-tos for returning to normal
- Self-compassion
- Dropping anchor during times of distress
- Everyday practice
Protective Factors for Minimizing STS

- Supportive work environment
- Knowledge
- Expertise from experience
- Evidence-based practices
- Policy & practice

Provider Resilience APP:
http://t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/provider-resilience

Activity: Self-Care Inventory & Personal Safety Plan
Resources
- Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others. L. van Dernoot Lipsky with C. Burk
- Your Wheel of Life. Institute for Leadership Fitness. www.instituteforleadership.com
- Caregiver’s Bill of Rights. Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project. www.compassionfatigue.org
- Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL). B. Hudnall Stramm. www.proqol.org

Questions