



Understanding How Family Stress and Trauma Impacts Home Visitors

October 10, 2017

Presenters:

Robin Gurwitch, PhD.
Duke University Medical Center & Center for Child and Family Health

Jan Williams, LCSW
Center for Child and Family Health

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood
Development, Teaching and Learning

NCECDTL

Session Objectives

At the end of this presentation, you should be able to:

- Define Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
- List the symptoms of STS
- Understand why it is important for home visitors to know about STS
- Understand why it is important to prevent STS
- Use strategies that help to prevent STS with home visitors on the program level and the personal level

NCECDTL

Session Agenda

Here's what we're doing today:

1. What is Secondary Traumatic Stress?
2. The difference between burnout and STS
3. Who is most at risk for STS?
4. The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)
5. Reducing STS in your program
6. Mindfulness/Self care strategies

NCECDTL

What is Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

“The experience of short-term exhaustion and traumatic stress reactions associated with exposure to the suffering of one’s clients.”

(Boscarino, Figley, and Adams, 2004)

Also known as Vicarious Trauma

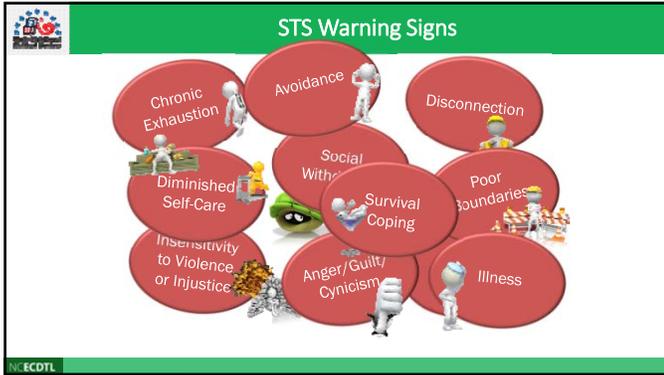
The Bucket

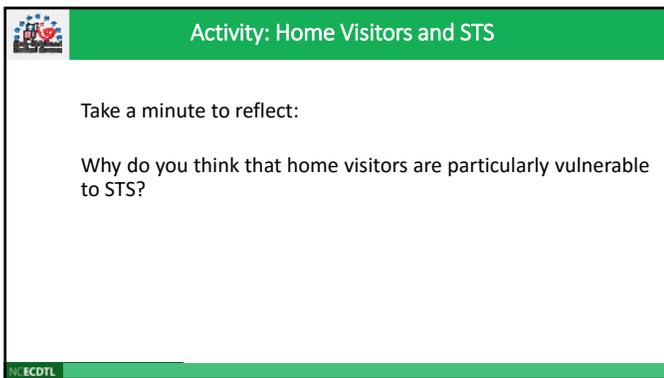
- Anyone who works with high-needs families is like a bucket that can get filled with traumatic stress
- 26% of people working with this population show signs of STS (and 50% of child welfare workers)
- What we will learn today is how to effectively “dump the bucket”



Difference Between Burnout and STS

- STS comes from the home visitor’s relationship with a parent or family member who has experienced trauma
- STS has symptoms similar to PTSD and include:
 - Emotional exhaustion
 - Lethargy
 - Lack of interest in the job
 - Reduced feeling of personal accomplishment







Factors that Increase Risk of STS

Parents

- Families with multiple stress due to depression or other mental health issues, substance use disorder, homelessness, or intimate partner violence
- Families with very limited resources
- Families that are isolated or have a limited support network
- Stories of intense suffering



ECDFL

Factors that Increase Risk of STS

Professional (YOU)

- Personal trauma history
- New to the job or on the job for a while
- Very empathic
- Period of high life stressors
- Lack of awareness of STS



ECDFL

Factors that Increase Risk of STS

Job Environment

- High percentage of parents with trauma history on caseload
- Lack of connection/peer support/isolation
- High job stress
- Barriers to achieving goals



ECDFL

The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)

- The ProQOL is free (Stamm, 2009) and available online at <http://proqol.org/>
- A 30-item self-report measure of the positive and negative aspects of caring
- The ProQOL measures Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue
- Compassion Fatigue has two subscales
 - Burnout
 - Secondary Trauma

ProQOL

- We recommend that you use this screening tool as a starting place
- Each person can complete the assessment—it will take less than 10 minutes to complete and score
- Results should be confidential – You should not be forced to share with supervisors or managers – that’s up to you
- Results can give you a good idea if you are already experiencing STS or burnout

Self-Care Strategies

- Shoulder shrugs (many of us carry the weight of the world on our shoulders)
- As you inhale, lift your shoulders up to your ears and hold. As you exhale, drop them down
- Repeat 5 times



What Can We Do About STS?

- So, how do we lower that STS score or prevent it from creeping up (and raise your compassion satisfaction score)?
- By using: **AWARENESS, BALANCE, and CONNECTION**



ECDTL

Awareness

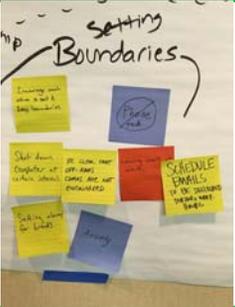
- Start with awareness of STS, both in leadership and home visiting staff:
 - STS and self-care should be introduced to staff during their initial orientation
 - Why must leadership be involved?



