

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
The Safeguard Program
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History:

The Safeguard Program was developed in 1999 in conjunction with the launch of the CyberTipline® becoming one of the first models for protecting and providing support to staff that view objectionable material in the workplace. The *Helping the Helpers* (Francis, De Arth-Pendley et al, 2001) study examined the habits and behaviors of the employees in the Exploited Children's Division (ECD) highlighting the effects viewing objectionable material had on the analysts at the time and identifying key areas for support and risk management. The Safeguard Program seeks to address vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue in staff and assist each analyst in developing the healthy coping skills necessary to maintain a positive work/life balance.

Cornerstones of Safeguard:

There are four main cornerstones of the Safeguard program: 1) the hiring procedure; 2) mandatory participation; 3) use of an outside consultant; 4) off-site staff support.

NCMEC conducts three rounds of interviews to address any concerns with potential candidates prior to exposure to content and requires meeting with the NCMEC Safeguard Consultant. Exposure to content and an additional Safeguard debrief after exposure occurs at the third interview. At each level, the components of the Safeguard Program are discussed.

At each level of employment, Safeguard requires different levels of participation. During the first 6-months of employment, each new analyst participates in monthly individual and group sessions with Safeguard. After this time period, analysts and managers are required to participate in bi-annual individual sessions. Quarterly psychoeducational trainings are offered to all staff. Participation is strongly encouraged.

The use of an outside consultant for the Safeguard Program is essential in maintaining confidentiality and building trust among staff members. The Safeguard Program is not linked to NCMEC's management or human resources division, and therefore is a safe environment for staff members to share their personal thoughts and feelings. The Safeguard Consultant is bound by professional code of ethics to uphold confidentiality and this is explained to all staff members in the initial Safeguard sessions. It is also explained that any concern of harm to self or others will be reported to the appropriate authorities and safety is of utmost concern. NCMEC utilizes several tiers of support for Safeguard. The consultant travels to NCMEC weekly to conduct individual sessions, but a NCMEC staff member is always on-site and on-call for any immediate needs. This dual support has been highly effective in providing support.

As NCMEC has grown in size, it has become necessary to provide off-site support to staff members in branch offices. This support is provided via telephone, Skype, and face-to-face

sessions with staff. The Safeguard Consultant travels to each branch on a regular schedule to meet with staff and observe their workspaces. Off-site staff is encouraged to schedule regular telephone or Skype sessions as well.

Current Safeguard Model:

In 2010, NCMEC conducted a Safeguard program evaluation to review protocols and measure the efficacy of the program. NCMEC utilized an independent consultant and used a self-reporting tool to measure effectiveness of the program. Findings showed that the analysts benefit from Safeguard, understand secondary trauma and compassion fatigue, and relied heavily on peer support. The analysts also reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of Safeguard services required.

NCMEC employs a strengths-based approach to safeguarding staff, emphasizing resiliency and healthy coping skills. The current DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) criterion for PTSD also notes that exposure to actual or threatened sexual violation through work-related media has now been recognized as one of the criteria for diagnosis.

NCMEC values the health and wellness of its employees; therefore, Safeguard is an integral component of the workplace. The current model includes the following criteria:

- Individual and group sessions for new analysts designed to provide individualized support and a peer-support network for staff. Group sessions are designed to be psychoeducational and teach analysts the components of resiliency, stress management, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout.
- Bi-annual individual sessions for veteran staff.
- Quarterly psychoeducational training for all staff.
- Second and third round interview support by Safeguard.
- Post-employment support includes a check-in email for all staff one month after leaving ECD.

The Safeguard model is adaptable and flexible. It is imperative that models such as Safeguard go through rigorous and continuous review so that the needs of the staff are met. NCMEC's model also offers adjunct levels of support, for example parent support group sessions to address the needs of new parents in the division.

Additional resources and considerations include the Technology Coalition best practices guidebook serving as a tool to assist electronic service providers and other interested groups to develop their own wellness program.

References:

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Juliet M. Francis, Psy.D., Gina De Arth-Pendley, Ph.D., Erin Reilly, M.A., Christine Feller, M.A., and John Shehan, B.S. (2001) *Helping the helpers: The Safeguard Program at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children*. Alexandria, VA: NCMEC.

The Technology Coalition. (2015). *Employee resilience guidebook for handling child sexual exploitation images*. Retrieved on June 22, 2015: <http://technologycoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/TechnologyCoalitionEmployeeResilienceGuidebookV2January2015.pdf>