

# ND Child Welfare Supervision

June 2018

Every year more than 10 million children in the US endure the trauma of abuse, violence, natural disasters and other adverse events... For therapists, child welfare workers, and other helping professionals, who care for these traumatized children and their families, the essential act of listening to their stories takes an emotional toll that may compromise their professional functioning. "Individual and supervisory awareness of the impact of this indirect trauma exposure – **referred to as Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)** – 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." (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2011) Supervision in child welfare plays a pivotal role in creating a positive and supportive environment in which workers feel safe enough to share their thoughts and feelings about traumatic events.



## Secondary Traumatic Stress and Child Welfare Staff: A Supervisor's Role

### Who is at risk???

ALL STAFF in Child Welfare Agencies are at risk.

- Staff whose roles are supportive: receptionists, drivers, etc- may be at higher risk because of a lack of opportunity to process the stories they hear as part of their jobs with clinically trained supervisors.
- Risk is higher for those who carry a heavy caseload of traumatized children, are socially or organizationally isolated, or feel professionally compromised due to inadequate training.
- Supervisors who are responsible for supporting staff affected by STS have the potential of being affected themselves. Effective training and support to identify and manage staff STS related symptoms can be highly effective. National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee (2011)

### Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress:

- **Cognitive:** loss of perspective, poor critical thinking skills
- **Social:** decrease in collaboration, increased isolation, avoidance
- **Emotional:** depression, safety concerns, feeling overwhelmed, irritability, guilt
- **Physical:** headaches, tense muscles, nightmares, frequently ill.

Secondary Traumatic Stress: What is it? (2012)

Want more information and resources? Join us for free training!!!!

## Secondary Trauma Training For Supervisors with David Conrad

Preconference Workshop at the North Dakota Children and Family Services Conference

Monday, July 23, 2018 9:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m Click [here](#) for registration information

# Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress With Staff

Many times when we discuss Secondary Traumatic Stress we typically think of something that is out of the ordinary and an incident that also is quite disturbing and devastating. However, we should be looking at the everyday situations and stories that our child welfare workers are hearing, sharing, and experiencing on a day to day basis. Given the very nature of child welfare, we hear agonizing and harrowing stories on a daily basis and we are conditioned to think that these kinds of events are a normal part of our workday.

We do know that the system overall is hugely impacted by STS. When a worker is impacted by STS, there can be a negative impact on a worker's ability to assess safety and risk and often a growing distrust among colleagues. There can be a decrease in motivation and an increase in absenteeism and workers will often experience challenges in managing client's trauma reactions as well as a lack of psychological safety. All of this will decrease the retention of workers and also lead to poor outcomes for children and families.

## So, what are things that you can do as a supervisor to support your staff?

A parallel process occurs as

supervisors demonstrate helping relationships with workers. This demonstration influences the way workers relate to clients. For example, if a supervisor does not allow or encourage the discussion of feelings and does not open the door for the effects of trauma to be discussed, they are modeling to the worker that feelings and thoughts are not important and people should just pick themselves up and move on.

One of the most important functions that a supervisor can do is to watch for the worker's ability to **maintain balance between work and personal life**. Encouraging the use of leave, leaving work at a scheduled time or not being on call can be supportive to workers.

Provide **ongoing education** about traumatic stress symptoms on an regular basis and make it a part of your weekly staff meetings.

**Peer mentoring and monitoring** through individual staffing and group activities can also be used to identify problematic issues in the workplace. A **supervisors' modeling** of coping skills will also aide the workers in developing positive coping strategies.

**What do workers identify as to what they need from their supervisor?** A supervisor that will be there for them, have time for them and listen without criticism. Secondary Traumatic Stress and the Child Welfare Professional (2007)

**Additional Resources:** A number of resources are available to you on [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) This link will allow you access to resources in how to address trauma when working with children and families as well as within your role as a Supervisor.

Links for resources within this site that are specific to supervisors include: [Secondary Traumatic Stress A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals](#)

[Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators](#)

[Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress Among Child Welfare Staff](#)

**DID YOU KNOW???** The Children and Family Services Training Center manages the Secondary Trauma Education, Prevention and Support Project for the Child Welfare System in North Dakota. David Conrad, nationally recognized expert in addressing secondary trauma in child welfare professionals, serves as the consultant for the project. David provides both individual/group consultation to child welfare staff directly impacted by fatalities, staff assaults and other critical incidents, and secondary traumatic stress training seminars focused on preparing staff for coping with the work on an ongoing basis. If you or your agency are interested in utilizing the services available through the project, please feel free to contact the Training Center.

References: National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee. (2011). Secondary traumatic stress; A fact sheet for child-serving professionals. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-fact-sheet-child-serving-professionals>; ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute. (2012). Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress among Child Welfare Staff: A Practice Brief. New York: NYU Langone Medical Center [https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/addressing\\_sts\\_among\\_child\\_welfare\\_staff\\_a\\_practice\\_brief.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/addressing_sts_among_child_welfare_staff_a_practice_brief.pdf) Secondary Traumatic Stress...What is it? Ross, Leslie Anne and Henry, James. Webinar (obtained 3-30-2018, created 1-31-2012) [https://www.nctsn.org/resources/all-nctsn-resources?search=secondary+traumatic+stress%2C+what+is+it&resource\\_type=21&trauma\\_type=All&language=All&audience=All](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/all-nctsn-resources?search=secondary+traumatic+stress%2C+what+is+it&resource_type=21&trauma_type=All&language=All&audience=All); Pryce, Josephine; Shackelfor, Kimberly K. , & Pryce, David H. Secondary Traumatic Stress and the Child Welfare Professional (2007) Lyceum Books.

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