Secondary Traumatic Stress

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Agenda

- Overview of Symptoms of Stress, Trauma, PTSD, Burnout and STS
- Self Assessment for Stress and STS
- Effective Interventions to Alleviate STS Risk
Stress in Child Welfare

- Child Welfare is a high risk profession in which workers may be confronted with danger, threats or violence
- Child welfare workers may empathize with their clients’ experiences; feelings of helplessness, anger and fear are common
Stress in Child Welfare (cont.)

Child Welfare workers who are parents-or who have their own histories of childhood trauma-may be at particular risk for experiencing such reactions.
There is a Cost to Caring

- **STS** is the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting in knowledge about a trauma experienced by another person.
- It’s also the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized person.
Stress

Stress is the response of your body to all demands made on it.
Common Stress Reactions

- Emotional/Psychological
- Behavioral
- Cognitive
- Physical
- Social
Trauma

- An event or experience that threatens one’s sense of physical or psychological safety
- PTSD or PTS Symptoms
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Avoidance/Numbing
- Hyper arousal
Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Normal response that helpers that are exposed to painful material experience.
- Worker develops signs and symptoms that mirror client reactions
- PTSD/STS handout
Impact of Working with Victims of Trauma

Trauma experienced while working in the role of helper has been described as:

- Compassion Fatigue
- Countertransference
- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Vicarious traumatization
Impact of Working with Victims of Trauma

Unlike other forms of job “burnout” STS is precipitated not by workload and institutional stress but by exposure to the clients’ trauma

STS can disrupt child welfare workers’ lives, feelings, personal relationships and overall view of the world
Intrusion

- Never “turn off” work
- Images of cases stayed in their minds after hours
- Insomnia
- Nightmares or dreams about the consumers
- “Non-Stop Worry” and anxiety
Avoidance/Numbing

- Avoid thoughts, feelings or conversation
- Detachment— even from colleagues or family
- Restricted range of affect
- “Felt Hard or Immune” as a protective measure
Hyper Arousal

- Trouble Concentrating
- Easily Startled
- Sudden Irritability or Anger
- Hyper-Vigilance—feeling “On Guard” or uncomfortable constant watchfulness
- Treat others with more suspicion
STS and the Empathy Factor

“When people are stressed, they want to know that you care before they care what you know.”

Will Rogers Quote
Why Does one Experience STS

- Empathy and Exposure
- Disparity between worker’s expectations and realities of work
- Divide between how you view your role and how others perceive you
- Dealing with unsympathetic systems, i.e. judicial, corrections, medical,
- Prior personal trauma
- Information overload
- High level of accountability
Secondary Trauma

- Normal Response
- Not a sign of Weakness, but inevitable aspect of trauma recovery work
- Not Burnout
Burnout

- A breakdown of the psychological defenses that workers use to adapt and cope with intense job-related stressors.
- Increased workload and institutional stress are precipitating factors.
Symptoms of Burnout

- Physical - fatigue, headaches, insomnia, upset stomach
- Emotional - irritability, depression, anxiety, guilt, helplessness
- Behavioral - callousness, pessimism, cynicism, defensiveness
- Work-related - quitting, tardiness, absenteeism, poor performance
STS and CPS Workers

- Similar STS reactions due to work with child victims of abuse
- Feelings of exhaustion
- “ Couldn’t do enough” for children and families on their caseload
- Working overtime to help
- Upset over negative media coverage
STS Reactions of CPS Workers

- Intrusive reactions, dreams of clients, nightmares about work
- Recurring fears/thoughts about violence and threats in the field
- Hyper-Arousal, inability to concentrate, jumpy, irritable, difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Numbing, denial of feelings very common
Preventing and Managing STS

- Knowledge
- Recognition
- Responding
Interventions that Help

- Organizational
- Professional
- Personal
Organizational Interventions

- Education (Job Related and STS)
- Coalition Building
- Healthy Work Setting
- Making sure staff understand policies and procedures
- Access to leaders, supervisors
- Adequate human resource policies
Professional Interventions

- Balance
- Pacing
- Boundary/Limit Setting
- Peer Support
- Supervision
- Debriefing Sessions
- Professional Training
- Job Commitment
- Plans for Coping
Work-Team Worker Care

- Acknowledge toll of work
- Arrange job into manageable parts
- Reduce Isolation
- Help each other keep good work boundaries
- Supervision reduces STS risk
- Case Review/Debriefing
Personal Interventions

- Physical
- Social/Interpersonal
- Psychological/Spiritual
Physical Interventions

- Self Care Behaviors
- Relaxation Techniques
- Adequate Sleep
- Adequate Nutrition
- Massage/Body Work
- Exercise
- Self Care Plan
Social/Interpersonal

- Social Support
- Talk, share feelings with others
- Reduce isolation
- Life Balance, Diversity of Activities
Psychological/Spiritual Interventions

- Therapy
- Relaxation/Meditation/Deep Breathing
- Contact with Nature
- Creative Expression
- Humor
Thank You!!

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