

Staff/Intern Orientation: Trauma Exposure Response and Self-Care

Created by the Support Center for Child Advocates Center for Excellence in Advocacy

Trauma

Trauma is a psychologically distressing event, or series of events, that is outside the range of usual human experience, one that induces an abnormally intense and prolonged stress response

(North Carolina Division of Social Services and Family and Children Resource Center, 2005).

Trauma Exposure Response

The transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet ...when external trauma becomes internal reality

(van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk, 2009).

Terms

- Compassion Fatigue
- Vicarious Trauma
- Burn-out

Staff/interns may be exposed to trauma by events they observe, stories they hear, and case-related materials they review. Exposure to trauma at work can trigger emotions related to personal experiences of trauma, loss, and adversity.

Normal responses to trauma exposure:

- Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Guilt
- Feeling world is not fair/safe
- Cynicism
- Overwhelmed
- Anger

How to cope when overwhelmed:

- Connect feelings to Trauma Exposure Response
- Talk to supervisor, social work supervisors and/or trainers.
- If you are in the midst of a stressful or overwhelming exposure, take necessary steps to take care of yourself.

How to take care of yourself:

- Recognize that it's normal to have a wide range of reactions to trauma work and the experiences of our clients.
- Recognize that individuals may have different reactions to trauma exposure.
- Have an "end of the day" routine to help you transition away from office.
- Talk about your experiences and responses with supportive staff.

Remember: You are not alone in this work and your response to it. The leadership of this organization is here to help as challenges arise.