



# ND Child Welfare Supervision

## **BUILDING STAFF RESILIENCE**

Working in child welfare is hard. Even on its good days, it is hard, no question about it. Retention rates for child welfare workers are low and the average time that workers remain in the profession has decreased considerably. Many of these workers leave because of the demands that it takes emotionally and even physically. On the flip side, many social workers find a great deal of satisfaction in their work and maintain resilience despite the challenges that they face daily. What is their secret? Is it all about the workers or are there forces in our agency that create and support resiliency? How can we, as supervisors, assist in creating a workforce that can weather the challenges, as well as the daily struggles, and still come out on top? How can we as supervisors be supportive of workers? Is it our role? What works best? Is resilience something that can be taught? Is it a skill, an attitude, the environment, or a combination of all of these? The answer is “Yes”!

When we focus on resilience as something that a worker “has” or “doesn’t have”, it places blame on the worker and tends to avoid the fact that the environment also plays a critical piece in resiliency. Critical components such as the alignment between our personal and organizational values and having manageable case loads affect a workers resilience. In addition, agencies need to recognize the impact of emotional demands on its workers. It is said that the function of emotional support is considered to have the most impact on work resiliency and it is only when there is a trusting relationship between worker and supervisor that social workers will be honest about their emotions. If the agency cultures inhibits this honesty, workers are at greater risk of decreased resilience and therefore at a higher potential for burnout. (Journal of Social Work 2018)

# Strategies to building resilience in the workplace.

- 1. Create a supportive work culture:** When workers feel comfortable discussing concerns and challenges, they will feel empowered and psychologically safe. This positive environment also leads to more confidence and better critical thinking, which in turn leads to better connections and better assessment of children and families.
- 2. Create an environment that fosters emotional intelligence (EQ):** By developing EQ you will help workers navigate difficult situations with grace and empathy. Workers will not only put forth grace and empathy with their coworkers but also with the families with whom they work with. Having a high level of EQ allows you to empathize with others, communicate effectively, and be both self and socially aware, all of which assist in resiliency.
- 3. Encourage growth and development:** When we create an environment that is safe to take chances in or to ask questions, we promote development and empower workers to view challenges as opportunities for growth. Set an example by setting goals, embrace feedback and make feedback a skillset we use daily while learning from mistakes.
- 4. Help workers develop strong communication skills:** When we have open and honest communication with our team, they feel more connected and better equipped to handle challenges. They also can communicate their needs clearly and can provide helpful feedback to others.
- 5. Promote Self Care and Well Being:** Encourage workers to practice self care by setting time aside for regular breaks, exercise and relaxation. Don't use breaks to stew about work, engage in activities that give you a break from work. Role model the importance of taking care of yourself and promote work life balance
- 6. Provide opportunities for skill development:** When we value ongoing learning, we create a work place that encourages workers to stay up to date with policy, learn new skills and sets the tone that we never stop learning and growing, all of which make us more resilient during trying times, and during times of change.
- 7. Establish a sense of purpose:** Ensure that workers understand the agency mission; having a strong sense of purpose can drive resilience and provide a reason to push through adversity. When the mission is in alignment with our passion for the work, the reason that we come to work each and every day, it makes the hard days a bit easier knowing that there is meaning behind it and that the outcomes are worth it.
- 8. Set Realistic Expectations:** When we set realistic goals, and achieve them, your team will feel more confident in their abilities and more likely to bounce back from setbacks. Celebrate successes, no matter how small, to build a sense of accomplishment and motivation.
- 9. Encourage Collaboration and Teamwork:** A cohesive team is better equipped to handle challenges and overcome setbacks. When there is camaraderie and collaboration, there tends to be more opportunities and creative thinking. Set aside time for team building exercises and encourage your team to share their knowledge, skills and resources to tackle the hard stuff together.

# Strategies to Building Resilience cont.

- 10. Learn from Setbacks:** Any setback should be seen as an opportunity to learn and grow. Create an environment where it is safe to ask questions and learn from mistakes. When we view setbacks as opportunities to refine our skills or to create new strategies, we have a more resilient team that is better equipped to handle adversity and work together to come up with a better plan.

Adapted from: "10 Effective Strategies Building your Team's Resilience" Maven Leadership Inc. (2024)

## Creating Resilience in Ourselves

Devereux Center for Resilient Children uses the analogy of staff being a "pitcher of water" which in turn fills the "cups" of children and families when speaking of resiliency. In this analogy, leadership are the "wells" that fill up the "pitchers" (aka Staff). As leaders we must ask ourselves, "how full is our well?" If my well is dry, how am I in turn treating others, including those on my staff?

Devereux points out specific objectives in creating resilience in ourselves as leaders so that we can show up for the hard days:

- 1. Relationships-** As supervisors, we have the opportunity to create a supportive environment where we challenge staff to do their best, and to work side by side with staff when needed. We can also foster trust within our staff. Are we creating relationships that are similar with mentors and supportive people in our lives? If we are not creating relationships that are supportive and help us get through the difficult days, it will be immensely hard to show up for those under our guidance.
- 2. Self Control-** Are we using healthy coping strategies that assist us in using critical thinking? Do we take breaks and participate in activities that also feed our soul and body? When we are overstressed our ability to engage in critical thinking deteriorates and we are not "present" for others. Remember to model healthy self-care for your workers.
- 3. Internal Beliefs-** What is the mental tape that we are playing for ourselves? Do we encourage staff creativity and model and encourage positivity and optimism or is the mental tape that is playing telling me only what is going wrong versus all that is going right? Are we closed to new ideas and struggle with change? We need to focus and nurture staff strengths as well as focus on the great things we see them doing. If you shine your light on something it will grow!
- 4. Nurture Initiative-** What makes you come alive? Are you taking the time to enjoy staff and share positive moments? Are we taking the time in our department to enjoy each other? Create opportunities for staff to laugh and play. Short periods of time in staff meetings, during lunch or during breaks can provide wonderful opportunities to engage, laugh, and enjoy each other. Many workers stay in their jobs due to their connections with peers and their supervisors. Are we providing those reasons for people to stay within our own agency?

# Upcoming Training Opportunities

## Supervisor Foundation Training added for Fall 2024

### Administrative Supervision for Child Welfare Supervisors

August 21-22, 2024  
in Bismarck  
Register by clicking [HERE](#)

### Educational Supervisor Training for Child Welfare Supervisors

November 13-14, 2024  
in Fargo  
Registration opening soon!

## Did you know?

Micro Learnings are available on the CFSTC Website. These can be used to provide basic foundational information about the Safety Framework Practice Model prior to a worker entering Child Welfare Certification. It can also serve as post training opportunities for individual workers or as a group learning opportunity for your staff to clear up questions, or to refresh our efforts. [Click here](#) to see what micro learnings have been added. More will be added soon!

Sept. 16 -19, 2024 | Bismarck, ND

#Purpose2024

# RESERVE YOUR SPOT

The Behavioral Health & Children and Family Services Conference