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Look for more information at the HOUSE Liaison Center

[Equity in Career and Technical Education - ICCBHouseCenter \(lequity.com\)](http://Equity in Career and Technical Education - ICCBHouseCenter (lequity.com))



CARING WITHOUT CRASHING

2025 HOUSE SUMMIT



AGENDA:

- ❖ An Introduction to the Topic
- ❖ Developing a Crash Prevention Plan
- ❖ Definitions of STS and CF
- ❖ Symptoms of STS and CF
- ❖ Warning Signs
- ❖ Who's at Risk?
- ❖ Prevention
- ❖ When and how to get help



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

THE IMPORTANCE OF SECONDARY TRAUMA & COMPASSION FATIGUE AWARENESS

- A brief cautionary tale
- Listening to trauma stories may take an emotional toll that compromises professional functioning and diminishes quality of life.
- Awareness of the impact of indirect trauma exposure—referred to as secondary traumatic stress (STS)—is a part of protecting practitioner health and ensuring that students receive the best possible care.
- Nearly half of practicing counselors reported experiencing symptoms of STS in a study published in 2019 by *The Professional Counselor*.



DEVELOPING A CRASH PREVENTION PLAN

YOUR PERSONAL CRASH PREVENTION PLAN WILL INCLUDE:

- A list of your STS and CF risk factors
- Action steps to ensure that you pay attention to how you're feeling, and check-in with yourself regularly to gauge the impact of STS
- A list of the warning signs that tell you it's time to take care of yourself so that you don't crash
- Your regular self-care regimen to prevent STS and CF
- Action steps to adhere to your regimen
- What you will do if you need help



DEFINITIONS OF SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS & COMPASSION FATIGUE



HISTORY & BACKGROUND OF THE TERMS

- In the feminist anti-violence field, Lisa McCann and Laurie Pearlman coined the term vicarious trauma in 1990.
- Carla Joinson, a registered nurse, created the term compassion fatigue in 1992 describing it as the “Loss of the ability to nurture”.
- Psychologist and traumatologist, Dr. Charles Figley, published his seminal work about secondary traumatic stress in 1995.
- The three terms have been used interchangeably in the past, but in recent years, each term has been defined separately.

DEFINITION OF SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

DEFINITION OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes compassion fatigue as being made up of two components: burnout and secondary traumatic stress.
- Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion accompanied by doubts about one's competence and the value of one's work.
- Burnout is the result of a chronic imbalance between the demands of the job and the resources one has to complete the job, causing long-term, work-related stress.

DEFINITION OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA

- According to SAMHSA, when STS goes on for a long time, it can develop into “vicarious trauma” (VT).
- This type of trauma is rare but can be so distressing that the way a person views the world changes for the worse.
- VT is a theoretical term that focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on the covert cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person’s traumatic material.

DISCUSSION



What are some of the basic needs requests and experiences you hear that have taken a toll on you over time?



SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS & COMPASSION FATIGUE



SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS

- Somatic conditions (headaches, racing heart, weakness, etc.)
- Change in sleep habits
- Change in appetite
- Nightmares
- Increasing agitation
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance (excessive worrying)
- Hyperarousal (easily startled)
- New anxieties or fears
- Loss of pleasure
- Inability to do work
- Wary of every situation (expecting a traumatic outcome)

SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

- Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion
- Feeling overwhelmed, frustrated and cynical
- Doubting your competence to do your job
- Doubting the value of your work
- Feeling as if nothing you can do will help
- Feeling numb or indifferent
- Disconnected from others
- Having a desire to use substances to cope

SELF-ASSESSMENT

- Formal assessment of secondary traumatic stress and the related conditions of burnout and compassion fatigue is often conducted through the use of Stamm's Professional Quality of Life Measure ([ProQOL](#)).
- This questionnaire has been adapted to measure symptoms and behaviors reflective of secondary stress.
- The ProQOL can be used at regular intervals to track changes over time, especially when strategies for prevention or intervention are being implemented.



WARNING SIGNS

PERSONAL WARNING SIGNS AND SELF-AWARENESS

- There is serious risk in overlooking STS and CF. Practitioners need to stay vigilant about proactively looking for dangerous signs.
- Being self-aware is essential. All practitioners need a self-reflective process of looking internally to detect their own warning signs.
- To engage in that self-reflective process, practitioners may seek their own counseling, lean on colleagues or other professionals in the space, or connect on a deeper level with loved ones to work through problems.

