

*Handouts for the Webinar*

# **Staff Performance and Retention: Using a Trauma Lens**

June 3, 2015

*Presenters*

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Jordan Institute for Families

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work

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NC Division of Social Services

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## PRESENTER BIOS



### **Susan Osborne**

Susan has been Director of Alamance County Department of Social Services for more than 15 years. She began her social services work as a foster care social worker more than 25 years ago. She is also the Principle Investigator for Alamance Alliance, a SAMHSA grant that focuses on early identification and intervention for social emotional needs for children ages 0-5. Susan is the founding co-chair of the Alamance County Children's Executive Oversight Committee, which since 2007 has been promoting system of care principles and practices for services for children and families in Alamance County.



### **Jeanne Preisler**

Jeanne works with the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, Child Welfare Section, where she coordinates Project Broadcast, a \$3.2 million federally-funded initiative to help our state develop a trauma-informed child serving system. She has worked in child welfare for the last 15 years in various capacities, including as the Director of NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network and the Board of Directors for the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. Jeanne is a former foster parent with two adult daughters (one was a kinship placement and one through foster care).



### **Kelly Sullivan**

Kelly Sullivan, PhD, is a Licensed Psychologist and an Assistant Professor at Duke University Medical Center and works at the Center for Child and Family Health (CCFH) in Durham, North Carolina. She directs CCFH's outpatient clinic and two child trauma projects for SAMHSA and NC Division of Social Services. She is an experienced trainer of trauma-informed treatments and practices for mental health clinicians, child welfare professionals, and foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers.

## SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS SCALE

The following is a list of statements made by persons who have been impacted by their work with traumatized clients. Read each statement then indicate how frequently the statement was true for you in the past **seven (7) days** by circling the corresponding number next to the statement.

NOTE: “Client” is used to indicate persons with whom you have been engaged in a helping relationship. You may substitute another noun that better represents your work such as consumer, patient, recipient, etc.

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
1. I felt emotionally numb.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. My heart started pounding when I thought about my work with clients.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. It seemed as if I was reliving the trauma(s) experienced by my client(s).....	1	2	3	4	5
4. I had trouble sleeping.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. I felt discouraged about the future.....	1	2	3	4	5
6. Reminders of my work with clients upset me.....	1	2	3	4	5
7. I had little interest in being around others.....	1	2	3	4	5
8. I felt jumpy.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. I was less active than usual.....	1	2	3	4	5
10. I thought about my work with clients when I didn't intend to.....	1	2	3	4	5
11. I had trouble concentrating.....	1	2	3	4	5
12. I avoided people, places, or things that reminded me of my work with clients.....	1	2	3	4	5
13. I had disturbing dreams about my work with clients.....	1	2	3	4	5
14. I wanted to avoid working with some clients.....	1	2	3	4	5
15. I was easily annoyed.....	1	2	3	4	5
16. I expected something bad to happen.....	1	2	3	4	5
17. I noticed gaps in my memory about client sessions.....	1	2	3	4	5

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Intrusion Subscale (add items 2, 3, 6, 10, 13)	Intrusion Score	_____
Avoidance Subscale (add items 1, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17)	Avoidance Score	_____
Arousal Subscale (add items 4, 8, 11, 15, 16)	Arousal Score	_____
TOTAL (add Intrusion, Arousal, and Avoidance Scores)	Total Score	_____

**Citation:** Bride, B.E., Robinson, M.R., Yegidis, B., & Figley, C.R. (2004). Development and validation of the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale. *Research on Social Work Practice, 14*, 27-35.

# PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS PRIMARY AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS IN CHILD WELFARE



## Using a Trauma Lens

## SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS (STS) IS AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Developing a comprehensive program to address primary and secondary traumatic stress within the child welfare workforce is critical to retaining experienced, competent staff. It is an on-going process that can begin today with simple strategies with little to no cost.

The return on investment for developing and sustaining a comprehensive program is extremely high. The savings from less staff turnover and higher staff productivity can be reinvested into family or employee programming.

This document was designed to help county departments of social services implement programming that prioritizes the wellness of their staff.

### Global Strategies Include:

- Value Individual Control
- Normalize the Experience
- Be Mindful of Triggers
- Use Reflective Supervision
- Value Stress Reduction
- Use “Stay” Conversations
- Encourage Use of Vacation Time
- Highlight the Positive Difference Being Made

## Practical Strategies For Agency Leadership

- Focus on prevention strategies through staff education, skills training and supervision.
- Promote psychological safety with panic buttons or intercom processes, security alarms, multiple staff on duty, threat policies, etc.
- Ensure you have physical safety protocols in place. Independent Living Resources, Inc. has a *Personal Safety Handbook* for Human Services Professionals that has researched strategies.
- Monitoring retention and turnover rates by units (highest in North Carolina is typically in Investigation/Assessment units).
- Ensure employee orientation emphasizes the potential impact of STS and what the employee should do when they are negatively impacted by this work.
- Put STS prevention, monitoring and support strategies into employee evaluation/performance reviews.
- Set up a formal celebration system (praise notes, stars, success slips, highlights in newsletters, etc.) to reinforce the positive difference employees are making in the lives of children and families.
- Ensure all leadership and supervisors model self-care and appropriate work/life balance for employees.
- Invest in quality tissues and ensure all supervisors' offices and all meeting rooms always have an adequate supply.
- Ensure the agency mission prioritizes teamwork. Co-workers have a large influence on a worker's resilience and ability to sustain this work, and professional isolation can intensify STS.
- Have Human Resources monitor and acknowledge birthdays, employee anniversaries, and significant life events.
- Have Human Resources monitor absenteeism and vacation days and notify supervisor of any patterns. For example, if someone has not taken time off from work in the past six months, their supervisor may want to encourage it; or if someone has taken an abundant amount of time off, the supervisor may want to dive deeper into why that might be.
- Ensure staff receive regular communication about any new agency initiatives and how they fit into the big picture, updates on current initiatives and the reason why an initiative ended when applicable.
- Cultivate a positive relationship with your local media. Ensure several people on staff are properly trained and effective at speaking with media.

