

# SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Developed by the Center for Pediatric Traumatic Stress  
March 2020



A PARTNER IN  
**NCTSN**

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

# Who is this slide set for?

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- This resource is designed for healthcare staff, including
  - Clinical staff (nurses, physicians, medical assistant's, social workers, psychologists, etc)
  - Security
  - Front desk
  - Dispatch
  - Environmental service workers
  - Leadership
  - Any others working in healthcare settings

# Who developed this slide set?

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- This resource is based on materials developed by the Center for Pediatric Traumatic Stress (CPTS), a treatment and services adaptation center in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).
- We hope that these slides will be helpful in working with healthcare teams. Please use them freely, with attribution to CPTS.

**More on this topic at**

<https://healthcaretoolbox.org/self-care-for-providers.html>

**and**

[healthcaretoolbox.org/tools-and-resources/covid19.html](https://healthcaretoolbox.org/tools-and-resources/covid19.html)

# Overview & Objectives

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- I. What is secondary traumatic stress?
- II. What is its impact for healthcare professionals?
- III. Ways to address secondary traumatic stress
- IV. Resources

# Learning objectives

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- ❑ Recognize the signs and symptoms of secondary traumatic stress
- ❑ Describe ways to decrease secondary traumatic stress in yourself and your peers
- ❑ Explain the importance of self-care
- ❑ Implement ways to decrease the risk and incidence of secondary traumatic stress within your work and home settings

What is  
secondary traumatic stress?

# Trauma (Oxford English Dictionary)

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## 1. A deeply distressing or disturbing experience

1.1 Emotional shock following stressful event or physical injury

## 2. [*Medicine*] Physical injury

**For our purposes:**

**“Trauma” = potentially distressing event /  
experience**

**“Traumatic stress” = reactions to that experience**

# What is Secondary Traumatic Stress?

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- According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), “**Secondary traumatic stress is emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another**”.

Members of the healthcare team may not only *hear about* patients’ traumatic experiences, they **may be part of the story** as they deliver care during and after these experiences.





# What is Secondary Traumatic Stress?

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- **Pediatric medical traumatic stress (patients / families):**

For pediatric patients and their families, illness, injury, and medical interventions can be distressing, frightening, painful – and may lead to traumatic stress reactions.



- **Secondary traumatic stress (healthcare professionals)**

Healthcare team can themselves experience distress from being directly involved in care of potentially traumatized children and their families. This is known as **secondary** traumatic stress.



# You may have heard these related terms and concepts

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## **BURNOUT**

Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced feelings of personal accomplishment

## **SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS**

Responses based on exposure to the trauma of others

## **COMPASSION FATIGUE, VICARIOUS TRAUMA**

(other terms for secondary traumatic stress)

## **COMPASSION SATISFACTION**

Positive feelings from competent performance, relationships with colleagues, work that makes a meaningful contribution

# Secondary traumatic stress:

What might you notice in yourself / your peers?

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- Irritability
- Inability to concentrate
- Feeling angry / cynical
- Intrusive or recurrent disturbing thoughts
- Sleep problems
- Feeling emotionally detached
- Overly aware of any signs of danger
- Hopelessness
- Guilt
- Avoiding reminders of difficult experiences
- Social withdrawal
- Chronic exhaustion
- Physical ailments
- Diminished self-care
- Feeling ineffective
- Feeling down or depressed
- Feeling apathetic

# What contributes to the risk for secondary traumatic stress?

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## **Situational factors that contribute to risk of STS**

- ❑ Lack of predictability
- ❑ Sense of chaos
- ❑ Loss of control
- ❑ Heavy caseload / patient load

**“Secondary Traumatic Stress is a normal response to abnormal events.”  
–Laura Vega, DSW, LCSW**

# What contributes to the risk for secondary traumatic stress?

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## **Individual factors that contribute to risk of STS**

- ❑ Highly empathic
- ❑ “Dose” of exposure – more patients / type of work
- ❑ Socially or professionally isolated
- ❑ Feel professionally compromised due to inadequate training
- ❑ Fewer years in field
- ❑ Younger age
- ❑ Gender (women report more often)
- ❑ Unresolved personal trauma

What is the impact of  
secondary traumatic stress?

# Who is affected?

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## □ **All healthcare staff can experience STS**

- Clinical staff
- Security
- Front desk staff
- Dispatch
- Research staff
- Environmental service workers
- Administrative staff

## □ **Remember factors that increase risk for STS**

- Empathy \*
- Heavy patient load / dose of exposure
- Feeling isolated
- Feeling one's training is not adequate for current role / tasks
- Younger / fewer years in field
- Personal trauma history that is not resolved

\* Human connection is important in our work with patients – yet is also a point of vulnerability to STS

# Who is affected?

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## **Hospital-wide survey of patient care staff at large children's hospital**

Among healthcare professionals, across disciplines:

**39%** high risk for secondary traumatic stress

**21%** moderate to high risk for burnout



# What is the impact of STS?

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“The changes helpers experience in their identities, world views, and spirituality affect both the helpers' professional relationships with clients and colleagues and their personal relationships.”

