

# NORTH DAKOTA SECONDARY TRAUMA PREVENTION PROGRAM

## ENHANCING RESILIENCY SESSIONS

**Introduction:** Listed below are training sessions developed to promote resiliency among North Dakota Child Welfare and RCCF staff. An underlying goal of these sessions is to promote social support and strengthen staff relationships. Equally important, the sessions will provide staff with an opportunity to expand their understanding of resiliency, which includes identifying and utilizing protective strategies. Working in a fast-paced and demanding work environment, with a client population that is often in crisis and suffering from their own trauma, can take a significant toll on child protection staff. Staff cannot eliminate or extinguish these stressors. Rather, they must expand their understanding of resiliency which includes utilizing strategies to enhance their resiliency.

**Topics for Discussion:** The topics chosen for these sessions are based on the recommendations of the best available literature and experts in the field. A variety of teaching methods are used which include surveys, questionnaires, lectures, videotapes, and experiential exercise. Each session would be scheduled for 90 minutes.

Listed below are the training topics that will be covered in the sessions. Included is a brief overview of each session.

- **Recognizing the important role that Awareness, Balance and Connection play in protecting yourself from vicarious trauma.** In this session, participants will increase their understanding of vicarious trauma including what it is; signs of vicarious trauma and what increases staff risk for vicarious trauma. With audience participation, the facilitator will discuss how embracing awareness, balance and connection (i.e. the ABC's of vicarious trauma) can restore and renew the caregiver.
- **Recognizing Burnout and Taking Steps to Protect Yourself.** Attendees will expand their understanding of burnout including how it is similar to and different from secondary trauma. The trainer will also identify the six key domains of burnout: symptoms of burnout; misconceptions about burnout and risk factors that elevate staff risk for becoming burned out. He will also provide a handout titled: Job burnout: How to spot it and take action.
- **Burnout: Expanding your Understanding and Taking Steps to Combat It.** In this session, Mr. Conrad will introduce participants to the Areas of Worklife Scale (AWS) developed by Dr's Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter. Dr.'s Maslach and Leiter are widely recognized as pioneers and leaders in the field of burnout. In the session, participants will be encouraged to consider whether they are able to implement all or some of the components of the AWS. The session will also include an exercise on reflective writing, a highly regarded strategy to combat burnout.
- **Critical Incidents: Preparing for the Possibility of Such an Occurrence.** In this training, the facilitator will define "critical incidents" and provide examples typically experienced by caregiving professionals. He will also identify personal and professional adversarial effects of critical incidents. Participants who have experienced critical incidents will be encouraged to discuss how they were impacted and how they moved forward. The facilitator will also outline positive steps staff can take to respond to a critical incident.