Have all leaders and supervisors read the CW360 STS Issue. Have a half-day retreat to discuss and begin development of agency-wide plan to support workforce.

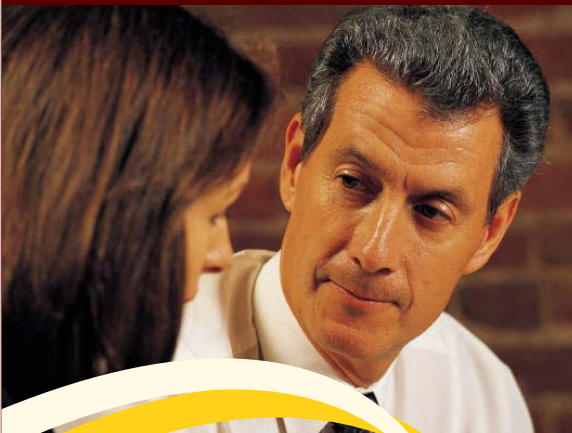
## Practical Strategies For Agency Leadership

### NORMALIZE THE EXPERIENCE

Be sure employees know it is normal to struggle with the unique stress of working with abuse and neglect cases. Remember that each individual will experience things differently but the most important step you can take is talk about it frequently and normalize it.

### USE STAY CONVERSATIONS

Whether it is an informal conversation, a formal interview or a survey the employee completes, having a stay conversation provides data to better understand why employees stay and what they value most. It will also give you a head's up if there are issues that need to be addressed.



- Explore negotiating lower co-pays for employee mental health services. In some jurisdictions, the county has covered the cost of the co-pays for the first three mental health visits.
- Consider contracting with or embedding a mental health professional to support staff on a regular basis. Contract with local hospice grief counselors (and/or hospital chaplains) to conduct support groups for staff after a death or other challenging incident.
- Ensure ongoing training for STS is embedded into your agency's internal training program. At a minimum, ensure all staff attend the STS courses sponsored by NC Division of Social Services.
- Ensure your agency conducts exit interviews and stay interviews with employees to keep abreast of the reasons for staff retention and for staff turnover.

Supervisors wear many hats. Ensure they feel supported in this difficult work. Supervisors need the opportunity to process these topics regularly with their manager and peers before they can undergo a parallel process with workers.

- Ensure supervisors understand importance of STS prevention and have the skills to support their staff.
- Develop a mechanism where employees can go 'above' their supervisor without negative repercussions to share when they do not feel supported regarding a stress reaction.
- Ensure supervisors realize that monitoring their staff for secondary traumatic stress reactions is as important as monitoring their staff's completion of case documentation.
- Ensure you have a critical incident debriefing protocol to manage and support staff involved in a critical incident.
- If you have a formal training department, encourage use of the free online *Resilience Alliance Curriculum*.
- Promote physical health whenever possible. Put healthy options in the snack and drink vending machines, offer healthy food options during staff meetings, and/or encourage 15 minute walking breaks twice a day (in groups/pairs or individually).
- If building space allows, set up a room for employee exercise, yoga class, Zumba or meditation. Collaborate with local gyms to offer discount memberships for employees.
- Conduct an annual survey of employees (ex. STSI-OA, ProQOL).
- Ensure your agency Attorney and staff have a positive working relationship. Worker turnover has been linked to legal ethics/litigation issues and having a positive attorney/staff working relationship that allows for informal conversations can help.



## AGENCY LEADERS: WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not put all of the burden on the supervisors to develop, oversee, and manage their employee's primary and secondary traumatic stress reactions.
- Do not put all of the burden on the employee to manage their own stress reactions. Realize this is an occupational hazard for the child welfare industry.
- Do not underestimate the power of your attitude toward Secondary Traumatic Stress. An authentic approach to caring for employee's mental wellness will go a long way.
- Do not put this issue on the back burner. Attending to the physical and psychological safety of staff is as important as attending to the physical and psychological safety of the children and families we serve.

## SUPERVISORS: WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not feel like it's impossible to focus on Secondary Traumatic Stress because you have too much to do. Focusing on it will help you and your team in the long run.
- Do not minimize, make fun of, or diminish employees feelings or expression of grief/stress.
- Do not expect your staff to practice work/life balance if you are not modeling it.
- Do not forget how stressful it is to be a front line worker.

## Practical Strategies For Agency Leadership

- Foster a culture of optimism.
- Acknowledge the impact community collaboration (or lack thereof) has on staff satisfaction and endeavor to strengthen those relationships at every opportunity.
- Allocate funds to support meals for staff during usually difficult days or those complex after-hour cases.
- Prioritize keeping the 1:5 supervisor-worker ratio. Keeping appropriate ratios not only helps supervisors and workers, it helps ensure positive well-being outcomes for children and families.
- Develop an employee-led group to gather concerns and issues regarding developing and maintaining a physically and psychologically safe environment. Respond to all concerns in writing to all staff.

