

# Trauma and Stress Reduction Training

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*When a participant in a past training was asked what she got out of the training she replied...“that the cumulative effects of my trauma and stress can be mitigated if addressed over time in accepting circles of people”*

**Introduction:** Listed below are training sessions developed to help caring professionals cope with the inevitable trauma and stress they encounter in their work. A primary goal of these sessions is to provide staff with a safe and supportive environment to process the stress and trauma they are exposed to at work. They are also an opportunity for staff to obtain tools, strategies and insight that can help protect them from the ongoing trauma and stress they encounter at work. If staff have recently been involved in a traumatizing event these sessions can help them “normalize” their feelings and reframe their thoughts about what happened.

## **Topics for discussion**

These topics are based on what current secondary trauma literature clearly states are the best tools and strategies to protect staff from the trauma and stress encountered at work. A variety of teaching methods are used in these training sessions including surveys, questionnaires, lectures, videotapes, experiential exercises and journal articles. Each session lasts approximately 2 hours.

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

## **Questionnaire—Discussion**

(1) 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 (i.e. over-identification with clients) places staff at significant risk for secondary trauma. In this exercise, we will discuss how being too empathic can elevate your risk for secondary trauma. Also, the facilitator will give you some strategies you can use to protect yourself from over-identifying with your clients.

(2) Resiliency: Recognizing its significance and taking steps to enhance your resiliency.

This session begins with a short lecture on resiliency. It is followed by a discussion about the importance of resiliency, maintaining resiliency, regaining resiliency and identifying personality traits that result in enhanced resiliency.

(3) Understanding your motivations and appreciating your rewards for doing the work!

In this session staff will be encouraged to reflect on why they chose their career path, how they have grown (both personally and professionally), what their short and long-term goals are, and how they hold on to their “hope” during difficult times.

(4) Recognizing and working through your grief and loss issues at work

It is widely recognized that there is considerable “grief and loss” in all work engaged in by caring professionals. Attendees will be provided with information about grief and loss including: information about different types of loss, sudden versus predictable loss, normal grief reactions and helping others who are grieving.

(5) Teamwork: Promoting effective teamwork to protect yourself from the inevitable trauma and stress of your work

Participants will be asked to form small groups and complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire will examine such issues as: how well do you function as a team; what are ways you collaborate with your teammates; and what are the unique skill sets each member of the team brings to the team..

(6) Expressive Writing: How it can help you move past a traumatic event, conflict or stressor in life

According to psychologist, Dr. James Pennebaker, writing about your distress or trauma can be an effective tool in helping caring professionals move past their trauma. In this session, the facilitator will encourage those who engage in ‘expressive writing’ to talk about their experience including the challenges as well as benefits. The facilitator will share information from Dr. Pennebaker’s writing and research to encourage participants to use expressive writing in the future.

(7) Understanding and appreciating the role of humor in protecting us from secondary trauma.

As outlined in several articles on this subject, humor plays an important role in protecting caring professionals from the stress and trauma of their work. In this session, participants will discuss when humor is appropriate and inappropriate. There will also be some discussion about the potential downside of humor as well as the significant positive benefits. Participants will be encouraged to share humorous events they have experienced or witnessed in the workplace.

(8) Maintaining and strengthening friendships to protect staff from the stress and trauma of work

We will discuss the significance of friendships, the difference between old and new friendships, what you can do to maintain or sustain your friendships. Participants will be encouraged to consider who they can process their joy and disappointments with.

(9) Letting go of your attachment to your client's success or failure

Letting go of one's attachment to a client's success or failure is often a challenging issue for caring professionals. In this session, participants will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire and to reflect on such issues as: how they are impacted by the success or failure of their clients; when do they consider themselves successful in doing the work and what gives them peace of mind at the end of the day.

(10) What makes people happy or gives them a positive sense of well being?

In order to combat the ongoing trauma and stress of work caring professionals must maintain a positive sense of well-being. Participants will be asked to complete a short quiz considering such issues as what does and doesn't make us happy. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on the difference between "momentary" and/or a more "enduring" sense of well-being. A related short-video clip will be shown to enhance the learning experience.

(11) Self-Care: What are activities you engage in or wish you engaged in to protect yourself from the stress and trauma of work?

Self-Care is one of (if not the most effective) strategy for protecting caring professionals from the stress and trauma of work. In this exercise/discussion, participants will be encouraged to discuss what emotional, physical, and psychological self-care activities they use to protect themselves from the stress and trauma of their work. Obstacles to using those strategies will also be discussed

(12) Second-guessing: Understanding the impact and taking steps to stop it?

In this exercise, we will discuss why caring professionals are very prone to second-guess themselves following their involvement in a traumatic event. We will also discuss the short and long-term consequences of second-guessing and what can be done to stop it.

(13) 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 will find helpful in protecting themselves from the trauma and stress of their work. A wide variety of relaxation exercises and strategies developed by experts in the field will be provided.

(14) Over-thinking or ruminating can have a paralyzing effect on us. How can we stop doing it?

In this exercise, we will discuss why we ruminate, how we are adversely affected by it and what we can do to disengage or free ourselves from rumination. The facilitator will provide participants with specific strategies they can use to “shake off” ruminations.

(15) 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 define Post-Traumatic Growth, a theory developed by psychologists, Dr. Tedeschi and Dr. Calhoun, and discuss the possible growth that staff and clients may realize as a result of their exposure to trauma.

(16) Have you lost your down time?

In this lecture/discussion we will view a short film clip which well illustrates why we are significant risk for losing our down time. We will also explore how the loss of down time can have a negative impact on us at work. And finally, we will discuss what we can do to increase and preserve our down time.

(17) Cognitive Restructuring: What is it and how can we use it to protect ourselves from the emotional stress and strain of work?

The facilitator will define the concept of “cognitive restructuring” for participants. He will outline steps that can be taken to initiate cognitive restructuring which include ‘thought stopping’, taking responsibility for your own thoughts, giving yourself positive affirmations and accentuating the positive.

(18) Vicarious Trauma and child welfare: Revisiting the issue of “self-care”. In this exercise, we will focus on self-care including creating balance between your work/home life, nurturing or nourishing yourself and identifying activities you engage in to “escape” from the stress and trauma of work.

(19) Stress is inevitable in life: What can we do to thrive rather than merely survive.

In this session, participants will consider the difference between surviving stress or, put another way, “treading the water of life” and thriving or “flourishing or growing in the face of challenge”. Participants will be encouraged to share examples at work where they feel like they are merely surviving. They will also be encouraged to consider what *qualities, behaviors, thoughts or actions* have helped them to thrive during difficult times.

(20) Burnout, what is it and what can you do to protect yourself from it?

Participants will begin this session by taking a short burnout quiz to assess their understanding of the concept of burnout. They will also be asked to consider strategies they can use to protect themselves from burnout and whether they currently use them. At the end of the training they will be given a sheet outlining “tips” to protect themselves from burnout.

(21) How are we impacted, and how do we respond, emotionally to serious cases of abuse and neglect?

Participants will begin this session by reading a short story about a semi-fictitious serious case of abuse. After reading the story, reactions will be sought including whether the primary character received the support she deserved. Attendees will also be encouraged to share whether they have been through similar events and, if so, what strategies they found helpful or useful in moving forward.

#### **IV. Experiential Exercise**

(1) Reflecting on Your Personal and Professional Development

In this exercise, staff will be asked to create a timeline to help them look at how and why their career developed as it did, how their attitudes and beliefs have changed over the course of their career, and how events in their professional and personal life may have influenced their development. It is also an opportunity for staff to get to know their colleagues better both personally and professionally.