–ISTSS

## **STS can affect patient care**

May contribute to

- tension or conflicts with patients & families
- stresses within the health care team



**Ways to address  
secondary traumatic stress**

# Are our healthcare organizations “trauma-informed” ?

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**Realize**



Understand impact of trauma exposure for pediatric patients **and for staff**  
(prior trauma + current illness, injury, treatment)

**Recognize**



Stay attuned to potential trauma reactions in patients, families, **staff**

**Respond**

Integrate this knowledge into policies & practices to reduce traumatic stress in patients & families  
**...and promote staff well-being**

Adapted from SAMHSA definition of trauma-informed care

# Six principles of trauma-informed care / Trauma-informed organizations

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- ❑ Safety
- ❑ Trustworthiness and Transparency
- ❑ Peer Support
- ❑ Collaboration and Mutuality
- ❑ Empowerment, Voice and Choice
- ❑ Attention to Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

# ABCs of Provider Self-care

## Individual:

- Awareness
  - Personal triggers
  - Personal boundaries
- Self-care activities
- Work-life balance

## Organization:

- Does organizational culture value & support work-life balance?
- Recognize that all staff may be impacted by this work?
- Teams acknowledge / debrief after particularly challenging incidents or difficult cases?

For the Provider: Working with Traumatized Children and Families ...ABCs OF PROVIDER SELF-CARE	
<b>AWARENESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be aware of how you react to stress (overworking, overeating, etc.).</li><li>• Monitor your stressors and set limits with patients and colleagues.</li><li>• Talk to a professional if your stress affects your life or relationships.</li></ul>
<b>BALANCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Diversify tasks and take breaks during the workday.</li><li>• Eat sensibly, exercise regularly, and get enough sleep.</li><li>• Engage in activities outside of work; use your vacation days.</li></ul>
<b>CONNECTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connect regularly with family, friends, and community.</li><li>• Use meditation, prayer, or relaxation to connect with yourself.</li><li>• When not at work, disconnect from professional role and e-mail.</li></ul>

Adapted from Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996

# Self Care Strategies

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**Everyone has a different idea of what “self-care” looks like to them**

□ **Strategies that can be done in 2 minutes:**

- Breathe
- Stretch
- Day dream
- Step away from assignment
- Laugh
- Give yourself a compliment
- Look out the window
- Share a joke

□ **Strategies that can be done in 5 minutes:**

- Listen to music
- Chat with a co-worker
- Step outside for some fresh air
- Have a snack
- Grab a cup of coffee or tea
- Mindfulness activity

**What are some strategies that help you?**

# Strategies for healthcare organizations

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## □ **Organizational support can include**

- Psychoeducation
- Skills training
- Staff retreats
- Clinical group supervision
- Case conferencing
- Self-report screening
- Workplace self-care groups
- Work/life balance
- Flexible scheduling
- Employee assistance programs
- Use of evidence-based practices



