

26th Annual downstate Conference on Child Abuse
April 25, 2018 2:30 pm-4:00 pm

Title: Recognizing Secondary Traumatic Stress/Vicarious Trauma and Self Care Preventative Strategies

Session Description: This session is intended for any multidisciplinary team member who works with children and families who experience adversity and trauma. Participants will discuss elements of the work they do which may come with the heavy price often creating demands on physical, mental and emotional health and well-being. Recognizing when the work is taking its toll on you is the first step to decreasing those effects by implementing a well-constructed self-care plan that is both rewarding and sustainable.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will:

1. Increase knowledge about what secondary trauma/traumatic stress looks like
2. Be able to recognize STS/Vicarious Trauma within their own work they do
3. Be able to create a sustainable self-care plan that is rewarding and easy to incorporate in their daily routine.

I) What is Vicarious Trauma? What is Secondary Traumatic Stress?

- a. Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another.
- b. Each year more than 10 million children in the United States endure the trauma of abuse, violence, natural disasters, and other adverse events.
- c. These experiences can give rise to significant emotional and behavioral problems that can profoundly disrupt the children's lives and bring them in contact with child-serving professionals.
- d. For therapists, child welfare workers, case managers, and other helping professionals involved in the care of traumatized children and their families, the essential act of listening to trauma stories may take an emotional toll that compromises professional functioning and diminishes quality of life. Individual and supervisory awareness of the effects of this indirect trauma exposure is a basic part of protecting the health of the worker and ensuring that children consistently receive the best possible care from those who are committed to helping them.
- e. The development of secondary traumatic stress is recognized as a common occupational hazard for professionals working with traumatized children.
- f. STS does not just impact clinicians; it is an important issue for the entire MDT. STS can impact anyone in a CAC who comes into contact with traumatic material through hearing client's trauma stories, seeing high levels of distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event, retelling a client's story for forensic purposes, and/or seeing photos or other graphic images related to the abuse. Every member of the multidisciplinary team can be at risk of developing symptoms of STS if they have this type of indirect exposure.
- g. The trauma symptoms associated with STS may impact every area of an employee's life. Some employees will experience mild reactions, while others may report a symptom profile consistent with PTSD. Social withdrawal, loss of interest in activities, avoidance, mood changes, and relational disturbance are all common traumatic stress reactions

that can lead to functional impairment, if unaddressed. CAC employees may notice a change in their outlook on life, their perceptions of the world as a safe place, and may over or their reaction to danger. If employees are reporting symptoms that are impacting their functioning, they should be referred for a trauma assessment and assistance from a trauma therapist if indicated.

- h. There are a range of activities that organizational leaders can implement to prevent or address STS. Good supervision allows CAC staff to process the personal impact of the work and sends the message that indirect trauma exposure is an issue that should be monitored and addressed. This allows supervisors to make referrals to resources such as a qualified EAP provider, when additional support and assistance is needed. Sessions where employees can share with peers how they are feeling about a client encounter, without oversharing graphic details of the client's trauma, can decrease the secondary exposure to others, yet allows employees to metabolize the experience and may discharge the potency of its effects. Organizational strategies such as team building, employee recognition, and supporting staff in creating a work-life balance activates and supports the employee's natural coping abilities.

II) Individual Assessment- Where am I on the scale of experiencing work related stress?

III) Group Activity- What is stressing us out collectively

IV) What can I do about it?

- a. Physical
- b. Psychological
- c. Emotional
- d. Spiritual
- e. Relationships
- f. Workplace
- g. Other Areas
- h. Balance

V) Creating an Emergency Self-Care Plan

VI) Creating a sustainable self-care plan for long term use and maintenance