## Practical Strategies For Supervisors

- During individual supervision meetings, give staff opportunity to discuss any personal history of trauma and how that may be impacting their work (they would not need to reveal details).
- Keep an eye on the types of cases assigned at any given time. An abundance of one case type (i.e., domestic violence) may be more draining than having a variety of cases. Also, it may be particularly draining if they have a personal history with it (i.e., experienced domestic violence as a child).
- During case staffings, ask how each case is impacting the worker personally and ask them how their peers can help.
- Actively monitor staff training, not only to be sure they meet the minimum requirements, but to also ensure the employee feels supported in their professional and educational development.
- Spend time ensuring staff feels psychologically safe.
- Use universal precaution philosophy regarding staff psychological safety - assume they do not feel safe and regularly assess it.
- Deploy staff in teams during difficult situations so they do not feel isolated or solely responsible.
- Normalize the reactions to primary and secondary traumatic stress.

Encourage the use of the workbook "What About You?: A Workbook for Those Who Work With Others". It is a great resource for supervisors and line staff to get in touch with their current stress reactions.

## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Complete the 'What About You?' workbook.
- Change your on-call telephone ring tone every month.
- Prioritize balance between work life and personal life and have a friend or colleague hold you accountable to keep balance.
- Track your successes and be sure to share them with your supervisor and the team during meetings.
- Be a detective about your own trauma triggers and whenever possible, share those with your colleagues so they can support you.
- Practice self-care (physical, social, emotional, professional, psychological and spiritual).
- Deal with work conflict as quickly as possible. Allowing it to fester is often counter-productive.
- Advocate for yourself – being able to articulate your experience and what you need from others (peers, supervisors, etc.) can improve resiliency.
- Get more sleep. Really!

## Practical Strategies For Supervisors

- Create a culture where it is not only okay to talk about stress reactions, but create a culture where employees are encouraged to discuss the impact this work has on them.
- Be mindful of workplace bullying especially where reactions to stress are happening. If you see one employee minimizing someone's feelings, be sure to publically support that employee who is experiencing the stress.
- Be mindful of the impact when cases go in a different direction than the worker wanted it to go (i.e., they felt reunification was still possible but the supervisor, group, or attorney felt it was time to terminate parental rights). This is particularly challenging for staff and they may need additional support during these times.
- Be mindful that staff worries (especially new workers) about making a costly mistake with a child or family. Allow that topic to be part of the regular discussions to minimize feelings of professional isolation.
- Create opportunities for employee choice wherever possible.
- Ask employee where they would like to meet (i.e., in their office, your office, in conference room, outside).
- Ask employee which case they would like to discuss first.
- Offer flexibility in work hours if possible (even if it is coming in 30 minutes early and leaving early one day).
- Realize that one type of support strategy (i.e., talking in a support group, massages) may not be helpful to some team members.
- Create opportunities that will empower the worker whenever possible (i.e., ask them what happened well this week, ask them if there is anything specifically they want to be involved in at the agency but haven't yet been invited to participate in, etc.).
- Regularly discuss families who have successfully completed their service plan. The celebration of successes is critically important.
- Encourage employees to implement a new strategy (either a case work practice or a stress reduction practice) to see how it works and report back to the team.
- Be willing to adjust case size or case type depending on staff's current secondary traumatic experiences.

Encourage the use of the workbook "What About You?: A Workbook for Those Who Work With Others". It is a great resource for supervisors and line staff to get in touch with their current stress reactions.



## Practical Strategies For Supervisors

- Develop a 'stand-up' Peer Support Meetings (impromptu short meetings with staff who are present at the time to support a colleague who is struggling with a case).
- Develop a self-care accountability buddy system (and monitor how its working).
- Develop an informal (or formal) mentoring program (match a new employee up with a seasoned worker who has a history of achieving good outcomes with families).
- Remember to say thank you to your staff for their efforts.
- Publically celebrate employee successes.
- Send a handwritten note every now and again to staff's home address.
- Make employee evaluations meaningful. Do not rush them. Discuss employee strengths, needs and areas the employee wishes to develop professionally during the upcoming review period. Be sure to include how you and the employee will handle primary and secondary traumatic stress reactions and how you as their supervisor can support their work/life balance.
- Be sure you advocate for your own needs with your supervisor or agency leadership.



### Tip For The Tired...

Working with children and families can be exhausting, and when we are tired, we don't always react the way we should when others share something. Keep this simple tip in mind... when someone shares something with you, try to match their level of enthusiasm (or concern) and follow-up with at least two questions. By asking two questions, you are showing you care about what they are sharing with you. This simple strategy can go a long way on those days you would rather just be left alone. Be sure to be genuine when you ask.

### HOW CAN TIC TACs HELP?

Developing a trauma-informed community (TIC) and a trauma-aware community (TAC) can be reinforced with the use of the cost effective candy Tic-Tac's.

Employees are encouraged to quietly rattle them when they see a team member exhibiting trauma-informed practice. This helps to celebrate successes and reinforcing trauma-informed practice.

Additionally, often staff may not have the right words or know how to ask for help, but they need support. In those times, employees are encouraged to quietly rattle the Tic-Tacs when they might need extra support from their colleagues.

### PROJECT BROADCAST

NC Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Division of Social Services  
820 S. Boylan Avenue  
Raleigh, NC 27699-2406

# STAY SURVEY

Dear Employee,

You are invited to participate in the Employee Stay Survey. Your responses will be strictly confidential. Our agency would like to better understand what employees' value most in their workplace and why they remain valuable employees with our agency. This Stay Survey allows you to provide constructive feedback which can be helpful to us and the other employees. We would very much appreciate your honest responses to the questions about your experience.

