

Preventing and Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress

Risk for secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a consequent and natural result of human services work. As such, the experience of STS should never be viewed as an individual shortcoming, and the responsibility for managing STS should not land only on individual staff. Instead, a proactive response, including efforts at both the individual and agency level, will yield the most positive outcomes.

Based on the four categories below, think through strategies you can utilize as an individual, advocate for at your agency, and if you're in a leadership position, consider implementing to support the well-being of your staff and effectiveness of your organization.

Psychoeducation

In a trauma-informed system, it is important for staff at all levels to understand the signs and symptoms of traumatic stress. When this occurs, the impact of STS is normalized, and strategies for prevention and intervention can more easily become a part of an agency's culture.

- 1. What opportunities are available to me to learn more about the impact of traumatic stress and using a trauma-informed approach in my role? How could I learn more about what opportunities are available?*
- 2. How does this agency currently support staff in understanding the impact of traumatic stress and trauma-informed practice? What resources are available to this agency to support this effort? What is one concrete step in expanding opportunities for psychoeducation?*

Self-Care

Activities and practices which we can realistically engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress and maintain our overall health and well-being.

- 1. What is one self-care strategy that is important to me? How can I make this part of my daily routine? Who can join me in keeping this routine?*
- 2. How can my agency support and encourage self-care practices among staff?*

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Workplace Supports and Supervision

Built-in staff support mechanisms help address STS in a proactive and sustainable way.

Supports can be formal, such as:

- Trauma-informed supervision practices (remember – a trauma-informed supervision does not mean that supervisors become therapists for their staff!)
- Critical-incident response and debriefing procedures
- Periodic use of trauma-informed organizational assessments and/or STS self-report screenings to help determine what types of supports are needed.
- Use of an employee assistance provider

Or informal, such as:

- A self-care accountability buddy system
- Regular peer wellness check-ins
- Protected time for staff appreciation and connection (potlucks, walks, book clubs, etc.)

1. *What type of workplace support (formal or informal) would be most useful to me? What supports are available to me now? What concrete step could I take toward bringing a workplace support to my agency?*
2. *What supports (formal or informal) are available to staff at the agency? How could this agency build in both formal and informal supports for the staff?*

Ongoing Skills Training

When staff are adept and confident in their role, their overall stress level improves, and skill building in specific areas such as regulation and engagement can enhance a staff's ability to handle future stressors.

1. *What skills would I like to develop in order to feel more confident and comfortable in my role? What resources are available to me to pursue development in these areas?*
2. *Are there on-going opportunities for staff to develop the skills they need to do their job well? How can the agency improve opportunities for skill building?*



DHS
trauma
think tank

