

## The Resilience Alliance:

A Review of a Secondary Trauma Intervention  
for Child Welfare Staff

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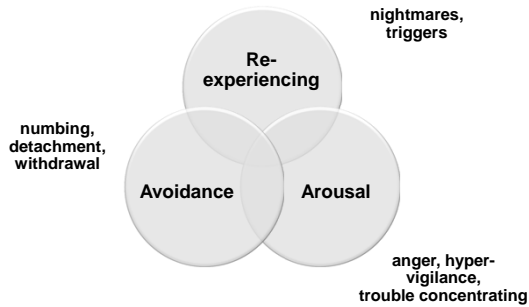
University of Minnesota School of Social Work  
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## ACS-NYU Children's Trauma Institute



- The CTI is a collaboration between the New York City Administration for Children's Services and the NYU School of Medicine
- Our mission is to advance trauma-informed practice within the child welfare system
  - Partner with stakeholders to identify where trauma expertise/interventions can improve child welfare outcomes (safety, permanence, well-being)
- The CTI is funded by SAMHSA and private donors, and is a member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

## Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)



## STS and Child Welfare



- Child protective staff are at high risk of experiencing both primary and secondary trauma in the course of their daily work
- There is a growing literature about the high incidence of secondary traumatic stress (STS) among child welfare staff, link to work withdrawal and attrition
  - Impact of workplace environment
- There is some evidence linking high STS and difficulties identifying risk factors among simulated child welfare cases



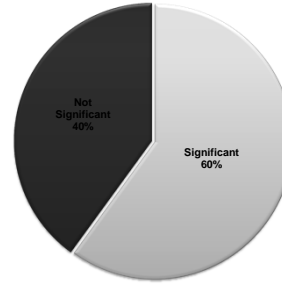
## Exposure to Occupational Stressors



CPS-Related Stressor	% witnessing event (N=49)
Dangerous neighborhood	92
Drug abuse by client	90
Poverty and homelessness	86
Physical abuse of child	84
Educational neglect	84
Poverty and lack of food	80
Sexual abuse of child	78
Criminal activity by client	76
Poverty and lack of healthcare	69
Death of a client due to illness	47
Death of a client due to accident	33
Death of a client due to unknown cause	33
Death of a client due to murder	24



## Work-Related PTSD Symptoms

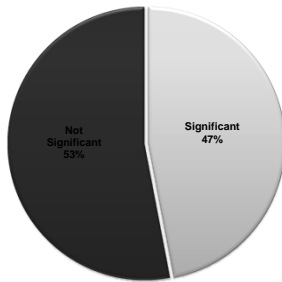


182 ACS workers completed the Impact of Event Scale (IES). Items include:

- Pictures of it popped into my mind
- I stayed away from reminders of it

1 week after the most distressing work-related event, 60% reported clinically significant PTSD symptoms (IES score > 26)

## Work-Related PTSD Symptoms



Of those reporting significant symptoms after the event, 47% (n=52) continued to experience clinically significant PTSD symptoms in the week preceding the evaluation, an average of 2.15 years later

## Layers of Traumatic Stress



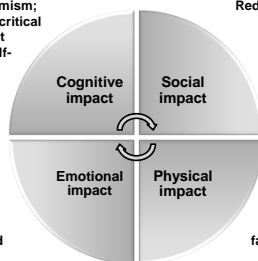
## Impact of STS on Child Welfare Staff



Negative bias, pessimism; loss of perspective, critical thinking skills; threat focus; decreased self-monitoring

Reduction in collaboration; loss of social support; factionalism; withdrawal

Helplessness; hopelessness; anger; feeling overwhelmed



Headaches; tense muscles; stomachaches; fatigue; sleep difficulties

## System-Level Impact



## Addressing Secondary Traumatic Stress



Trauma as a behavioral toxin



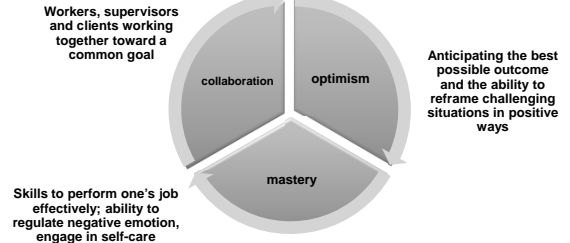
Need for psychological  
"protective gear"