Thank you.

Today's Date:

## Q1. If you feel comfortable sharing the information, please provide the following: (optional)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

How many years employed? \_\_\_\_\_

Position Title/Area \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ if you would like to speak with an agency representative.

# STAY SURVEY

## Q2. Please indicate if any of the following are reasons that influence your decision to stay employed with us.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to keep work/life in balance             | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with other employees             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agency culture                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Rewarding work                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits   | <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfaction with position responsibilities   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confidence in leadership                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Skills/abilities fully utilized               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational opportunities                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient opportunity for growth/advancement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible work schedule                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient recognition or appreciation        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good fit between me and role and/or organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Wages   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job expectations met                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Work load manageable                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to home                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Working conditions                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with director manager/supervisor    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                                   |

## Q3. What do you like best about working here?

**Q4. What do you like least about working here?**

**Q5. What changes would you make to improve your work team if you were managing it?**

**Q6. How well have you been able to keep a healthy work/life balance? What changes could be made to help you maintain a healthy work/life balance?**

**Q7. Do you feel your skills are being fully utilized?**       **Yes**       **No**    Please explain.

**Q8. Do you feel you are kept informed with respect to our agency policies and procedures?**

**Yes**    **No**    Please explain.

**Q9. Looking at your total compensation package, do you feel you are fairly compensated for your work?**

**Yes**    **No**    Why or Why Not

**Q10. If you were to win the lottery and resign, what would you miss most about this job?**

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**Q11. What would you like to be doing a year from now?**

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**Q12. Check which best expresses how you feel about YOUR JOB**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
1. Training you received			
2. Opportunity to use your abilities and skills			
3. Opportunity to do challenging and interesting work			
4. Work load			
5. Recognition for work			
6. Amount of responsibility you are given			
7. Your pay			

**Q13. Check which best expresses how you feel about COMMUNICATIONS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
1. Information you received on our agency policies, procedures and practices			
2. Information you received on departmental policies, procedures and practices			
3. Salary Review policies, procedures and practices			
4. Performance Review policies, procedures and practices			
5. Opportunities for promotion/advancement			
6. Opportunities to participate in decision-making			
7. Reception of new ideas			

**Q14. Check which best expresses how you feel about YOUR SUPERVISOR AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

1. Your supervisor's qualities as a Manager			
2. Your supervisor's awareness and understanding of your issues			
3. Your supervisor's interest in your career development			
4. Your supervisor's review of your performance			
5. The communication among your colleagues/co-workers			
6. The cooperation among your colleagues/co-workers			

**Q15. Check which best expresses how you feel about your WORKING CONDITIONS AND BENEFITS**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

1. Work hours			
2. Sick leave			
3. Vacation policy			
3. Time off for personal needs			
4. Employee benefits			
5. Physical working conditions			
6. Adequate technology and support			
7. This agency as a place to work			

**Q16. Please use the space below for additional comments to help us improve our workplace.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.  
YOU ARE A VALUABLE PART OF THIS TEAM!**



# EXIT INTERVIEW

Dear Exiting Employee,

You are invited to participate in the Employee Exit Interview. Your responses will be strictly confidential. Our agency would like to better understand what employees' value most in their workplace and why they leave. This Exit Interview allows you to provide constructive feedback which can be helpful to us and the remaining employees. We would very much appreciate your honest responses to the questions about your experience.

Thank you.

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Q1. If you feel comfortable sharing the information, please provide the following: (optional)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Final Work Date \_\_\_\_\_

Position Title/Area \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ if you would like to speak with an agency representative.

# EXIT INTERVIEW

## Q2. Please indicate if any of the following are reasons that influenced your decision to leave our agency.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits  | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of confidence in leadership                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better job opportunity                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Mismatch between me and role and/or organization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career change                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Relocation/Move                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commute   | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict with director manager/supervisor       | <input type="checkbox"/> Return to school                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict with other employees                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Skills/abilities were not fully being utilized   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family/personal circumstances                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress of position responsibilities              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient opportunity for growth/advancement | <input type="checkbox"/> Termination                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient recognition or appreciation        | <input type="checkbox"/> Wages  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job expectations not met                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Work load  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of work/life balance                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Working conditions                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Layoff, non-renewal, etc.                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                                      |

## Q3. If your reason for leaving is a new job, please specify (optional)

Is your new rate of pay lower than \_\_, equal to \_\_, or higher than \_\_ what you were paid here?

What is the name of your new employer and location? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your new title/position? \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4. What did you like best about working here?**

**Q5. What did you like least about working here?**

**Q6. Would you work at here again?**       **Yes**       **No**    Please explain.

**Q7. What changes would you make to improve your work team if you were managing it?**

**Q8. Did you receive your performance appraisals on time during your employment here?**

**Yes**     **No**    Please explain whether they were helpful or not.

**Q9. Were there opportunities for career advancement?**     **Yes**       **No**    Please explain.

**Q10. Do you feel you were kept informed with respect to our agency policies and procedures?**

**Yes**     **No**    Please explain.

**Q11. Check which best expresses how you feel about YOUR JOB**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

1. Training you received			
2. Opportunity to use your abilities and skills			
3. Opportunity to do challenging and interesting work			
4. Work load			
5. Recognition for work			
6. Amount of responsibility you were given			
7. Your pay			

**Q12. Check which best expresses how you feel about COMMUNICATIONS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

1. Information you received on our agency policies, procedures and practices			
2. Information you received on departmental policies, procedures and practices			
3. Salary Review policies, procedures and practices			
4. Performance Review policies, procedures and practices			
5. Opportunities for promotion/advancement			
6. Opportunities to participate in decision-making			
7. Reception of new ideas			