ECDTL

Awareness

- Provide continuing education about STS.
- Encourage every staff person to have a Personal Resiliency Plan (self-care plan).*
- Try a "wellness committee" at your workplace!



*Schreiber & Gurwitsch, 2002

ECDTL

Balance

- Manage caseloads wisely
 - Try to balance the caseload: families who have many needs, families who can be identified as "low needs"
- Balance the very difficult work with humor and fun
- Maintain balance between work and home
- Continuing education is encouraged so that home visitors continue to be challenged and learn new skills to effectively meet work demands



NC ECDTL

Supervision, Professional Development and Coaching

- Supervision that is reflective and supportive in nature can provide a "safe space" for addressing family stress
- Three components of reflective supervision:
 - **reflection**—examining thoughts and feelings
 - **collaboration**—supervisors share responsibility, decision-making, and problem-solving with staff
 - **regularity**—time protected from cancellation or procrastination



NC ECDTL

Supervision, Professional Development and Coaching

- Professional Development that addresses stress and trauma
- If possible consider using your program's coaching opportunities to enhance skills related to dealing with family stress



NC ECDTL

Connection and Community Partnerships



Build community partnerships to facilitate access to additional resources and services for families, as needed.

We assign one agency to each staff member who stays connected and reports back to the team. This adds some “spice” to their job and helps the entire team.

NECDTL

Connection and Community Partnerships

- Connecting with each other and processing a traumatic event in your program is important, but make sure:
 - It's done in a structured way with all being willing to participate (e.g., no sense of coercion)
 - It's led by a professional with mental health experience

Caution: Refrain from engaging in one-upmanship about trauma cases, which can increase STS in your colleagues



NECDTL

Reducing STS in Your Program

- Take a minute to reflect.
- Out of the things that we just discussed, what is one small thing that you could do at your program to prevent STS? Something that could be done in the next few weeks?



NECDTL

Mindfulness

- Mindfulness can make a difference in stress levels by calming the nervous system and this can reduce reactions to trauma
- What is mindfulness? Being in the present moment in a relaxed state without judgement
- There are many ways to be mindful: mindful breathing, prayer, meditation, listening to music, mindful walking, looking at nature, art. Any of these will help to trigger the "relaxation response" and be an antidote to STS

ECDTL

Mindfulness

Mind Full, or Mindful?

ECDTL

People Who Practice Mindfulness:

- Are happier
- Are more exuberant
- Are more empathetic
- Are more secure
- Have higher self-esteem
- Have a reduction in the reactivity that underlie
 - Depression
 - Binge eating
 - Attention problems
- Are more accepting of own weaknesses and receptive of feedback
- Fight less with romantic partner
- Are less defensive

ECDTL

 Self-Care

*If your compassion does not include
YOURSELF,
it is incomplete*

—Jack Kornfield



 ECDTL

 Creating a Personal Resiliency Plan

- Everyone’s plan will be different
- What is restoring to one person might be depleting to another
- What is renewing to YOU?

 ECDTL

 Challenges to Self-Care

- Not believing that STS is real and can impact YOU
- Making time when all around you seem to need your help
- Feeling guilt for taking time for yourself
- Believing those around you are doing fine, so you should be doing fine too
- Lacking modeling or support from administration for self-care activities

 ECDTL

 **When to Seek Professional Help**

- Sometimes our jobs are truly overwhelming
- We may need additional professional help if STS interferes with:
 - The ability to effectively do the work
 - Enjoy time with others (isolation sets in)
 - Ability to see hope ahead (depression sets in)
- If STS is interfering with your daily functioning, don't suffer alone.
- Recognize that it is ok to ask for help (why are we the last to ask??)

 ECDTL

 **Useful Resources**

- *Mindfulness Resilience Practice*
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/mindfulness-resilience-practice>
- *Taking Care of Ourselves: Stress and Relaxation*
<https://www.ecmhc.org/relaxation.html>
- *Tips on Becoming a Reflective Supervisor*
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/collection-tips-becoming-reflective-supervisor>
- *Tips on Becoming a Reflective Supervisee*
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/collection-tips-becoming-reflective-supervisee>

 ECDTL

 **Useful Resources**

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network website: www.nctsn.org (set up a user name)
- *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook* by Francoise Mathieu
- Self Care Starter Kit socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/how-to-flourish-in-social-work.html
- www.eatmovesleep.org (take a self-assessment on your health)
- Tools for Peace: Stop, Breathe, and Think (a helpful app for learning short meditations)

 ECDTL

Continue The Discussion: MyPeers Home Visiting Community

<http://www.123contactform.com/form-2230355/My-Peers>

ECDTL

Questions?

ECDTL

For More Information

For more information, please contact us at ecdtl@ecetta.info or call (toll-free) 1-844-261-3752.

ECDTL