## Resilience Alliance – Goals



Decrease stress on the worker through enhancing resilience skills, increasing social support and changing organizational culture



## Resilience Alliance – Structure



## Resilience Alliance – Content



- Focus on learning resilience concepts, applying skills to workplace experiences
- Each session follows a similar format:



- A didactic piece on the day's concept/skill
- A group exercise related to the skill
- A "take away" activity that helps staff to apply the new skills during the coming week

## Resilience Alliance – Content, cont.



- Most exercises include a focus on group dynamics and the importance of collaboration and support
- Further into the intervention, multiple concepts/skills are combined
- Each session ends with a relaxation exercise to transition back to the work place; these exercises can also be used by staff as part of regular self care



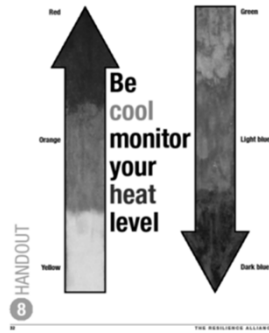
## Resilience Alliance Exercises

## Reactivity



- **Reactivity** describes our emotional and physical reactions to events that take place in our environment (survival mode)
- When we perceive our environment negatively, we are more likely to be aggressive, hyper-vigilant and over-reactive
- How people present to others can differ from how they are feeling internally – you shouldn't assume you know how someone is feeling without asking them

### Reactivity Color Zone



### Characteristics of Reactivity — Level of Heat

	HIGH	LOW
Body temperature		
Emotions		
Thoughts		
Speaking style		
Facial expressions		
Others		

HANDOUT 9 THE RESILIENCE ALLIANCE

### Reactivity and Optimism in a Staff-Supervisor Interaction

**"SUPERVISOR" rating**

Reactivity (Heat): Dark Blue Light Blue Green Yellow Orange Red off the chart

Heat: \_\_\_\_\_

Optimism: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**"CASWORKER" rating**

Reactivity (Heat): Dark Blue Light Blue Green Yellow Orange Red off the chart

Heat: \_\_\_\_\_

Optimism: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

HANDOUT 17 THE RESILIENCE ALLIANCE

## Optimism



- Individuals who retain hopefulness for the future are more likely to have favorable outcomes
- Optimists see the positive in most situations and believe in their own strength and efficacy
- Optimism allows you to see the positive aspects of any situation and use it for your benefit
- *Optimism can be learned*

### Optimism — Working the Positive

FOR EACH NEGATIVE STATEMENT WRITE TWO POSITIVE/OPTIMISTIC RESPONSES:

This is all messed up, it's not going to work.

(Example: It will work if I try another way.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

This is not the way it should be.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

After four hours of fighting, this is looking worse and worse.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

None of my clients are what I am fighting to do for them.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

You are never able to get anything right.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

HANDOUT 14 THE RESILIENCE ALLIANCE

## Self-Care



- Stress affects many aspects of our lives – physical, emotional, personal and professional,
- Self-care strengthens resilience, which in turn reduces reactivity and enhances self-efficacy
- Self-care needs to be preventive, not just something we do when we feel overwhelmed
- We cannot take care of others unless we first take care of ourselves
- Self-care is not just an individual activity, it needs to be integrated into the organization's practice and culture

**Practicing Self-Care in the Workplace**

**For ALL HANDOUTS**  
 Select one self-care activity to practice in the upcoming week.  
 I chose self-care activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This is how I felt before practicing it: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This is how I feel after practicing it: \_\_\_\_\_

**For the SUPERVISORS**  
 I chose self-care activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This is how the staff's members felt before practicing it: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This is how the staff's members felt after practicing it: \_\_\_\_\_

**For the MANAGER/STAFF**  
 I chose self-care activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This is how the management staff's members felt before practicing it: \_\_\_\_\_  
 This is how the management staff's members felt after practicing it: \_\_\_\_\_