- **Emotional Hardiness: A necessary survival skill for caring professionals.** In this training, Mr. Conrad will introduce staff to the concept of “emotional hardiness”. He will also provide historical information about emotional hardiness and examples of work-related stress that can test a person’s hardiness. As part of the discussion, he will introduce a three- step process staff can put in place that will enable them to embrace their emotional hardiness.
- **Emotional Resilience: It’s a necessity for all human services professionals.** Work-related trauma can throw staff into emotional turmoil and leave them feeling sullen, demoralized, and withdrawn. In this session, you will expand your understanding of emotional resilience which includes understanding how to develop and sustain resilience. We will also explore the relationship between positive emotions and resiliency and the facilitator will identify elements of resiliency. The trainer will also offer 10 ways to boost your emotional resilience.
- **Empathy: Though one of our most useful tools in working with children and families it raises our risk for secondary trauma.** Empathy is a powerful tool caring professionals use in their effort to help children and families. However, excessive empathy places staff at significant risk for secondary trauma. In this exercise, the facilitator will explain how and why empathy places staff at increased risk. He will also provide suggestions on how staff can empathize with their clients without over-identifying.
- **Empathy as a paradox: Though a necessary skill for working with and assisting troubled children, youth and families it also elevates staff risk for secondary trauma.** Most staff who pursue a career working with at-risk children, youth and their families have an “empathic ability” to notice the pain and suffering in others. This can benefit the client population they work with, but also places staff at elevated risk for secondary trauma. In this session, participants will expand their understanding of empathy including how their clients can benefit from their empathic engagement. The facilitator will also identify the risk factors associated with being too empathic and provide strategies staff can use to protect themselves from being too empathic.
- **Empathy: Exploring how it may prevent Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress and Increase Compassion Satisfaction.** As part of the training, Mr. Conrad will expand participants understanding of burnout, secondary trauma and compassion satisfaction and pinpoint strategies they can put in place to reduce burnout and secondary trauma and increase compassion satisfaction. He will also identify the building blocks of empathy including how empathy can improve compassion satisfaction.
- **Expressive Writing: it may help you to move past a traumatic event or life stressor.** Mr. Conrad will introduce participants to the concept of expressive writing including how you can benefit from using it. More specifically, he will discuss how expressive writing can help staff to move past an event that they are thinking, dreaming or worrying about. In the training, staff will also be provided with guidelines on how to practice expressive writing.
- **Embracing Forgiveness and Moving Forward.** In this training we will talk about “forgiveness” including how and why it is important to forgive the often challenging client population you work with. We will also talk about how forgiveness does not come easily and doesn’t mean you deny the person’s responsibility for hurting you. As part of the discussion, Mr. Conrad will identify possible benefits staff can realize by practicing forgiveness.
- **Developing, Maintaining and Strengthening your Friendships.** It can protect you from some of the Stress and Trauma at Work. Friendships can protect you from the stressors and strains of work by providing you with someone who will listen when needed; someone to share your joys and disappointments with; and someone to help steer you away from the everyday stressors and strains of your professional and personal lives. In this session, the facilitator will identify traits shared in personal and professional friendships and identify strategies to maintain and strengthen your friendships.

- **Practicing Gratitude and Positive Thinking.** In this training attendees will expand their understanding of gratitude including how they can benefit from identifying that which they feel grateful for. As part of the group discussion, Mr. Conrad will identify how cultivating a sense of gratitude can increase your life satisfaction and overall well-being.
- **Recognizing and working through your grief and loss issues at work.** There is considerable “grief and loss” in caregiving professions, but it is often unrecognized and unaddressed. In the training, participants will expand their understanding of grief and loss including the identification of examples of often overlooked grief and loss. Attendees will also be provided with advice on how to assist themselves and others in appropriately processing their grief and loss.
- **What Makes People Happy or gives them a Positive Sense of Well-Being.** In this session, the facilitator will encourage participants to consider ongoing strategies they can put in place to increase their overall happiness. He will share research findings on which factors determine an individual’s overall level of happiness and identify common myths about happiness. As part of the discussion, Mr. Conrad will differentiate momentary and enduring happiness and provide examples of intentional activities staff can engage in to increase their happiness.
- **Humility: Why do we need to embrace it?** Humility has been viewed by some as a strength and by others as a weakness. This issue and others will be explored including why human services staff, in particular, should embrace their humility and view it in a more positive light. Possible positive benefits will also be identified for staff who choose to embrace their humility.
- **Recognizing the Value of Humor in the Workplace.** Humor in the workplace, for human services staff, can be used as a self-protective tool to help staff maintain some distance from the suffering. In this session, the facilitator will identify why, when and how humor is recognized as an asset in the workplace. He will also discuss when humor is appropriate or not appropriate. As part of the discussion, the facilitator will identify the positive benefits of embracing humor in the workplace. Participants will also be encouraged to discuss and share examples of how they have benefitted from humor in the workplace.
- **Holding on to Your Hope while Working with an Often Struggling Population.** As you well know, working with a client population that has often endured significant trauma in their own lives can be very challenging. Holding on to your hope, despite their setbacks, can be very challenging for you as well. In this session, we will discuss the concept of “hope work” and the facilitator will provide strategies you can use to encourage and maintain your hope for yourself and for your clients.
- **Hypervigilance: A common response to stress in a hazardous work environment.** Human Services staff have often shared with me that they sometimes feel hypervigilant or overly cautious, anxious and excessively observant of what is going on around them. This is not unusual and particularly after staff are involved in a traumatic or frightening event. In this session, participants will expand their understanding of hypervigilance including how they may be impacted, emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally. The facilitator will also identify symptoms of hypervigilance, possible adverse effects and offer strategies staff can use to combat it.
- **Intrusive Imagery: How can you Respond to and Minimize the Adverse Effects.** Intrusive images are described as an unwelcome thought, image, or unpleasant idea that is upsetting or distressing and which can become difficult to manage or eliminate. In this session, the facilitator hopes to expand participants understanding of the concept of intrusive imagery. As part of the training, the facilitator will provide strategies staff can use to help them move forward when confronted with intrusive thoughts and images. These strategies will include visualization and guided imagery techniques.