# What does the Research Say?

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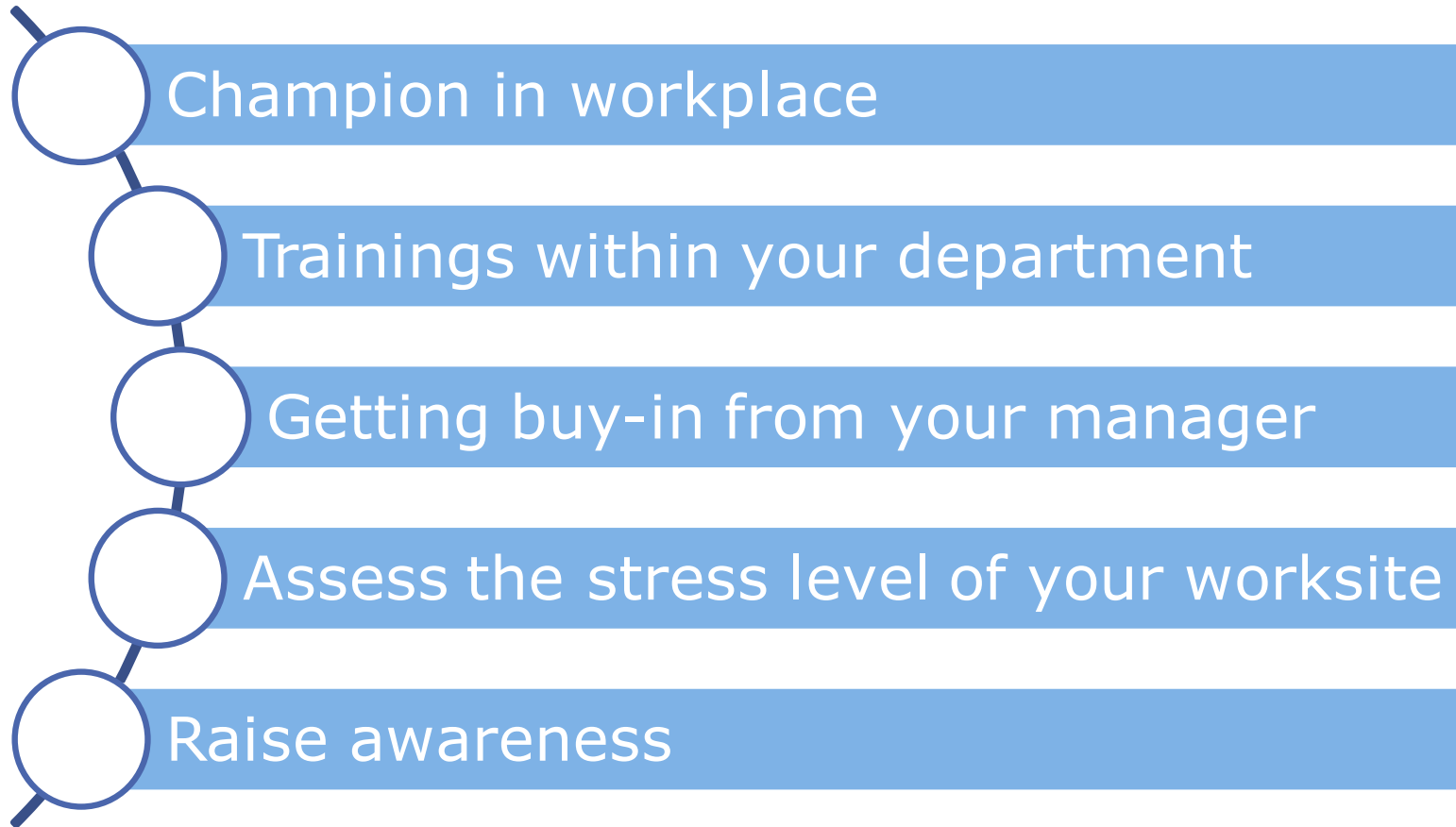
- Implementation of stress prevention programs in hospital settings:
  - 50% reduction in medication errors
  - 70% reduction in malpractice claims





# How might you advocate within your workplace?

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- Champion in workplace
  - Trainings within your department
  - Getting buy-in from your manager
  - Assess the stress level of your worksite
  - Raise awareness

# Wrap-up:

## What Healthcare Professionals Should Know

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- Stress can happen to all of us
  - Working with traumatized families impacts even seasoned providers
  - Exposure to others' emotions and distress increases our stress
  
- Unmanaged stress can take a toll on you and your patients
  - Years of work experience will not inoculate you from stress
  - Unmanaged stress can accumulate, erode health and well-being
  
- Ill and injured children and families depend on your empathic engagement
  - In order to attend to your patients, you need to attend to yourself
  - Follow the same advice that you would give your patients

# Wrap-up:

## What Healthcare Professionals Should Know

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- ❑ Secondary traumatic stress can look different for each individual. Reactions can be akin to traumatic stress symptoms.
  
- ❑ Keep in mind the ABCs of provider self-care
  - Awareness
  - Balance
  - Connection
  
- ❑ Support self-care in yourself and your peers
  
- ❑ Help to build trauma-informed healthcare teams / organizations



# Resources

**Find more on this topic at**  
**[healthcaretoolbox.org/tools-and-resources/covid19.html](https://healthcaretoolbox.org/tools-and-resources/covid19.html)**  
**AND**  
**[healthcaretoolbox.org/self-care-for-providers.html](https://healthcaretoolbox.org/self-care-for-providers.html)**