**HANDOUT 24**  
 THE RESILIENCE ALLIANCE

## Integrating Resilience into Practice



- As we move through the intervention, the focus moves from learning specific skills to seeing their interconnectedness, and integrating them into daily practice
- As trust grows within the group, we are also able to move from hypothetical situations to discussing specific experiences they have had on the job

**Remembering the Past**

How has your resilience impacted my ability to reach out to my co-workers, ask for support and work together as a team? \_\_\_\_\_

How has your resilience impacted my ability to recognize things that I/we/they did well? \_\_\_\_\_

How has your resilience impacted my feelings of competence? \_\_\_\_\_

How has your resilience impacted my "self" belief? \_\_\_\_\_

How has your resilience impacted my self-care activities (e.g., sleep, diet, stress work, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

How has your resilience impacted my ability to recognize how it was impacting me? \_\_\_\_\_

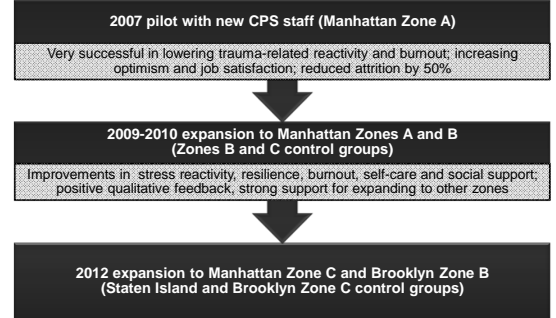
**HANDOUT 25**  
 THE RESILIENCE ALLIANCE

## Program Evaluation



- Data collection tool:
  - Burnout
  - Job satisfaction
  - Optimism
  - Reactivity to stressful events (IES)
  - Self-efficacy
  - Social support

## Activities and Results



## Participant Feedback



- [Play Video](#)

## Participant Themes



- Focus on collaboration and work unit
  - Opens communication between staff levels
  - Breaks down mistrust
  - Provides mutual support
- Importance of mastery
  - Counteracts survival mode
  - Helps staff prioritize work and feel confident in decision-making

## Feedback from Current Zones



- Creating buy-in
  - Importance of preparatory work with supervisors and managers
  - Emphasis on attendance among all levels of staff
    - Supervisors and managers set tone for their staff
    - Acknowledging impact on attendees when others miss sessions
  - Identifying and addressing concerns about project
  - As staff find sessions helpful, appreciate the focus on self-care, buy-in is increasing

## Feedback, continued



- Positive impact of resilience sessions
  - Withdrawal of transfer requests
  - Improved unit cohesion and communication
  - Increase in use of resilience language, awareness and management of reactivity
  - Integration of “positive check in” into debriefings, managerial and supervisory meetings
  - More communication about successes across units
  - Increased recognition of each others’ successes
  - Improved case practice

## Dissemination



- Available through NCTSN, Child Welfare Breakthrough Series Collaborative
- Further expansion/sustainability within New York City’s child protection offices
- Exploring adaptation and expansion to foster care and preventive services agencies
  - Integrated with ACS’s workforce development work
- Exploring application to juvenile justice staff

## New York City’s Lessons Learned



- Targeted intervention can reduce STS effects
  - On individual *and* occupational dimensions
- Stakeholder input should be used to develop an integrated program
  - “layering on top” not likely to be successful
- Staff buy-in at all levels is critical
  - Preparation is as important as the intervention itself
- Interventions cannot just be focused on frontline staff – *must go up the line*

## Lessons Learned, continued



- Focus on self care *and* skill building, individual *and* organization
- Data collection has to be balanced with staff availability
- Integrate resilience concepts/skills into ongoing activities
- More broadly, achieving a trauma-informed child welfare system requires interventions/efforts that:
  - Are linked to child welfare outcomes
  - Include a strong focus on staff resilience
  - Are supported by policy and practice change

## Contact Information



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[http://nctsn.org/search/luceneapi\\_node/resilience%20alliance](http://nctsn.org/search/luceneapi_node/resilience%20alliance)

## Discussion