**Q13. Check which best expresses how you feel about YOUR SUPERVISOR AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

1. Your supervisor's qualities as a Manager			
2. Your supervisor's awareness and understanding of your issues			
3. Your supervisor's interest in your career development			
4. Your supervisor's review of your performance			
5. The communication among your colleagues/co-workers			
6. The cooperation among your colleagues/co-workers			

**Q14. Check which best expresses how you feel about your WORKING CONDITIONS AND BENEFITS**

Satisfied      Neutral      Dissatisfied

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
1. Work hours			
2. Sick leave			
3. Vacation policy			
3. Time off for personal needs			
4. Employee benefits			
5. Physical working conditions			
6. Adequate technology and support			
7. This agency as a place to work			

**Q15. Please use the space below for additional comments to help us improve our workplace for future employees.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!  
BEST WISHES FOR YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVOURS.**

## Staff Performance and Retention: Using a Trauma Lens

### Welcome!

Please click on the colored link below to download the  
handout for today:  
June 3, 2015 webinar handout



NCDSS CHILD WELFARE SERVICES  
STATEWIDE TRAINING  
PARTNERSHIP



UNC  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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### Webinar Goals



By the end of this webinar we hope you  
will be able to...

- Describe how Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) affects worker turn-over, performance, and outcomes
- Identify common signs and contributing factors for STS
- Begin to develop an organizational climate and system to address STS

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### Agenda

- Orientation & Introductions
- Why Should I Worry About STS?
- Underlying Beliefs
- What Does STS Look Like?
- What Can I Do About It?
- Questions & Answers



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**Panelists**

Jeanne Preisler  
Kelly Sullivan  
Susan Osborne



**Moderator**

Mellicent Blythe

**Tech Support**

Phillip Armfield  
John McMahon

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# Why Should I Worry About STS?

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## STS and Your Staff

1. It's important to DSS child welfare professionals
  - It was in the top 5 of training topics requested by supervisors, program managers, and directors
  - **It was the #1 topic requested by front-line staff**
2. STS affects how your staff do their jobs, whether they stay at their jobs, and in turn the outcomes they achieve for families

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"The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet." (Remen 1996)

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### The Words We Use

Secondary Traumatic Stress – Emotional toll that compromises our professional functioning and diminishes quality of life (presence of PTSD symptoms: intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity)

CHANGE IN DSM-5 and it's impact on the "Vicarious Trauma" terminology.

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### The Words We Use

Compassion Fatigue – cumulative physical, emotional and psychological effects of continual exposure to traumatic stories or events when working in a helping capacity

Compassion Satisfaction – the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work.

Burn Out – emotional exhaustion, develops over time due to general work related stress

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## Resilient Organization

Become a Resilient Organization Despite:

- Budget Cuts
- Bad Media Reports
- Child Fatality
- Frozen Positions

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## Primary Reasons Staff Leave

- Stress
- Expectations Not Met
- Mismatch Between Person and Role (or Organizational Culture)
- Insufficient Opportunities for Growth
- Insufficient Recognition or Appreciation
- Problems with Direct Manager/Supervisor
- Dissatisfaction with Pay
- Lack of Work/Life Balance
- Loss of Confidence in the Organization Leadership

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## Financial Cost of Turnover

- Advertising
- Reviewing Applications
- Interviewing Applicants
- Training Cost for New Worker
- Mentoring Time by Supervisor
- Lowered Morale and Productivity (other workers picking up vacant position's caseload)

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## Turn-Over and Outcomes

Flower et al. (2005) – Impact of staff turnover on Permanency

- 74.5% achieved permanency with one worker
- 17.5% achieved permanency with two workers
- Suggests need for trauma-informed transitions for any change in worker

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## Becky's Story

- Becky came into foster care at age 15 after years of emotional and physical abuse.
- As an adult, Becky tells anyone that will listen that the worst situation she ever dealt with in her life was when her social worker left her to take another job.

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## Challenges

- Rural Communities
- Work/Life Balance
- Organizational Culture
- Primary Stress

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### Primary Stress Sources

- Threats by client
- Dangerous neighbors
- Unknown dangers (meth, weapons, etc.)
- Physically aggressive families/youth
- Substance abuse/mentally illness – Erratic behavior by families/youth

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### Secondary Stress Sources

- The death of a child or adult on the worker’s caseload
- Investigating a vicious abuse or neglect report
- Frequent/chronic exposure to children’s detailed and emotional accounts of traumatic events
- Photographic images of horrific injury or scenes of a recent serious injury or death

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### Secondary Stress Sources

- Helping to support grieving family members following a child abuse death, including the siblings of the deceased child
- Concerns about the continued funding and adequacy of resources for their agency
- Concerns about being publicly scape-goated for a tragic outcome when they did not have the means or authority to intervene effectively

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# Let's Talk About Underlying Beliefs

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## Workplace Beliefs

- When it's not okay to talk about it
  - Secrecy is reinforced (don't talk about it)
  - Start to believe there is something wrong with me
  - Start to feel helpless & trapped
- You'll get over it
- If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen
- There's no crying at DSS
- You knew what you were getting into

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### Professional Boundary Beliefs

- We should not get too attached to children
- We should not have any contact with children when they are no longer on our case load
- We are the only ones that really know this child

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## What Does STS Look Like?