# Resources for providers: Interactive online training

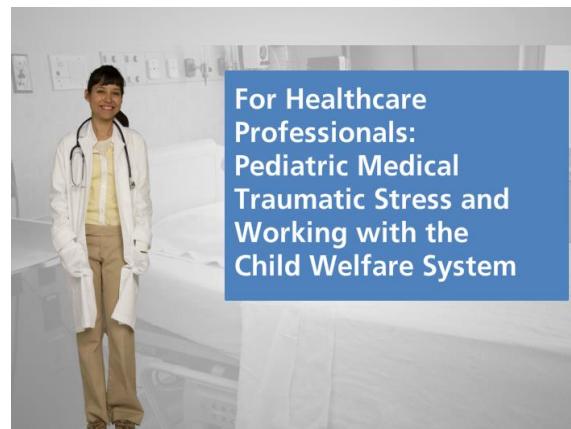
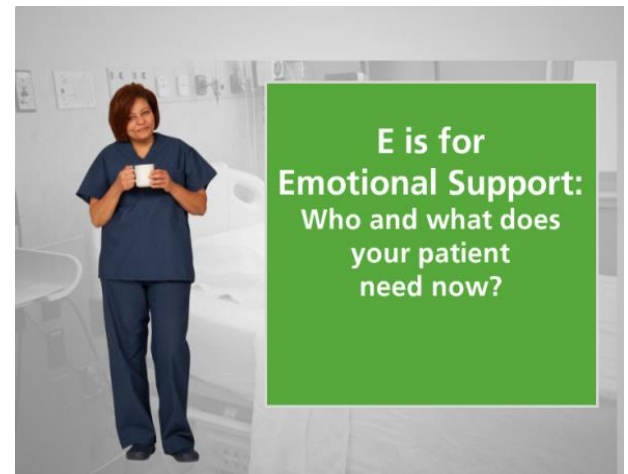
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**FREE interactive online nursing CE at  
HealthCareToolbox.org**

**The “how to” of implementing trauma-  
informed pediatric care in the hospital and  
ED**

**Currently 5 one hour courses**

**COMING SOON: Secondary Traumatic  
Stress course – an expanded & interactive  
version of  
this slideset**



# Resources for your patients

## HealthCareToolbox.org



- Free CE for nurses
- Download patient handouts
- Find assessment tools
- Learn quick interventions

Basics of Trauma-Informed Care

**REDUCE DISTRESS**  
D • Ask about fears and worries

**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**  
E • Who and what does the patient need now

**REMEMBER THE FAMILY**  
F • Gauge family stressors and resources.

Patient Education Materials

Last Updated: 04 May 2019

Providing useful and timely information to your patients and their families is key to trauma-informed pediatric health care.

[Downloadable Pediatric Handouts](#)

Evidence-based pediatric handouts for their parents and siblings.

[Resources and links](#)

Suggested books and online resources on related topics (feel free to find useful).

## Patient education handouts (English & Spanish)

- Home
- Blog
- How Providers Make a Difference
- What Providers Need to Know
- What Providers Can Do
- Cultural Considerations
- Research Summaries
- Tools and Resources
- Patient Education Materials
- Download / Print Patient Handouts
- Self-Care for Providers
- Online Education for Providers
- For Child Welfare Professionals
- For Parents and Children
- Recent Posts
- Download / Print Patient Handouts
- Patient Education Materials

When Your Child has Existing Health Concerns

Parenting a child with existing healthcare needs can be especially stressful during a disease outbreak or pandemic. The following tips can help:

- ✓ Keep in touch with your child's healthcare team. They are the best source of accurate information about current affairs and how they might impact your child.
- ✓ Rely on trusted sources. Misinformation can be spread online by well-intentioned people. Reduce reliance on disease groups and your child's healthcare team to answer questions that you see online.
- ✓ Check in about health-related worries. Your child might feel scared. Provide fact-based reassurance whenever possible.
- ✓ Be sensitive to "triggers". Seeing or hearing things about COVID-19 can be scary for kids with underlying health issues. Keep in mind that children's brains are still developing.
- ✓ Give everyone a chance to ask questions. Brothers and sisters need age-appropriate information.

## Parent tipsheet on COVID-19 (English & Spanish)

Putting it Into Practice: Using These Tips at Home

**Do:** Help put feelings into words.

**Say:** "A lot's been happening. Is there anything you're wondering, or worried about?"

**Do:** Find other ways to share.

**Say:** "Can you draw me a picture about how you're feeling?"

**Do:** Remember everyone's reactions might be different.

**Say:** "How is everyone feeling? How can we help each other this week?"

**Do:** Help your child feel in control.

**Say:** "Way to go, GermBuster powers! Let's wash our hands."

**Do:** Promote connection.

**Say:** "You can still chat with your friends."

**Do:** Model reaching out to others.

**Say:** "When I'm upset, I find someone to talk to."



# CENTER FOR PEDIATRIC TRAUMATIC STRESS

at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia & Nemours Children's Health System

## ABOUT THE CENTER:

Since 2002, **CPTS** has provided national leadership on medical traumatic stress & trauma-informed pediatric care as part of the **NCTSN**

- Focus on health care providers and systems
  - Tools for practice
  - Training (online & in person)
  - Resources for providers & families
  - Implementation projects



## National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

- **Mission:** Raise standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities.
- 60+ centers across the US
- Address all types of child trauma and many different service systems
- Founded in 2001

