Strategies for Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress

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Objectives

Participants will:

• Understand the importance of addressing secondary trauma

• Identify personal and professional strategies to mitigate the impact of secondary trauma

• Describe organizational strategies for addressing secondary trauma

• Learn about resources for supervisors to address secondary trauma reactions among their staff and themselves
Secondary/Vicarious Traumatization

* Trauma experienced by helpers/professionals as a result of working with trauma survivors.

* Symptoms are similar but usually less severe than post-traumatic stress symptoms experienced by direct trauma victims.

* Risk increases when traumatic exposures are unexpected, or among those without adequate preparation.
Secondary Trauma and Trauma-Focused Therapy

- Treating highly distressed children with complex presenting issues in high-stress environments
- Working with parents and caregivers
- Treatment involves eliciting detailed accounts of children’s most traumatic experiences
- Therapists serve as emotional container for children’s and parents’ distress
- Safety concerns and ongoing stressors
- Resilience
Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

* Avoidance (including of certain clients)
* Preoccupation with clients/client stories
* Intrusive thoughts/nightmares/flashbacks
* Arousal symptoms
* Trouble sleeping
* Thoughts of violence/revenge
* Feeling estranged/isolated/no one to talk to
* Feeling numb or detached
* Feeling trapped, “infected” by trauma, hopeless, inadequate, depressed
* Difficulty separating work from personal life
The Impact of STS

- Increased absenteeism
- Impaired judgment
- Low motivation/less willingness to do extra work
- Lower productivity and poorer quality of work
- Decreased compliance
- More staff conflict
- Higher turnover

(Osofsky, 2012)
Meet Resilience Man!
Dealing with Secondary Traumatic Stress

Personal strategies:
* Knowing your own personal vulnerabilities and unresolved or triggering issues
* Knowing your limits
* Awareness of how trauma work affects you
* Self-care
* Stress management
* Supports, relationships
* Cognitive coping: focus on positive aspects of work, positive self-talk
* Good boundaries between professional and personal life
Workplace or Professional Self-Care

* Take a break during the workday.
* Take time to chat with co-workers.
* Make quiet time to complete tasks.
* Identify projects that are exciting or rewarding.
* Set limits with clients and colleagues.
* Practice low-impact debriefing vs. sliming.
* Arrange your workspace so it is comfortable and comforting.
* Get regular supervision and consultation.
* Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest.
* Balance your caseload so no one day or part of the day is “too much.”
* Have a peer support group, participate in debriefings.
Top 10 Ways to Breed Burnout in Your Organization

1. Never, ever give anyone information today that you can wait until next week to tell them about. This includes important deadlines especially.


3. Do not celebrate important events. If you see others wishing someone happy birthday, be sure to sneer at them so that they get back to work.

4. Whenever possible, call people on their days off even if it’s not an emergency. It reminds them of the stresses they’ve left behind. Maybe next time, they’ll think twice about even taking time off.

5. Stop watering the plants. Once they die, leave them to collect dust. Employees won’t stay very long if even the plants look sad.

6. Approach every situation with a “what is it this time?” attitude.

7. Adopt “It will never work,” as your motto.

8. Cancel meetings with the people you supervise. They should be able to do their jobs without support.

9. Make simple, everyday tasks more complicated than they need to be. For example, lock the supply closet and only open it on Tuesdays between 3 and 4.

10. Leave your sense of humor at home. This is serious work for serious people.

http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/94.pdf
Organizational Strategies

* Reduce caseloads/workloads
* Provide adequate supervision
* Provide good mental health insurance coverage and Employee Assistance Program
* Explicitly acknowledge the job stress and the possibility of work-related secondary traumatization of staff
* Provide staff educational workshops to increase individual awareness, develop peer support, decrease traumatized individuals’ sense of isolation, and encourage self-care
* Provide adequate coverage and backup for staff in stressful positions
* Encourage ongoing discussion of secondary trauma among staff and administration
* Cultural shift

(Osofosky et al, 2008)
Taking Care of your Supervisees

- Be aware of secondary/vicarious trauma and effects on therapists
- Frequent check-ins: how are you doing?
- Use STS and self-care assessment tools
- Address STS early to take preventative steps to minimize harm
- Signs of concern
- Promote and model self-care
- Supervisor and team support
Strategies and Resources for Addressing STS

- Balanced caseloads
- Reflective supervision
- Training and education
- Professional and personal self-care
- Work/life balance
- Supervisory and peer support
- Organizational support
  - Organizational Self-Care Checklist
Exercises for Addressing STS and Building Resilience

- Relaxation exercises
- Creative outlets
- Team building
- Fun and laughter
- Cognitive reframing
  * Dwelling on Days that Make You Want to Come Back
- Advocacy/community outreach
- Self-care
  * Finding the Time
What about You? Taking Care of Supervisors

- Secondary trauma and self-care training
- Monthly support groups
- Peer consultation
- Shared responsibility
- Critical incident stress debriefing
- Organizational policies to enhance resilience and compassion satisfaction
Dwelling on Days that Make You Want to Come Back

1. Think about the most rewarding moment at your job.
2. List five things that you love about your job.
3. Think about and list five people whose lives you have touched.
4. Why did you take your current job?
5. Write down three compliments you have received from your co-workers or three things you think you do well.

http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/94.pdf
Assessment Tools

- Professional Quality of Life Scale:
  - http://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html

- Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale:

- Self-Care Assessment:
  - http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/students/self-care/documents/plan/Self-Care_Assessment.pdf
Resources

- **Web-Sites/Blogs**
  - [http://compassionfatiguesolutions.blogspot.com/](http://compassionfatiguesolutions.blogspot.com/)
  - [http://www.compassionfatigue.ca/](http://www.compassionfatigue.ca/)
  - [http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/students/self-care/measures.asp](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/students/self-care/measures.asp)

- **Workbooks**
    - [http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/94.pdf](http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/94.pdf)
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