- **Expanding your understanding of legal ethics and the potentially adverse effects on child protection workers.** Child welfare workers describe working with attorneys to be sometimes frustrating, stressful and even traumatizing. In this session, the facilitator will explore the different work ethics adhered to by lawyers and child welfare workers and how that contributes to the inter-professional tension. The facilitator hopes that by expanding participants understanding of what contributes to that stress they will be better able to cope with those adverse effects.
- **Practicing Mindfulness to Enhance your Resiliency.** The goal of this training is to expand your understanding of mindfulness including how you can benefit both personally and professionally. As part of the training, the facilitator will discuss why you should practice mindfulness and how it may serve as a protective mechanism against vicarious trauma. He will also provide examples of mindfulness exercises staff can utilize.
- **Cultivating a Sense of Optimism to Enhance Your Resiliency** **Optimism has been shown to be an important predictor of resiliency and particularly for persons working in a stressful work environment.** Mr. Conrad will discuss how optimism means different things to different people and how one can achieve optimism. As part of the discussion, he will also provide strategies staff can put in place to cultivate their sense of optimism.
- **Identifying the Elements of our Personal Moral Compass and Core Values and Utilizing them to Enhance our Resiliency.** In this training, the facilitator will provide several different definitions of a “personal moral compass”. He will also work with participants to identify their personal moral compass and core values and discuss how practicing altruism and finding a purpose in life has emerged as a key factor associated with resiliency and recovery.
- **Engage in Physical Fitness to Improve your Emotional and Physical Well-being and Enhance Your Resiliency.** In this session we will discuss the benefits and challenges of engaging in physical fitness on a regular and ongoing basis. The facilitator will also provide some concrete examples of how you can benefit emotionally, physically and psychologically by engaging in a wide-variety of physical fitness activities.
- **Post-Traumatic Growth: Exploring our potential for growth as a result of exposure to traumatic events, life crises or extremely stressful events.** In this session, the facilitator will introduce attendees to the concept of post-traumatic growth. He will also share research findings which confirm examples of posttraumatic growth including: a change in the relationship with others; a change in the sense of self and a change in the philosophy of life. In the session, Mr. Conrad will introduce attendees to the post-traumatic growth inventory which they can use to determine if they have experienced post-traumatic growth.
- **Recognizing, Identifying and Utilizing Positive Role Models.** In this interactive training, the facilitator will provide several different definitions of roles models and offer suggestions and ideas on what you should look for when choosing a positive role model. He will also identify the common characteristics of a positive role model and outline the possible benefits of having a positive role model.
- **Relaxation: Identifying helpful activities, recognizing the obstacles and taking steps to overcome them.** The focus of this exercise/discussion will be on identifying relaxation activities participants find helpful in protecting themselves from the trauma and stress of their work. A variety of relaxation exercises and strategies, developed by experts, will be provided. Participants will be introduced to and practice relaxation exercises in the training.
- **Ruminating can have a paralyzing effect on us.** How can we stop doing it? In this exercise, participants will be encouraged to discuss why they ruminate, how they are adversely affected by it and what they can do to disengage or free ourselves from rumination. The facilitator will provide participants with specific strategies they can use to “shake off” ruminations.