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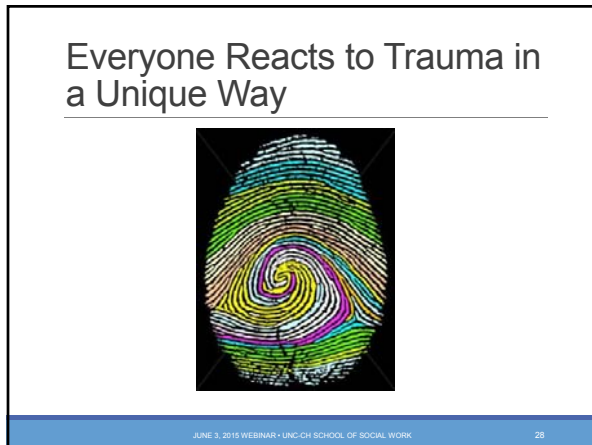
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Common Signs of STS	What You Might See
Hyper-Vigilance	Signs of being nervous, "on edge," or worried about things that don't bother you
Inability to Embrace Complexity	Looking for a "quick fix"; seeming quick to blame someone for complex problems
Inability to Listen, Avoidance of Clients	Delaying or failing to return phone calls or schedule appointments
Anger and Cynicism	Appearing "burnt out" from their job; negative or pessimistic about new ideas or people

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Common Signs of STS	What You Might See
Chronic Exhaustion	Signs of fatigue, low energy; may look like they "don't care"
Physical Ailments	Frequent health problems, sick days, physical discomfort
Cognitive Shift	Chronic pessimism regarding the abilities of the families on their case load
Minimizing	Seeming to dismiss clients' suffering or need for help
Guilt	Quick to take blame when things go wrong; focusing conversation on what they have not been able to do for children

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## What Can I Do About It?

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Look Through a Trauma Lens



**VALUE INDIVIDUAL CONTROL**

Whenever possible, give the employee options.

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Look Though a Trauma Lens



**NORMALIZE THE EXPERIENCE**

STS is an occupational hazard for all child welfare workers, and supervisors.

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Look Though a Trauma Lens



**BE MINDFUL OF TRIGGERS**

Social workers are constantly reminded of previous cases and triggers are often hidden from consciousness.

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Look Though a Trauma Lens



**REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION**

Helping employees see how this work is impacting them, how their own trauma histories may be affecting their stress symptoms, etc.

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Look Though a Trauma Lens



**VALUE STRESS  
REDUCTION**

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Look Though a Trauma Lens



**DON'T UNDERESTIMATE  
THE VALUE OF  
VACATIONS AND STAY  
CONVERSATIONS**

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Look Though a Trauma Lens



**FOCUS ON THE  
POSITIVE  
DIFFERENCE THEY  
ARE MAKING**

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PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS  
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC  
STRESS IN CHILD WELFARE

Using a Trauma Lens

RESOURCE DESIGNED  
SPECIFICALLY FOR YOU

Dozens of examples you  
can begin doing at the  
agency level, the  
supervisor level and at the  
individual level.

Facilitated through the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for the Children and Families, "Healthy Homes" Grant #14-0001. The information on this slide and the link provided is subject to change.

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Focus on STS Requires All Three

HEAD

HEART

FEET

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Future Plans

- Division Training
- Regional Supervisor Meetings
- Project Broadcast Expansion

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### Presenter Contact Information

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# Follow-up Document from the Webinar

## *Staff Performance and Retention: Using a Trauma Lens*

Webinar delivered: June 3, 2015

Follow-up document date: June 15, 2015

### *Presenters*

**Jeanne Preisler**

*Project Broadcast, Child Welfare Services Section  
NC Division of Social Services*

**Kelly Sullivan, PhD, MEd**

*Center for Child and Family Health, Duke University*

**Susan Osborne**

*Director, Alamance County Department of Social Services*

### *Produced by*

*Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the  
Jordan Institute for Families  
UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work*

### *Sponsored by*

*NC Division of Social Services and by  
Project Broadcast (funded through DHHS, ACYF, Children's Bureau, Grant # 90CO1058)*

**Webinar handouts:** [https://ncswlearn.org/ncsts/webinar/handouts/36\\_webinar\\_handouts\\_06\\_03\\_15.pdf](https://ncswlearn.org/ncsts/webinar/handouts/36_webinar_handouts_06_03_15.pdf)

#### **Additional handouts:**

- *Buncombe County's Critical Incident Stress Management Protocol (January 2013)*  
[https://ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/staff\\_performance/Buncombe\\_CISM\\_Protocol\\_Manual.pdf](https://ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/staff_performance/Buncombe_CISM_Protocol_Manual.pdf)
- *CW3600: Secondary Trauma and the Child Welfare Workforce (Spring 2012)*  
[https://ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/staff\\_performance/CW360\\_2012.pdf](https://ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/staff_performance/CW360_2012.pdf)
- *What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work with Others (2008)*  
[https://ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/staff\\_performance/What\\_About\\_You.pdf](https://ncswlearn.org/webinar/pdf/staff_performance/What_About_You.pdf)

**Recording:** if you missed the webinar or want to view it again, go to: <http://fcrp.unc.edu/webinars.asp>

## **About the Webinar**

### **Webinar Description**

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) can have a significant impact on child welfare professionals, their agencies, and ultimately on outcomes for children and families. Yet child welfare agencies often find it hard to identify and implement organizational strategies that effectively prevent STS and support those suffering from it. This webinar will explore what STS is, why it matters to agency leaders, and how you can address this critical workforce issue.

## Attendance

A total of 278 people, representing 70 of North Carolina's 100 county DSS agencies, registered for this event. Many participated in the webinar as part of groups. Registrants included 13 DSS directors, 170 supervisors, and 47 program managers/administrators.

