

The ABCs of Managing Secondary Trauma— Awareness, **B**alance, and **C**onnection¹

Being aware of how our work can impact us, and achieving and maintaining a sense of balance and connection in our lives, can prevent us from experiencing secondary trauma and/or mitigate its harmful effects. Listed below are several ways in which you can decrease your risk of experiencing—or reduce the impact of—secondary trauma.

Awareness

- *Know your own “trauma map.”* Acknowledge your own history of trauma and be aware that it can affect how you view and do this work.
- *Inventory your current lifestyle choices and make necessary changes.* Do you get enough sleep? Do you allow yourself downtime? Do you exercise regularly? Try to do these things.
- *Take care of yourself.* Create a self-care list and post it prominently in your home or office. A sample self-care list may encourage you to:
 - Be creative;
 - Get away;
 - Get outside and appreciate the weather;
 - Enjoy other environments;
 - Have fun; and
 - Socialize with people who aren’t criminal!

Balance

- *Give yourself permission to fully experience emotional reactions.* Do not keep your emotions “bottled up.”
- *Maintain clear work boundaries.* Avoid working overtime and do not spend all of your free time socializing only with coworkers, discussing the negative aspects of your job.
- *Set realistic goals for yourself.* Know your limits and accept them.
- *Learn and practice time management skills.* These skills will help you achieve a sense of balance in both your professional and personal lives.
- *Seek out a new leisure activity.* Choose a leisure activity unrelated to your job.
- *Recognize negative coping skills and avoid them.* Substitute these coping skills with the more positive coping skills included in your self-care list!

Connection

- *Listen to feedback from colleagues, friends, and family members.* Have a family member or friend conduct periodic “pulse checks.”
- *Avoid professional isolation.* While it is best to not spend all of your time with coworkers, it is beneficial to be connected with and supported by your coworkers on the job.
- *Debrief after difficult cases.* Now is the time to talk to and connect with another coworker!
- *Develop support systems.* Start an informal peer support group, seek out a mentor, or be a mentor to someone else.
- *Seek training to improve job skills and capacity.* Training will not only allow you to stay abreast of new issues emerging in the field but will also allow you to connect with others who do this work
- *Remember your spiritual side.* While often neglected when stress occurs, this aspect can be most helpful to coping with secondary trauma.

¹ Adapted from Saakvitne, K. & Pearlman, L. (1996). *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization for Helping Professionals who Work with Traumatized Clients*. New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company.