- **Resiliency: Bend without Breaking.** Working in a field with a client population that has often experienced a lot of trauma can test your resiliency. Resiliency topics to be covered in this session include, but are not limited to: what is it; how do you build it; and how do you get your resiliency back when you lose it. The facilitator will also discuss the importance and benefits of regularly implementing resiliency strategies and single out ten strategies attendees can put in place to enhance their resiliency.
- **Second-guessing: Learning to accept mistakes and move on.** In this exercise, the facilitator will explain why child welfare professionals are prone to second-guess themselves, particularly following their involvement in a traumatic event. He will also discuss the short and long-term consequences of second-guessing and identify steps staff can put in place to stop second-guessing themselves.
- **Self-Care: What are activities you do or wish you did to protect yourself from the stress and trauma of work?** Self-Care is recognized as one of the most effective strategies for protecting staff from the stress and trauma of their work and enhancing their resiliency. In this exercise/discussion staff will identify self-care activities they currently use or could consider using to protect themselves from the stress and trauma of their work. We will also discuss self-care activities that are purely pleasurable or can enhance one's self-esteem.
- **Showing self-compassion: Why it may be difficult?** As human services staff, showing empathy and compassion for others often comes easier than showing compassion for ourselves. In this training session, the facilitator will provide several different definitions of self-compassion, differentiate self-esteem and self-compassion and identify common misconceptions about self-compassion. He will also identify how staff can benefit from showing compassion toward oneself. Participants will be encouraged to complete the self-compassion scale.
- **Self-Efficacy and its Relationship to Resiliency.** Self-Efficacy is broadly seen as embracing a belief that enables you to respond to and manage challenging tasks. Though self-efficacy is seen as being closely related to resiliency it is also different. In this training, the facilitator will expand participants understanding of self-efficacy including how to differentiate self-efficacy from optimism and self-esteem. He will also identify four sources of information which influence our perceptions of self-efficacy and identify simple steps to boost one's self-efficacy.
- **Trauma exposure and its impact on sleep: Assessing the impact and taking steps to protect yourself.** In this training, the facilitator will discuss how sleep disturbance is a common consequence of direct and indirect trauma. He will also discuss how stress caused by a traumatic event can lead to a variety of sleep problems and will identify common sleep problems attributed to trauma exposure. Training participants will be provided with "healthy sleep tips" and recommendations for combating poor sleep caused by insomnia, bad dreams and daytime fatigue.
- **Stress is inevitable in life! What can we do to "Thrive" as Opposed to Merely "Survive"?** In this training, the facilitator will outline a definition of "surviving" as "doing a good job of "treading the water of life and in keeping your head above the surface". He will also discuss the contrast between "surviving" and "thriving"(e.g. "flourishing and growing in the face of adversity"). As part of the training, he will ask you to identify what strength factors you utilize to "thrive" and provide specific examples of strength factors you can consider using to thrive in the future.
- **Creating and maintaining a social support network.** Human services staff often identify creating and maintaining a strong social support network as essential if they are to survive and sometimes thrive in their field. In the training, the facilitator will identify the benefits and obstacles to building a strong social support network. He will also discuss how frequent stress and trauma in the workplace can adversely affect and undermine one's ability to build a positive social support network.

- **Teamwork: Assessing your team's strengths and identifying obstacles and how to overcome them.** A strong supportive team has been proven to be an effective buffer against the adverse effects of secondary trauma. In this session participants will explore these issues: (1) how well do you function as a team; (2) what are the unique skill sets that each member brings to the team; (3) what are activities you engage in to strengthen your team: and (4) what are obstacles that arise for your team and how do you overcome those obstacles.
- **Introduction to Vicarious Posttraumatic Growth.** In this training, participants will be introduced to the concept of Vicarious Posttraumatic Growth. More specifically, this training will focus on how caregiving professionals working with trauma survivors, may experience work-related benefits and rewards. In addition to exploring with participants how they may have experienced vicarious posttraumatic growth, the facilitator will share study results which confirm how some professionals have experienced positive change.
- **Vicarious Trauma: Identifying the risk factors and implementing self-care strategies to protect yourself.** In this exercise, the facilitator will identify client issues and personal issues which may increase your risk for suffering vicarious trauma. He will also discuss the importance of creating balance between your work/home life, identifying and implementing healthy habits, nurturing yourself and connecting with others, personally and professionally.

*Provider of Services:* David Conrad