## Answers and Resources from the Webinar

### Resources

#### Page 4 of the handouts references a workbook called, "What About You?" Where can we find this workbook?

This workbook and a number of other, longer resources can be downloaded using the links found above, on page 1 of this follow-up document.

#### How do you interpret the score on the STS scale?

The author of this scale, Brian Bride, suggests the following for interpreting the STS scale:

I recommend that scores be used to classify individuals into categories based on percentiles such that scores at or below the 50th percentile (less than 28) are interpreted as little or no STS, scores at the 51st to the 75th percentile (28 to 37) are interpreted as mild STS, scores at the 76th to the 90th percentile (38 to 43) are interpreted as moderate STS, scores at the 91st to the 95th percentile (44 to 48) are interpreted as high STS, and scores above the 95th percentile (49 and above) are interpreted as severe STS.

Source: Bride, B. E. (2007) Prevalence of secondary traumatic stress among social workers. *Social Work*, 52, 63–70.

We would also like to call to your attention to an agency-level STS assessment that you may find useful. In 2014 Sprang and colleagues from the Center on Trauma and Children developed the Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Organization Assessment (STSI-OA). The STSI-OA is an assessment tool that can be used by organizational representatives at any level to evaluate the degree to which their organization is STS-informed, and able to respond to the impact of secondary traumatic stress in the workplace. The STSI-OA identifies specific areas of strength, and opportunities to implement STS informed policies and practices. The results of this tool can be used as a roadmap for future training and implementation activities in the area of STS and trauma-informed care. To receive a copy of the STSI-OA to use free of charge, go to <http://www.uky.edu/CTAC/STSI-OA> and register.

### Buncombe County's CISM Protocol

#### How often has Buncombe County had to put its CISM protocol into practice?

Kristy Moeller (Kristy.Moeller@buncombecounty.org) has been the resiliency coordinator at Buncombe Health and Human Services for about a year. In that time she has used the CISM protocol to conduct two defusings and three formal debriefings. She has also conducted two additional debriefings outside of Buncombe County.

#### How effective has your CISM protocol been? Has there been staff feedback on this protocol?

Staff and supervisor feedback indicate that both the defusings and debriefings help to mitigate lingering secondary traumatic stress, allowing social workers to return more quickly to their responsibilities.

During the webinar Dr. Sullivan talked about the role of sense-making in decision-making (*see the last question on page 4*). In Buncombe our defusings and debriefings really help staff create a healthier narrative around incidents. This positions the individuals involved to move forward in a more positive way.

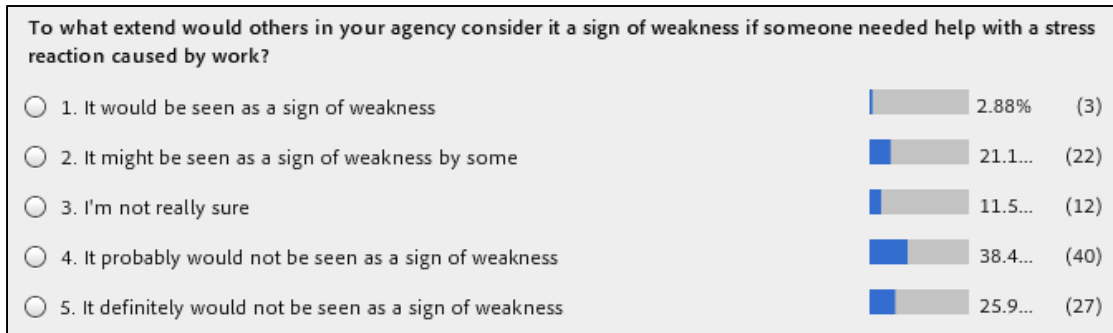
**Who initiated development of the protocol?**

Our protocol is based on the established CISM protocol, but it is customized for our organization. This was done by our Social Work Services Director, Angie Pittman, and her staff. In addition, we held a large 5-day local training for first-responders, law enforcement, social work staff, and other helping professionals in our community. From this training, we developed a local CISM network. This network reaches across our community, neighboring counties, and across the state to provide support for debriefings and defusings. Ned Fowler ([Ned.Fowler@buncombecounty.org](mailto:Ned.Fowler@buncombecounty.org)) runs this network.