CRASH PREVENTION PLAN (CPP)



Answer questions 1 & 2 on your CPP about your personal warning signs and your plan to stay vigilant and self-aware.



WHO'S AT RISK OF DEVELOPING STS & CF?

RISK FACTORS

- Repeated exposure to traumatic stories, images, news and social media
- History of personal trauma
- Exposure to traumatic events
- Too many patients, clients or students
- Social or organizational isolation
- Work-related paperwork
- Inadequate training for the job
- Being a woman
- Being a highly sensitive person (HSP)

WHAT IS A HIGHLY SENSITIVE PERSON (HSP)?

- A highly sensitive person (HSP) is an individual who is thought to have an increased or deeper central nervous system sensitivity to physical, emotional, or social stimuli.
- Heightened Sensitivity: HSPs are characterized by a greater capacity to perceive stimuli, including emotions, and to process information deeply.
- This heightened sensitivity can make them more vulnerable to feeling the emotional impact of traumatic events, even when experienced vicariously.
- The term highly sensitive person was first coined by psychologists Elaine Aron and Arthur Aron in the mid-1990s. Elaine Aron published her book, "The Highly Sensitive Person," in 1996.

ARE YOU AN HSP?

- Are you easily overwhelmed by such things as bright lights, loud noises, and crowds?
- Do you get rattled when you have a lot to do in a short amount of time?
- Do you make a point of avoiding violent movies and TV shows because they feel too intense and leave you feeling unsettled?
- Do you tend to reflect on things deeply?
- Do other people tell you that you are good at understanding what they are feeling or thinking?
- When you were a child, did your parents or teachers see you as sensitive or shy?

DISCUSSION & CPP



What are your risk factors? Record them in #3 of your CPP.



PREVENTING SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS & COMPASSION FATIGUE



COPING STRATEGIES & SELF-CARE

- Set Boundaries
- Get enough sleep
- Eat healthy foods
- Be active
- Engage in mindfulness, meditation and contemplative practices
- Have fun!
- Connect with friends and loved ones
- Use peer support
- Use self-assessments
- Utilize workplace accommodations & benefits
- Ask for help
- Build Compassion Satisfaction

WHAT IS COMPASSION SATISFACTION?

- Compassion satisfaction (CS) refers to the sense of fulfillment you feel for the work you do. It can be a source of hope, strength, and ultimately resilience.
- CS encourages practitioners to celebrate their work, identify how they have helped others, and be proud of positive outcomes they facilitated.
- CS can serve as a natural, protective tool against burnout and Compassion Fatigue.

DISCUSSION & CPP



What self-care strategies work best for you?

How will you hold yourself accountable for adhering to your self-care regimen?



WHEN AND HOW TO GET HELP

RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONAL HELP

- When signs and symptoms of STS or CF continue for more than 2 weeks or are truly bothersome at any point, seek out professional help.
- You can start by contacting your employee assistance program or a primary care physician, who may be able to rule out any physical concerns and recommend a therapist familiar with traumatic stress.
- [Crisis Help: Suicide, Mental Health, Drug, and Alcohol Issues | SAMHSA](#)
- [Find Help and Treatment for Mental Health, Drug, Alcohol Issues | SAMHSA](#)

DISCUSSION & CPP



Describe your action plan for getting professional help if you need it. Record your answer in #6 of your CPP.

QUESTIONS???

Contact Information

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RESOURCES

[Self-Care Strategies for Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress | Counseling@Northwestern](#)

[Compassion Fatigue and Self-care Resources for Crisis Counselors | CCP Toolkit | SAMHSA](#)

[Understanding Compassion Fatigue](#)

[Moving from Compassion Fatigue to Compassion Resilience](#)

[Resource Guide for Coping with Secondhand Trauma](#)

RESOURCES (CONT')

[APA: Recent Research on Secondary Trauma](#)

[The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Secondary Traumatic Stress Fact Sheet](#)

[Overview and History of Vicarious Trauma](#)

[HSPs and Trauma – The Highly Sensitive Person](#)

[ProQOL](#)



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