**Questions about STS**

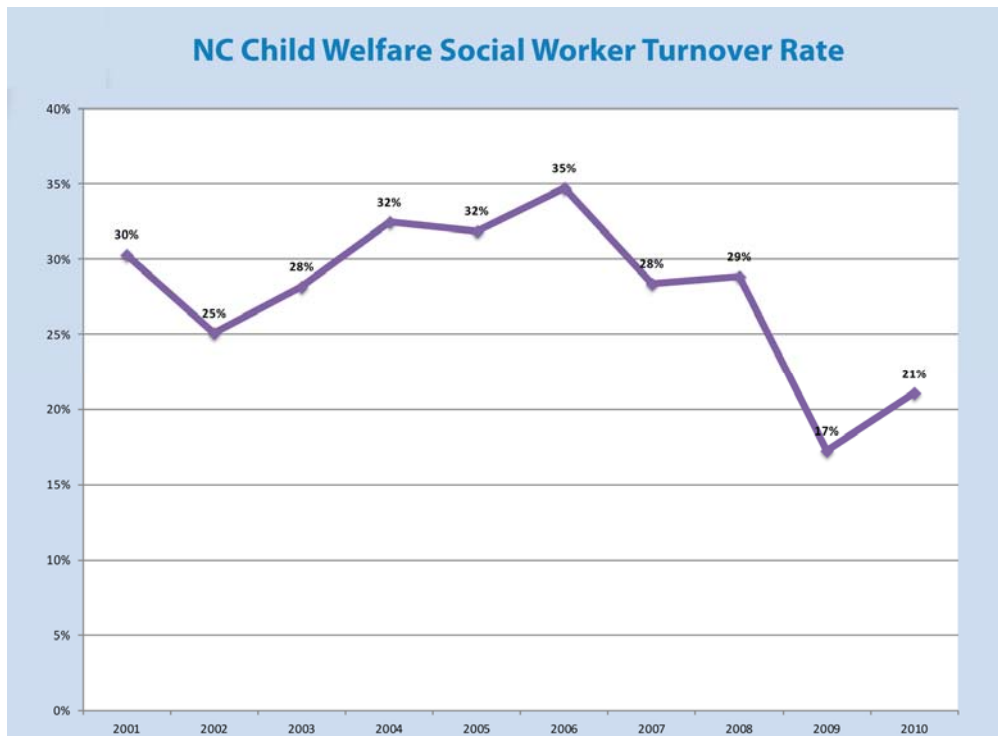
**Stigma**

Following are the results of a poll that asked participants the following question:



**What is the turnover rate for foster care staff?**

While we do not have an answer to this specific question, we do have information about how the turnover rate for child welfare professionals employed with NC county DSS agencies has fluctuated over time. The figure on the next page shows that “the turnover rate averaged around 30% for 2001 to 2005 before reaching a high of 35% for 2006. The rate declined to just below 30% for 2007 and 2008 before falling considerably to 17% in 2009. In 2010, the rate rose to 21%. The timing of the decline in turnover suggests an impact of the economic recession on depressing the labor market for social workers thereby reducing opportunities to leave current positions. However, other factors may have also affected this trend, such as agency efforts to reduce turnover” (Stewart & Duncan, 2011).



Source: Stewart, C. J. & Duncan, D. F. (2011, Sept.). *Changes and trends in the child welfare caseload in North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: Jordan Institute for Families, UNC-CH School of Social Work. <http://ssw.unc.edu/ma>

**Are things such as case load sizes, documentation expectations, and limited tools to perform tasks in the field (e.g., laptops/notepads) primary stressors?**

That feeling you can't do enough, that you can't stay on top of things, is common in child welfare and in other fields. This is a problem, but it is not STS. The pressures you describe are really better understood as contributing to burnout. They are not primary stressors. Primary stressors involve potential death or harm of a person. Often when agencies and professionals begin trying to address STS things like caseload size and documentation pressures come up. People find it easier to focus on and blame things like paperwork. These challenges are not easy to solve, but we are more comfortable talking about them than about trauma. If you can truly address trauma, challenges that contribute to burnout and turnover do get easier to solve as well.

**As a supervisor, how can we support our team? Particularly if they are in denial?**

The first step is always sharing information. Share some of these resources with your team, and have some discussion around their reactions and thoughts. You can also begin to ask people how the work is affecting them personally. Incorporate such questions into your regular case staffings or individual supervision meetings, to begin to normalize the concept that this work has an effect on how we feel, act, and see the world. When you see people having a reaction you think might be related to a traumatic situation, ask privately how they are feeling and whether they think that situation or case is playing a part. You know your workers as individuals and so you will know how to talk about it in a way that will feel supportive. And don't forget the concept of "compassion satisfaction"—continue to recognize and promote the good work people do and the protective value this offers for burnout and STS.

**What can we do to help workers deal with STS in agencies where there are limited resources—where there is no time to cry or explore stress relief?**

Many of the suggestions we've talked about and that are in the handouts do not require funding or significant time. Initially it's about incorporating these concepts and questions into the conversations you're already having. As your agency begins to make trauma and resilience more of a priority, there may need to be some re-allocation of time and/or money depending on your staff's needs and preferences. Remember, any time you do spend on the topic, will more than be made up for by the increased productivity of a resilient, energetic workforce.

**You say STS and burnout are different. Do agencies need to respond to them differently? And how often are they co-occurring?**

There is no easy answer to this question. Everyone needs to embrace the idea you are dealing with both burnout (documentation stress, etc.) and also STS. Expending effort to tease out which is which is probably not an efficient use of time. We must do a better job addressing the impact of trauma on the workforce. By doing so, we are creating a more resilient workforce who can better tolerate the elements that contribute to burnout. We wish we could give you some exact steps. Unfortunately, that's not possible—agency responses need to be individualized. We suggest talking within your agency about what you need and how best to proceed.

**Has there been research on the "trauma" involved in making decisions in child welfare? Often there are so many unknowns and you can't be "sure."**

This is the reality of our profession. Frequently we have to make weighty decisions without having all the information we need to make those decisions. To help us live with this difficult reality it is important that agencies make sure the people involved have the time and space needed to process events after they occur. In addition, staff members need support when it is time to make those difficult decisions. The key question to ask about this is, "What meaning is the worker or supervisor giving to those decisions? How are the decisions affecting the way they feel and think?"

**What about supervisors and STS? If workers are struggling with an unmanageable caseloads and STS and unrealistic expectations, then surely their supervisors have this x 20 with the burden of managing multiple caseloads along with the personnel issues that come with it.**

Supervisors absolutely need support around these issues as well. Management needs to be having similar conversations with supervisors to normalize STS reactions, provide opportunities to talk about both compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction, and seek input on ways your organization can provide support and promote resilience.